Notes on 2 Samuel

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2 Samuel

Lectures Introductory to the Study of the Earlier Historical Books of the Old Testament.

2 Samuel 1 - 12.

We have seen the sorrowful circumstances out of which arose the first desire to have a king in Israel, and the remarkable fact that, although it was a sin, God nevertheless did not put the people back into the condition in which they had been before they sought in this to be like the nations, but gave them a king after His own heart, as far as that could be, till He comes whose right it is. Now this is exceedingly instructive to my own mind, and the rather as in fact it is a principle in the dealings of God. So far is man's unfaithfulness from hindering God, that it only furnishes Him fresh occasion to glorify Himself, by proving and making known His supremacy over evil, and this invariably too by taking up the results of sin in order to make them the opening for the display of the resources of His wisdom and goodness. It was sin to have asked a king, but it was grace on God's part to give it.

But God was looking onward to a better than David; and now we have seen that, even after David was designated to the kingdom and anointed for it, God did not set aside at once the miserable consequences of man's choice. He allows the whole thing to resolve itself responsibly before the eyes of all men. He permits Israel to see, on the one hand, the ruin which the king of their own choice had brought in; but He lets them see, on the other hand, the weakness of the one He chose from

among them to establish the kingdom according to His mind, a type, and only a type, of the good and enduring things to come.

There never was greater confusion than towards the end of 1 Samuel — David among the Philistines seeking to fight Israel, Saul and Jonathan utterly worsted at last by the Philistines who slay them. What an awful issue for the king, with his sons, after consulting through a witch the dead prophet whom he had failed to heed whilst he was alive! Such was the fate of Saul and his house: what of the people? Whether they were on David's side or on Saul's, they proved altogether unequal to meet the difficulty, Saul's men fleeing before the enemy, and David's men ready to stone the true anointed of Jehovah! Had there ever been such a group of helpless ruin? And this was in the midst of God's people, where indeed, if things are according to God, they are the only things sweet on earth; if not so, wonder not if nowhere they look so deplorably ill. Nevertheless God's firm purpose stands; and now we are about to read in the second Book of Samuel how from this wretchedly low estate God raises up the man that He had chosen from the sheep-cotes to feed Israel like a flock, until he is established firmly by grace in Zion. It will be made plain, too plain, that he was not the true Beloved, but at best only a shadow of Him that was coming. Nevertheless, when it was painfully proved that David was but a sinful man, the bright promise of a better — even of the Messiah — shines through the dark patches of his history.

Let me take this opportunity, before passing on, of saying a little on the great central idea of these two Books. God's intention was to set up a king according to

His own mind. It was an entirely new place; but even though those who were called of God to fill that place for the time were altogether short of what was in the divine purpose, one remarkable witness of Christ there was from the first attached to the kingly place in Israel: the priest was to fall into a secondary place, and the king be henceforth the immediate link between God and the people. We have already seen that in Saul's case this entirely failed; for God forsook him, when morally obliged to become the enemy of one who, despising His will and word, at last betook himself to the power of evil to enlighten and sustain him when consciously forsaken of God. There we behold complete failure; immediately after which he and his perish.

The king's place in Israel for all that was of no less, but rather of the deepest, interest and importance, and for this simple reason: had he gone right, all would have been right for and with the people. I am not at all speaking about the Israelites individually viewed. It is impossible that it should be well with any soul for eternity who is not right with God for himself. There must be individual and immediate links with God. There is nothing stable short of life in the soul. But we are speaking now, not of life, nor of eternity, but of the kingdom on earth; and I say that the prime idea, the chief central thought of that kingdom, was this — and it is a grand one — that if the one man, the king, had only stood firm and right with God, he had been always the means of blessing unfailingly and fully for the people of God. Is it to be supposed that God did not know what sort of stuff kings were? He knew right well what the ways would be, not merely of Saul, but of David. He knew perfectly of course what David's sons would come

to. How comes it then that God sees fit to introduce such a principle as this, that the destiny of the people should turn on one person, even the king; that on his fidelity in glorifying God, on his standing true to Jehovah's name, should depend the well-being of Israel? Had the king of Israel been faithful in his office before God, there had always been an unfailing supply of blessing for the children of Israel as a people. It is no question simply now of his being a believer, or therefore of eternal consequences; but how are we to account for his astonishing public place in the early ways of God? Because the Holy Ghost is even here always thinking of Christ. When He comes, it will be so. And God, who is looking onward to this, had before His mind the one person who is the pivot on which turns our blessing, not only for eternity, but also for His people and all the earth in time.

This then is the great truth which is shadowed out by the throne of Jehovah in the midst of Israel; and this we shall see illustrated yet more in the Second Book of Samuel than in the first. In the first negatively we have seen the idea coming to a close, because it was a king that Israel chose according to their own heart, although even there God held the reins, as He always does. We have seen the type of the true king in anything but a kingly place — the outcast most hated and feared by the king who then was in all the group of outcasts who surrounded him; for David was beyond doubt the one who, if he cast a halo around all, continually brought them all into danger. Such is the case where Satan governs, even though there may be the form of the kingdom of God It was exactly so under Saul. All outward order was around him. And this is the more

striking, because that outward order was never to be disrespected.

Evil as Saul might be, and the path of faith assuredly far away from him, for all that the people that were most severed from Saul and most attached to the person of David were those that most felt for Saul and Jonathan when they fell. We see it in David himself. Nor was it the feeling of David exclusively, but shared by those that surrounded him; for they were but the reflex of his own mind and heart. The fall of king Saul in David's circle was a sorrow, and to himself a genuine one, as the Amalekite learnt to his cost; for he, judging simply from the feelings of the natural man, supposed that more welcome news could not be to the man designated for the kingdom. Nor was this unknown. It was evident that even the enemy knew it. It was everywhere diffused. The unhappy king spread the tale of his own fear and shame, of his own murderous hatred and jealousy of David wherever he went. And who was there in Israel that did not know it? And who was there out of Israel too, round about among the Amalekites or the Moabites or any others, who did not know that David was the one marked out for the throne, and that Saul, for this very reason, because he knew that his own house would fail before that of David, could not forgive such a loss and affront. But here we have the genuine feeling of the heart, as I have said — not only of David, but of those who shared his sympathies and his thoughts — not an expression of human satisfaction but of horror paid to the man that dared to lift up his hand against Jehovah's anointed. On his own showing therefore he fell, and fell too judicially under David's orders.

Nor was this by any means all. On the occasion the Spirit of God gives us one of. the most touching lamentations that ever broke from the heart of man. I am not forgetting, that God inspired it; but let us remember too that it was the genuine effusion of his affection. Faith can afford to be generous in a way and degree that puts the finest feelings of nature to the blush.

But the death of Saul and Jonathan by no means settled the question of David's succession to the throne. Nor does David for his part trouble himself about the issue. He walks in faith still. (2 Samuel 2) Instead of taking up measures of policy or violence with a view to the throne, he enquires of Jehovah, saying, "Shall I go up unto any of the cities of Judah?" This is admirable. He well knew that he was anointed, but he will not take a step without Jehovah. Any other would have had himself introduced at once with a flourish of trumpets. David could wait, and so much the more because he was anointed of Jehovah. He knew right well that Jehovah's purpose could not fail. For that reason he could afford to be quiet. If indeed we believe, beloved brethren, then do we with patience wait for it: the hope that we have is well worth the while. "And Jehovah said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up?" It was not merely the general fact, but he was led in the way in each particular part as well as in the main. And Jehovah directs him to Hebron, whither he goes. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

And this furnishes opportunity for another truth of some importance: even our blessed Lord Jesus will not take the entire kingdom all at once. There are many persons

who suppose that, when the Lord returns, the fresh work of establishing Israel and of Himself as the true Christ in the rights of David's throne will be all brought about in a moment. This is a mistake. He has all rights as well as all power; but the Lord Jesus, divine person though He be, will act for some time transitionally after He returns. Before He returns, when He has received the heavenly saints to Himself, there will be a transition during which He will occupy Himself among other things in getting ready a remnant from the Jews. He will deal with their consciences as well as their affections; He will produce an earnest desire, not in "the many" but in the few, to hail Him as coming in the name of Jehovah. But after this another transition will follow, which is even less generally seen by those who occupy themselves with questions of the prophetic word, — the transition that fills up the gap between the destruction of the antichrist, when the Lord Jesus shines from heaven and the judgment He will execute when acting from Zion against the leader of the nations of the world, more particularly in its north-eastern quarters where the masses of population are found, above all against the one called in scripture Gog, prince of Rosh. This is a considerable time after the destruction of antichrist. Does scripture tell us nothing of what the Lord Jesus will be doing then? There will be a settlement of all morally, according to God, in the hearts of Israel — Judah first, and the ten tribes afterwards. Just as we find in the case of David in the second Book of Samuel. He does not become king over all Israel at once; and even when he does, there is still a work of putting down adversaries among the neighbouring nations.

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that the Lord Jesus will solve every question by a single decisive blow inflicted on His adversaries in the camp. It is probable that this is the idea that commonly prevails among the mass of those persons who look for the Lord Jesus; but it is not sound, because it is not scriptural. It is a human inference drawn from the fact of His divine glory. It is supposed that, because He is God, because He knows all the wickedness of every individual, therefore every wicked one is consumed in an instant; but these are not the ways of God. He could do so if He pleased, but as the rule He has never acted thus; and He will not do so at the time to which we are now referring.

And hence it is that this book is in my judgment a very full and exact type in its grand features, without straining any part of it, or pretending that everything has an answer in the circumstances of that day. At any rate it is far from me to set up for having the competency, if indeed any man could have it, to run the analogy with a closeness which is not warranted by the direct instructions of the Lord elsewhere. Still the great general principle that applied of old will apply yet more by and by. And for this we are not dependent on this Book taken typically without plain teaching of scripture which openly refers to it.

For instance, let us take the account that is given in the prophecy of Isaiah, where the Lord Jesus is seen returning from Bozrah. What means this? I do not anticipate that any one who hears me will be under the ancient and general error of ecclesiastics or other uninstructed souls, that it is a question here of the cross or atonement. But many conceive that it points to the Lord destroying the Roman beast and the false prophet

with the associate kings of that company and day. Not at all. It is the Lord dealing with earthly things, not merely from heaven. It is the Lord Jesus, now associated with the people, who puts Himself at the head of Israel.

Again take the well-known picture of the day of Jehovah, Zechariah 14, where it is said that Jehovah shall go forth as in the day of battle and fight with those nations. It is granted that this does not fall in with ordinary pre-conceived notions, as to the manner of the Lord's future association with His earthly people here below. But the fact is that the faith in Christendom as to the judgment of the quick is vague, uncertain, and unreal. They hold the judgment of the dead, but in general merge in it that of the quick, which is to lose it. We must make room in our thoughts, my brethren; we must leave room rather for the truth of God's revelation as to all this. Here it is quite plain that the Lord will destroy one class of His enemies when He appears from heaven; equally plain is it that He will reign in peace over the earth; but there is a transitional period between the two. As its type, the second Book of Samuel is most valuable as showing that the grand distinctive principles which will exist under Christ were manifested in David.

Hence the application of what comes before us here. David is hindered for a time by the family of Saul; and more particularly we are told "Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; and made him king over Gilead." Now Ish-bosheth had no title whatsoever. Nevertheless we see great tenderness toward him on the part of David, and this the more because he knew his own title to be indisputable. When people are wrong, do not wonder if they are generally apt to be touchy; when

they have the confidence of the truth of God, they can afford to leave things without anxiety or bluster. Here certainly David shows us this. Although the pretender might be exceedingly vexatious, and an injury to the people too, nevertheless violent methods would have ill become the king that God had chosen in grace. David therefore leaves all with Him. Ish-bosheth then reigned for a certain time. “But the house of Judah followed David. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.” Thus patience had then its perfect work in David. And this, it will be observed, not merely while suffering in the presence of Saul, but now even after he had as the anointed king been reigning in Hebron according to God’s direction for him to go up thither. Indeed it was perhaps in a certain sense more trying now, because in Saul’s case there was a title; in Ish-bosheth’s there was none.Nevertheless in every way the anointed of the Lord was to triumph.

But soon we find Abner and Joab coming into opposition and collision. Only now is the name of Joab first heard of during these sorrowful scenes in Israel. There does this politic and bold man begin to take a very leading part. There are only two occasions perhaps when Joab ever appears; one is when there was anything bad to be done, another is when there was anything great to be won. Joab was a man as far as possible from the faith of David, and to suffer the prominence and allow the influence of such a chief was one of the fatal weaknesses of David’s kingdom — that is, of God’s kingdom in the hands of man, not merely man’s kingdom in the presence of God’s anointed, but, as has been remarked, God’s kingdom confided to man, and there failing.

The wily Joab accordingly caused great distress to David, though without hesitation taking part with him. He was a man of sufficient penetration to know who would gain the day, not to speak also of a family connection with David, which naturally gave him a certain interest in his success. It is to be feared that a principle of nobler, of less selfish, character never wrought in Joab. At any rate we see him in a most unhappy light on this occasion; for the result was that, in the conflict that ensued, Joab gains the day by treachery and violence, accomplishing by murder the downfall of those whom he too was desirous to see put out of his ambitious way. He wished to stand without a rival in the day of triumph and glory which he well knew would soon come to king David.

In the chapter (2 Samuel 3) that follows the Spirit of God marks the progress of things. “There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.” This gives occasion for showing out the end of Abner’s history, as well as of Ish-bosheth’s, in the next chapter. The continual fighting furnished at last what Joab had long wished for — the opportunity to take Abner aside and speak with him quietly, thus lawlessly to avenge the blood of his brother, while he got rid of a great opponent disposed for peace with his master. But David bore witness in his fasting and tears how deeply he felt Abner’s death, and how truly he judged Joab’s iniquity, though alas! his power was not equal to his heart. Hence he could do no more at present than say “to Joab and all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with

sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier."

It was a fine feeling, and this, I am persuaded, from higher than human sources. But while his was a generous heart, there was that which, being of God, gave it its true direction, and sustained it in power spite of all circumstances. Clearly I speak now of where he was directly guided of God. "And the king lamented over Abner," just as suitably as he had before lamented over Jonathan and his father, "and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou." He judged truly even of his own commander-in-chief, as one may call Joab — at least the one that was to be so formally before long. "And all the people wept again over him. And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down. And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner."

At the same time the king confesses what a sinful thing had been done, and his own weakness. "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak." How true! "I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: Jehovah shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness." A single eye is always full of light; and though David could not shake off those on whom indeed he was too dependent as the supports of his throne, nevertheless he does judge what

was unworthy of the name of Jehovah, and what was abhorrent to his own soul. Weakness or worse must always be till Jesus take the throne.

But it is not only that we have the death of Abner, as I have said, but of Ish-bosheth also. This follows in the next chapter, and there again how truly men mistook the heart of the king. The murderers “brought the head of Ish-bosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and Jehovah hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed.” How little unbelief ever learns! The lesson that was taught the Amalekite one might have supposed would have been remembered by the men of Israel that heard of the king’s feeling. But unbelief, in its ignorance of God and its incapacity to discern those that are His, unfits itself to appreciate the ways of faith and of love, and hence it is that all was lost on them. “And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As Jehovah liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, when one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings: how much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed?” What can be finer than this? Here was a man that was a rival, and this too without a cause and without a title. But faith is more than upright, and can readily afford to be generous. Certainly so it was with king David, who hated any advantage taken even of his enemies. “How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed?” It

was not that David shut his eyes to anything that was wrong. He did not mean that Ish-bosheth was righteous in everything, more particularly in disputing the throne given by God to himself. But he did not forget his life and general character, because of the grave mistake that opposed David and turned out fatal to himself. Therefore he adds, “Shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they slew them.”

The time was now come for the just place of the king. “Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and Jehovah said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.” Nevertheless it is solemn enough to observe that these men had known it all the time. It is not want of knowledge that hinders souls from acting according to God: I speak now of the general rule. But want of faith dulls the force of what we know, and makes it as if we knew it not. As long as there were those who acted on their nature, as long as it was a king of their own choice, or any one belonging to his family that seemed to have the smallest shadow of a title to the throne, their feelings wrought; their prejudices proved strong; their prepossessions were so deeply engaged that they forgot the word of the Lord. But now the Lord had put aside these different hindrances manifestly by His judgment, and had done it so much the more solidly for David as it was not by David. For David’s hand was never lifted up against Saul or Jonathan; David’s hand never got rid of

Abner nor of Ish-bosheth. But now, whether by wicked men with David, or by wicked men against him, or by the open enemies of the Lord, in all these various ways God had wrought and disposed of the different men who laid claim to the throne one after another; and lo! the confession comes out, which must have been as true of the dead as of the living, that all through they knew well enough what the will of Jehovah was.

And so do we find now constantly. When souls are brought out of hindrances, when they are brought out of a false position, there is many a confession made which shows that the truth had pierced their consciences long before: only will, the world, the difficulties of family connection, a thousand snares, hindered fidelity to the Lord. But in truth, my brethren, we are entirely dependent on God Himself to give force to His own truth. Power is not in the truth simply. It is still less in a position, true as it may be. The grace of God alone gives the truth power. It is this that really works so as to deliver from hindrances, and therefore it is of such importance to our souls that the affections should be strong and rightly set. If the affections are kept vigorous and pure on the object of God, then the truth is seen in its real beauty and brightness; whereas if the affections are weak, or wandering after false objects, we may have all the truth in the Bible before us, but it makes little or no impression. This we see in the unconverted man fully; but the very same thing that ends in the ruin of the unconverted operates, if allowed, and in the degree it is allowed, to the hindrance and injury of those born of God.

At last, then, all the tribes of Israel come and make their common acknowledgment to the king. (2 Samuel 5) Now

they could see that they are his bone and his flesh. Had they not been so before? Now they could remember how he led them in olden time. Was this again something new? Now they could remember that Jehovah said, “Thou shalt feed my people.” Had this too only just then burst on them for the first time? “So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before Jehovah: and they anointed David king over Israel.” Was there a reproach from David? I venture to answer there was not. No; there was a heart that loved them better than they loved him: there was one that sought Jehovah’s glory for them, and who valued the throne because it was Jehovah’s gift. I do not mean to say that he did not value it in itself, but I do affirm that it never entered the heart of David to seek the throne for himself. The first conception of it, the first presentation of the thought, was produced by God’s own deed and gift. It was in no way the fruit of vaulting pride in the spirit of David. But God’s call made it a duty to obey on his part as on Israel’s. He consequently was the one who could use that throne in his measure for Jehovah’s glory.

But if David and his men come to Jerusalem, the stronghold of Zion was still in the hand of the enemy, as it had hitherto been. Whatever might be the conquests of Joshua, whatever might have been achieved afterwards, in the very middle of the land, in the centre of Jerusalem itself, there frowned this stronghold held by the Jebusites; The time was come to mark a most important change. It was impossible that the kingdom could be according to God unless Zion were wrested for the king from the enemy who had thus daringly defied His people; and David felt this in all its force. He was

keenly alive to the dishonour that was done to God by the very heart and citadel of the kingdom belonging to an accursed race of Canaan. There they proudly and at ease, by long possession in their fortress, laughed all assailants to scorn. Hence, when David comes before it, they say to him, “Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither.” A most stinging taunt to the warrior king! The blind and the lame were sufficient to keep the stronghold against David and his men. That is, the place was so excessively strong by nature, perhaps also so fortified by the men of Jebus, that they had conceived it to be impregnable. “Nevertheless David,” as the Spirit of God says so calmly — “Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion: the same is the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David’s soul, he shall be chief and captain.” David was not only too sensitive to the taunt, but could not rise above it. All flesh is grass, and its glory as its flower. Generous as David was, he was wounded and resented the insult on those innocent of it. “Wherefore this day the blind and the lame shall not come into the house.” We know how the grace of the Lord Jesus reversed this. The blind and the lame were just the people that did come into the house when He was there. But David was not Jesus. The king felt things after a too human sort. The Lord Jesus only and always went or came in a way perfectly suitable to God and His grace.

“So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David.” This, though it be so briefly named by the Spirit, becomes ever afterwards an epoch and turning-point in the history of Israel. I do not know anything more

striking in scripture, or a more remarkable characteristic of it than such a fact as this, slight as some may count it — the quietness with which the Holy Ghost notices the completeness of the blow that was struck in the heart of the land at that which had been a constant challenge and triumph over all the efforts of Israel to that day. Now that David had wrested it from the Jebusites, this becomes the great fact that afterwards stamps its character upon Israel. Zion, in short, becomes a new name of the deepest moment — the sign of divine grace in royalty — the grace that took up the people in their lowest condition, and by that man whom God employed raised them up step by step to such a place of power and blessing and glory as never was before and never can be again till Jesus come and make this very Zion the centre of His earthly government with the blessing and glory due to His name.

Hence it is referred to in Hebrews strikingly, where it is said, “We are come to mount Zion.” It is indeed the most characteristic spot in the whole earth as the sign of grace. Why should it be so? Why should it not be so? There are two mountains that have a place proper to them — the mount of law and the mount of grace. Sinai, I need scarcely say, is the one, as Zion is the other. Sinai came into view when Israel were tried under law and all was favourable, the people having been brought out by the mighty power of God in the freshness of their youth. It was the beginning of their history, when all looked fair. They had entered upon it by a victory over the proudest king of the earth in that day; and what did they come to? Ruin, ever worse and worse, as each means

successively tried proved the hopeless evil of man when fairly and fully put to the test by God.

But now what a contrast begins to dawn, though only in type! They were taken up from the depth of ruin, and after that estate Zion was won. Thus it is the kingdom established in power after the people had been utterly ruined — after they had gone through every phase of change calculated to help, yet every experiment only sinking them deeper into the dust. After all this was Zion won, and not till then. Now there is nothing that so beautifully shows grace; for it is not only great activity of goodness, but also perfect goodness displayed after all had been lost. This is grace, and such is precisely therefore the picture of the stage at which Zion comes before us in Jewish history. Therefore it is that in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the apostle is contrasting all that flesh boasted of in Israel — Sinai and its ordinances, he takes up that name of Zion which they little felt and little thought of, giving it its real prominence and most striking superiority. The moment that it is named thus, how the heart recalls and turns over all the glorious things spoken of the mountain of grace, and remembers that Zion too was chosen by God for His holy hill — that not only was David an object of divine choice, but withal Zion! Nor need we wonder, because God in this too was thinking of Christ as King. There had He anointed His Son. It He desired for Jehovah's habitation. "This," said He, "is my rest for ever; here will I dwell: for I have desired it." "There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle." "Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." We shall see perhaps a little more as we go on.

Again, we hear next how David was owned by the Gentiles gradually. “And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house. And David perceived that Jehovah had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel’s sake.” All this flowed in on the king after Zion was won.

But I am far from saying that we have more than a pledge as yet of good things to come, chequered alas’ by the too evident fact that the first man is not the Second. Thus “David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David. And these be the names of those that were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shammuah, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon, Ibhar also, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia, and Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphalet.” The law made nothing perfect. Christ, the true light, was not come; nor was even the believer, though born of God, the new creation yet, so as to say, “old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new.”

Moreover we find, when the Philistines who heard of it came up, that David was still as dependent on God when on the throne as he had been whilst in the place of suffering. He “enquired of Jehovah, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines?” There was no confidence in his own powers, no presuming on past victories — as easy a thing to slip into as it is dangerous. “And Jehovah said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.” And so he smote them, “and there they left their images, and David and his men burned them. And the Philistines came up yet again.”

David does not even then act, because he had before beaten them; nor does he satisfy himself for the fresh need with the answer God had given him for their former attack. He enquires again; and Jehovah exercises his obedience by an altogether new command: “Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall Jehovah go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as Jehovah had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.”

But now (2 Samuel 6) we have another and a totally different scene. It is no longer a question of the enemy, but of the ark; for how could David’s spirit rest if the great symbol of Jehovah’s presence in Israel was wanting? If David now is established king of Israel, could he but desire the establishment of the sign that the true God was there? Nevertheless it was not yet apparent, and there were many mistakes made in consequence. “And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God.” It is instructive to notice that here at first he did not enquire. He evidently thought there could be no doubt of the matter. When it was a question of opposing the enemy, he felt that he needed the guidance of God; but when the point was the establishment of Jehovah’s ark in its due place in Israel, how could it be necessary to ask Jehovah about it?

And so it is we often deceive ourselves. For in fact there is no occasion where we more need the sustaining of God than in His very worship. Have we not learnt this by

experience, my brethren? Some of us are apt to think that, because this is a holy place, and because it is a holy work, and because we are by the grace of God “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,” we may enter into it as a matter of course. And what is it that we prove when we do? Certainly not the power of God. There is no place where there is a greater danger of distraction on the one hand or of form on the other. Is this to us anything but the iniquity of holy things? No where do we more truly need the guiding and directing grace of God than in His own service and worship. Do not suppose that this is said in the slightest degree to encourage legalism, or in any way to sanction the morbid state of a Christian which would shrink from that which is due to the Lord and ought to be his deepest joy, and what most surely He looks for continually; but one may warn that there is no small danger of our taking it all as a matter of course, just as we find David did on this occasion. We do well therefore and wisely if we read the history of David before the ark as a serious admonition to our souls in all that concerns our drawing near to God.

“And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, crave the new cart.” Where we have not the guidance of the Lord, and do not even look for it seriously, every step cannot but be wrong. Who told them to put it “upon a new cart?” Were they Philistines? Another Book told us of the Philistines doing so, and how God bore pitifully with these heathen who knew no better. But will He allow such a procedure in Israel? God deals with men according to the place in which they are, or He has put

them. If He left the poor Philistines to the darkness of nature, only just illumined by whatever beams of light might from Israel break through the darkness from time to time, could it be that God's elect should surrender themselves to imitate the darkness of the heathen? What a wretched descent, beloved brethren, when those who are called into the light of God allow themselves to be swayed by the license taken by the world, even though it may be the religious world!

But let us pursue the tale. "And they brought the ark out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before Jehovah on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." Surely this is very solemn for me, for any. God did not at once deal with the first departure from His word. They drove the new cart for a time without a sign of His displeasure. Then He allowed what might have seemed to be a mere accident of circumstances, by which He was pleased to try them, and in a single instance show signally His sense of their irreverence, though of course especially in one who went farthest in it. It is true that it was another act, and it was an aggravation of the evil.

Nevertheless on the outward surface of things it looked justifiable enough to guard the ark from a fall. The ark of God seemed in danger: why should not a Levite put

out his hand to save it? Was not Uzzah, son of Abinadab of Gibeah, the most fit to do so holy an act? But the act involved going against the express word of God. What of this? It was not only a device that was taken up hastily in the first instance, and carried out independently of God's order for carrying the vessels of the sanctuary; here there was a direct failure in the respect due to God's ark when it seemed to need man's succour. The Lord had appointed who it was in Israel that should carry the ark, and how it must be done. Of this the Philistines knew nothing, nor were they responsible to obey such an ordinance; but Israel were as being under the law. They had His word in their hands, and were responsible accordingly.

So when Uzzah put forth his hand and took hold of the ark, for the oxen shook it, God was bringing the matter to a point in judgment. "The anger of Jehovah was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." And David, instead of judging himself, instead of looking back and confessing how completely they had all acted without the guidance of Jehovah, was displeased because Jehovah had made a breach upon Uzzah. Displeased with whom? Oh, it is a sorrowful thing to say, he was displeased with the God of Israel. But do not think this so strange a thing either. When you murmur and complain of His chastening in your own case, what are you doing but expressing your displeasure at the Lord? Do you suppose, beloved brethren, that any trial which happens to you, whatever its character, is without Him? that afflictions "spring from the dust?" Do you suppose that anything, no matter what it may be, or by whatever instrument it come, even though it be what most of all

pains you, is without His intention or His lesson to your soul? Certainly not. It may fall on you through ever such a wrong in another. But this is never a reason either to justify you nor the smallest excuse for being displeased with God.

The fact is that Israel had acted without God's word from the first — even David himself; and if David was the one whom it least of all became, we must not be surprised if he also had the sorest feeling about the Lord. "And David was displeased, because Jehovah had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. And David was afraid of the Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of Jehovah come to me? So David would not remove the ark of Jehovah unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of Jehovah continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and Jehovah blessed Obed-edom, and all his household." What an answer to David's displeasure! "And it was told king David, saying, Jehovah hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of Jehovah had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings."

Now we have David righted in his soul, and Jehovah, instead of being dreaded, or being the source of displeasure, is the spring of gladness and thanksgiving. But it is holy joy. There is no brighter happier moment, as far as I can discern, in David's history as a king than on that day. "So David and all the house of Israel

brought up the ark of Jehovah with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of Jehovah came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before Jehovah; and she despised him in her heart." No wonder that the Spirit of God calls her Saul's daughter. Why, methought she was now David's wife. Yes, but what woman that day behaved less like it? She was "Saul's daughter" still. It was the genuine expression of her father. There was not a right feeling towards her husband in this transaction (and how near it was to his heart!), still less in her value for Jehovah's relation to Israel as witnessed by the bringing of the ark to Zion.

But "they brought in the ark of Jehovah, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before Jehovah." They were undisturbed by any hindrance now. Their sense of the divine majesty was evident, their adherence to the word of the Lord unmistakable. All the offerings speak of thanksgiving in devotedness and fellowship. "And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, he blessed the people in the name of Jehovah of hosts." It is clear that David was now enjoying in the very fullest sense the grace of God toward Israel and himself. "And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, as well to the women as men, to every one a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine. So all the people departed every one to his house."

Yet there was one person who had no sympathy with the festive joy of that great day in Israel, one soul who was

as displeased with David now as he himself had once been with Jehovah. “And Michal the daughter of Saul [mark the significant repetition of the natural root] came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!” But how dignified and withering was the rebuke of her husband! “And David said unto Michal, It was before Jehovah, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of Jehovah, over Israel: therefore will I play before Jehovah.” It was the service of faith. It was the king of Israel who, the more he was exalted and established of God, used all his exaltation as an offering to the Lord, and felt himself too so much the more exalted because God was everything to his soul. Nearness to God was greater in David’s eyes at that moment than the throne that God had given him; and David rightly judged. And Michal, far from appreciating the Lord’s grace in her soul, was thenceforth doomed to be far from a husband whom she failed to honour when he proved that his heart was set to treat all else as nothing so that he might honour the Lord.

In the next chapter (2 Samuel 7) we have the king before Jehovah. How different all that passed there, as we pass from Michal and the king to the king and Jehovah! “And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and Jehovah had given him rest round about from all his enemies; that the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for Jehovah is

with thee." But Nathan was wrong in this; he had answered hastily. The prophet is as much dependent on God for light as any other person, and it is an instructive thing that we should have the mistakes of a prophet, or it may be of a greater than the prophet: I speak of course even of an apostle himself; and, without entering on doubtful points, I do say it is perfectly certain that, great as was the apostle Peter, he made not only mistakes, but some of the most serious kind. I do not speak of what he did before he was brought into the highest place, and had the power requisite to fill it, but it is plain that God has recorded for our instruction that not even the very chief of the twelve apostles had wisdom except in what was given him. For experience will not suit in the things of God, nor any power in which a person may have previously wrought, unless there be also dependence on the Lord.

So here Nathan has a corrective from the Lord Himself, as indeed it was needed. "Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith Jehovah, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?" Many an edifice of our proposal and making God had never asked of us. We ought not to run before Him. Faith waits on God, instead of anticipating in self-confidence, or in the desires of our own heart, let them be ever so simple. It is obvious that David was acting from his own thought and his own circumstances. It

looked excellent, humanly speaking, and might even seem so for a man of God. In a certain sense the desire was admirable; but, beloved brethren, “to obey is better than sacrifice.” Can we trust our desires? There is nothing so humble as waiting on the Lord, and quietly doing His will as God makes it known; nor is anything really so firm, although unbelief counts and boldly declares it the greatest presumption to know it.

But there is more than this. God deigns in grace to serve His people and to suit Himself to them. It would not answer to His feelings that they should be at work or war, and He in rest and peace. When they were wanderers in the desert, He dwelt in a tent in their midst; and He must settle them in the land before He would accept a temple or settled dwelling at their hands. Yea, He must also make David a house settled in the throne of Jehovah before his son could build Him a house. For such was His holy pleasure, that not David but David’s son should build the house of Jehovah. The bearing is evident: the true Solomon, the Prince of Peace, is before the eye of God.

“Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people over Israel: and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. Moreover 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; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, and as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my

people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also Jehovah telleth thee that he will make thee an house."

Thus God must always have the first place, and always be the first mover. It would not consist with His glory to let David build Him a house till He had built David a house. Of this He proceeds to assure the king. "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son." It is true that David's seed should come under the righteous government of God. `' If he commit iniquity, I Will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men." It was not Christ yet. "But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.... So did Nathan speak unto David."

David goes in and sits before Jehovah, and pours out that wonderful answer to the expression of Jehovah's grace even in correcting David's hasty desire to glorify Him. "Who am I, O Lord Jehovah? and v hat is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord Jehovah; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord Jehovah? And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord Jehovah, knowest thy servant. For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them. Wherefore

thou art great, O Lord Jehovah: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel?" Could any words so well present this admirable feature of David's faith — that he so much the more appreciated the people as Jehovah's people because he had appreciated Jehovah? For His grace to himself and his house he has now to bless Him.

It is granted that, where we are occupied with the people first, we are never right. Who could ever trust a man's love for the church until he is content with the love of Christ alone? But when you have got the sense of what Christ is, when you are filled with His glory and with His love, then not to enter into His feelings toward the church would be the most unnatural of all things. It is more than doubtful whether it is really possible, but there may be something like it occasionally. There is an ultra-spirituality which loudly professes that it cares for nothing but Christ, while it despises the testimony of Christ and the fellowship of saints. This I believe to be a most offensive thing in the sight of God; and it is shown by the person isolating himself in heart and ways from all that tries as well as exercises heart and conscience. It will be found contrariwise, my brethren, that the more truly you are isolated in the power of faith to Christ, the more precious the children of God become to the heart; but for this very reason you cannot endure their walking apart from the Lord's will. It deepens your judgment of the condition in which they may be practically; but then it strengthens your desire to see them really delivered out of it.

Something of this sort you may trace running through all scripture. It does not matter where we search; the darker the time, the plainer it appears. Take for instance Daniel. Did any one ever love Israel more than he did those in Babylon? Yet he assuredly felt the condition of the people more gravely than any other; and it was because the power of faith isolated him so truly to the Lord that he loved them, and this for God's glory in them. I do not doubt that practically he walked in the empire a lonely man: few there beyond the three companions of his youth could appreciate his feelings; but I am persuaded that he loved Israel so much the more because Jehovah was all to him.

Similarly, though in a comparatively good time and quite other circumstances, we find David now communing with the counsels of God. It was at the time of fresh power and blessing to Israel where the name of Zion, as it were, gives character to the period, and the putting forth of divine power and goodness by David makes it an epoch in Israel. But whether one look at Moses or David or Daniel, at the beginning or middle or end, after all the Lord is the same yesterday and today and for ever; and the effect is the same in the heart of those that love Him. It may be modified by our circumstances, and the state of the people of God of course; but it is the same principle always. It was David's portion then to enjoy Jehovah's love, and not merely to himself but to His people, yet to be the witnesses of His glory as enjoying it themselves.

Hence David launches out into praise. "What one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible,

for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Jehovah, art become their God. And now, O Jehovah God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and-do as thou hast said." Such grace was indeed a great thing to say and do, but not too much. What could be too much for God? It made David nothing; but for this very reason David's heart just forgets himself, and there is no true dignity that is not founded on self-forgetfulness. But the only thing which ensures its reality is the sense of the grace and the presence of the Lord. David enjoyed it most deeply at this very time. "And now, O Jehovah God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant: therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Jehovah God, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever."

In the next chapter (2 Samuel 8) we hear of wars, and the Philistines and the Moabites subdued. We read of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, smitten, and the Syrians who would succour him also put down. At the same time some of the Gentiles come to bless the king with presents, and all those rarities that befit the character of the kingdom; in short power, glory, and blessing fill the scene. Further, the Edomites are made subject to the throne. Lastly, the administrative order and government of David are brought before us in due season, as well as his own place as supreme. "And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all

his people. And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder." The priests, and the scribes, and the various other officers are brought before us, each in his place.

Then in 2 Samuel 9 a different picture opens before us. The heart of David yearns now, not for subjecting others, but for the exercise of that grace that God had shown to his own soul. And so he thinks of the house of Saul. Were there any of them to whom he could show "the kindness of God"? On this most grateful scene we need not pause long. It is happily no strange tale to almost all of us, being the account of David's wonderful grace to Mephibosheth. "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet."

After this another scene opens, in which David wished to show kindness, not to Jonathan's line of the house of Saul but to Hanun, the son of Nahash, as his father had shown kindness to David. (2 Samuel 10) This was completely misunderstood. The Ammonites could not appreciate the grace of David's heart, but only suspected mischief, as the wicked naturally do. "And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it? Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away." The insult was told to David, who quietly met the matter; but at the same time it was committed to Joab; and certainly the vengeance taken was grateful to him. Joab took them,

and, as we know, spite of the Syrians who sought to shield them. Resistance was vain. They were punished severely. The power of the throne of David was firmly settled everywhere.

The next chapter (2 Samuel 11) introduces the first dark shade since David came to the throne. “And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah.” There was a bitter vengeance. “But David tarried still at Jerusalem.” I doubt that the soul of David was thoroughly with the Lord either in taking his ease, or in wreaking the vengeance that had been poured on the Ammonite. At all events the history that follows is too painful for us to dwell much on at this time. It need only be briefly touched on. His heart was ensnared, and sin soon followed — the gravest sin, more particularly in such a one as David. It was followed, as sin usually is, by the worst efforts to cover all, and he who did the wrong with Bath-sheba tried ineffectually to conceal his sin by having home his faithful servant Uriah; and when this failed to gloss over his own wickedness, he devised the means by which Uriah should be brought to his grave. Thus did the fallen king still more pursue, and now without a check, the course of wickedness on which he had entered. Oh, what sin and shame for David!

The next chapter (2 Samuel 12) brings Nathan again forward, who comes and puts before the king the case of the two men in the city, the one rich and the other poor. “The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up

together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own Dock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him."

"And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man." Do not always trust people when they show indignation with vehemence. David even then could feel hotly enough about evil. Alas! there was no self-judgment, nor is there a single feature more terrible in the sin of David than the long time he gave himself up to it, apparently without a right feeling as to man, or exercise of conscience as to God; so that, even when it was plainly enough set parabolically before him, his anger was kindled only against another man's wrong. When Nathan came, David might well have had his ears open to know whether there was any word from God about such a sin as he had been guilty of; but not so. Let us not deceive ourselves, my brethren, or be deceived by others. The only thing that enables us to judge aright anything in others is self-judgment. If we are to see clearly the mote in a brother, let us not forget to take the beam out of our own eyes. David here stands as a solemn instance that he who is so quick to see sin in another may be utterly blind to his own grave and unjudged iniquity. Hence too he says quickly, "As Jehovah liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith

Jehovah God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of Jehovah, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour."

Mark the solemn principle of retribution in this instance, so habitually found in fact as in scripture. Our sin always gives the form of our chastening. "I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour." And further, "Thou didst it secretly." Here comes in contrast, as before there was analogy, the one or the other characterising God's ways, as each would mark most impressively the deceitfulness of sin for man, and God's eternal abhorrence of it. "Thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah. And Nathan said unto David, Jehovah also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." He had sentenced himself, but God in every sense is greater. "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of Jehovah to blaspheme,

the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." Nevertheless of that very mother — of her who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite — did the grace of God raise up the heir to the throne of Israel, whom He made His firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth and type of Christ in peaceful glory, as David had been in suffering and warlike power — the latter yet. to be fulfilled. Truly the ways of God are wonderful. Here again we see, whatever may have been the sin of gaining her as the king did, the sovereign grace of God did not blot out the tie that was formed, but deigned out of that connection, when the sin was thoroughly detected and judged, to raise up the chosen son of David, who sets aside the others that might have pleaded a prior claim after the flesh.

It is a chapter profitable for the soul to consider well and often, the bitter grief of David, his exercise of heart when the child was smitten, and his admirable conduct after God had taken away the child. Then it was that he hears his servants' entreaty, and is comforted. Just when affectionate men naturally would give themselves up to unrestrained and hopeless grief, in the wisdom which grace inspired his tears were stayed, his heart turned with confidence to the Lord, and he partook of the refreshment provided for him. What a warning, yet what consolation, for him! David, however low he had fallen, was a real man of God; not only the object of grace, but as a rule one deeply exercised and habitually formed by it. He returns therefore to the spring of his strength and blessing. Accordingly we shall find in the sequel that God had good things in store, in the midst of sorrow and chastening, for the penitent king of Israel.

2 Samuel 13 - 24.

In the sketch proposed of these books of scripture there is of course no pretension to notice every point of interest they contain, but only a general comprehensive view, as far as the Lord enables me to present, of their main course and objects. The most careless reader must perceive, that as Saul holds a considerable place in the First Book of Samuel, so Absalom occupies not a little space in the Second, and both of them in collision with David. Now the nature of inspiration supposes that God, in selecting such persons or facts as are regarded there, had a divine object before Him. It is the main business of an interpreter to learn and set out according to his measure the design that the Spirit of God appears to have had in view.

It is clear on the face of it that the chief feature of Absalom's history is, in the end of it at least, opposition to David: he stood in the nearest relationship to the king, but he was none the less an antagonist. Now as David all through, whether in the First or in the Second Book of Samuel, is a type of the Lord Jesus, there ought not to be a question, as it appears to me, that the Spirit of God is giving us, in the adversaries of David, antichrists. Only the antichrist has qualities in his type, which differ quite as much as those of the antitype will, in express scripture or in reality. Thus in the New Testament, where he is brought before us directly and as a matter of doctrine or prophecy, John describes the antichrist first as one that denies the Christ; then as going on with a growing audacity (and this is more particularly his opposition to the Christian revelation) to deny the Father and the Son. For he is the liar and the antichrist. He denies Christ both in Jewish relations and

in personal dignity. He sets aside therefore in Him the glory of Israel, and also the fulness of divine grace as now shown in Christianity. For we must remember that the Lord Jesus in the variety of His glories displays God in many ways; for instance as Messiah King of Israel, and, when rejected by the Jews, as the Son of man, ruler of all tribes, peoples, nations, and tongues in the world. The unbelief of the Jews in rejecting the Lord was and will be thus used by God still more fully to display Christ's glory and His own counsels.

Now as John refers to the two characteristics of the last antagonist of Christ, so I think it will be found that in the First Book of Samuel Saul stands forth as the chief adversary of David before he came to the throne. After it Absalom holds a similar place in the Second; and of the two, Absalom was the more dangerous and daring, as the enormity in him was incomparably worse. The nearness and character of his relationship to the king made the guilt of his conduct the more dreadful before God and man. It is this which to my mind explains the large space that is given both to king Saul's jealous persecution on the one hand, and to Absalom's attempt at usurping the power of David on the other. It is true that at first Absalom by no means shows out the violent form which his wickedness was finally to take. He uses a certain craft which no doubt succeeded with the simple though repulsive to the upright. Before his treason we hear the details of his blood-thirsty cruelty, which no provocation could palliate, not even that most gross conduct of Amnon towards his sister Tamar. It will be so with antichrist. All his evil will not come out fully at once. Surely then it is a most solemn consideration for all our souls — the moral principle which we see in these

cases. Nearness to what is good invariably develops evil in its worst features. There could be no such thing as antichrist if there were not Christianity and Christ. It is the fulness of the grace and truth that is revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus that brings out the worst evil in man. And even Satan himself could not accomplish his designs against the glory of God save by rising up against the Man who is the special object of God's delight and of His counsels in glory.

Hence we find a pretty full answer to all this in the twofold type: first, Saul the adversary of David in his earlier career, when he had not been yet seated on the throne; then Absalom, not all at once, but by degrees coming out, though no doubt full of craft and blood-thirstiness before he turned against his father. The liar and the murderer is betrayed even in the earliest account of him which scripture brings before us. God, on the other hand, was judging the family of David, and speaking to David's own heart and conscience in the sin and shame and scandal that covered as a whole the family with reproach; and this it is that lets us see Absalom. He will avenge his sister's wrong himself. He has made up his mind to shed his brother's blood; he cloaks it under fair pretences. Amnon is ensnared to his ruin. (2 Samuel 13)

But there is more than this; there is a magnificent display of divine mercy shadowed in the way in which Absalom was brought home; and here again we have another witness of the same truth that has been often referred to. It is only after God has shown His rich mercy that Satan and man mature and work out their deepest malice. The woman of Tekoah was employed by the subtle Joab, who knew well that the heart of the king

was yearning after his guilty son. At the same time he knew that the king had difficulty in conscience, for he was the executor of the law of God. To him God had entrusted the sword in Israel, and Absalom had brought the stain of blood on the people and the land of God, as well as on the family of the king.

On every ground therefore David was called upon to assert what was due to God against his own son. But this is only one of a number of instances that strew the whole line of divine history where God, while He does insist on righteousness and resent all failure in maintaining it here below, never abdicates grace, but always holds the title of divine mercy above the claims of earthly righteousness. And certainly David was one who could not resist such an appeal There might be a certain struggle; and the very fact too that Absalom was his son would to an upright mind make the struggle harder: was it really possible for David to deny that grace which was his only ground and chief boast before God? This then was what Joab, who had not the slightest appreciation of grace himself, would nevertheless know to be the surest avenue to David’s heart: and this it was that the woman of Tekoah therefore pleads. She comes before the king, who asks her what was her sorrow. She puts in a parabolic way the position in which she stood, saying, “Thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him. And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not

leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth. And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne be guiltless. And the king said, Whosoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember Jehovah thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As Jehovah liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth."

Having thus secured the ground, the woman begins to open the secret. The king had now pledged his royal word. Grace was very dear to his heart. His feelings were moved and stirred deeply. It was no new thing for him, as his procedure to Mephibosheth could attest. Who knew or valued so highly the "kindness of God"? He had known the need of it himself. Of this then Joab had taken advantage in putting forward this woman to plead before David the imaginary trouble of her house. Now the king's conscience might be relieved. If he would spare another's house, spite of guilt, would he not spare his own? This was what calmed his fears. Nothing could be more artfully devised. Hence we see how the woman gradually begins to explain what it was that was really aimed at. "Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished." It

was no question of her son, but of the king's banished. "For we must needs die," she adds, "and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished may not be expelled from him."

It is the way of grace she pleads. Impossible for David to resist this. If God devises means that His banished should return, who was David to differ from God? If God, with all His unstained holiness, with all His jealous regard to righteousness, nevertheless devises His efficacious means (and David knew it well), who or what was David that he should hold out against the pitiful case of his banished one? of Absalom driven to another land because of the blood of Amnon, the blood of the guilty brother that he had shed in avenging his sister's dishonour? So it was then that the king, moved by it, listens to her. "The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore Jehovah thy God will be with thee."

Yet righteousness was not guarded here, as God does perfectly in Christ. Hence a suspicion arises that all was not straight. The king accordingly says, "Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak. And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid: to fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of

an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth." Where the eye is single, the whole body is full of light. There could be no doubt that the allegory was admirably drawn. Alas! it was the parable of one whose heart was not in the matter. How solemn a thing it is, my brethren, to see from time to time in the course of scripture history, as we may in fact now, that there are natural minds who can sometimes see more clearly what becomes a saint of God than saints themselves feel. But it is only those who know how to turn the grace of God to their own purpose when it suits them. This is what Joab was now doing by the woman of Tekoah. He held the truth in unrighteousness, we shall see with what result as far as Absalom was concerned.

But the king, when he did discover the aim, did not swerve from his word. He says to Joab, "Behold now, I have done this thing." He, indebted to grace, and to nothing so much as grace, could not possibly disavow the appeal of grace. Hence his command, "Go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again." Joab thanks the king, and acts. But David is not indifferent to the guilt contracted by the past, and Absalom is forbidden to come near. "The king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face."

Next the Spirit of God gives us the description of the person of Absalom. There was everything to attract the eye, everything to meet the natural desires, of one who would wish the comeliest person in Israel to be the king. Nature had wrought formerly in the choice of Saul. It was repeated again with Absalom. (2 Samuel 14)

In the next chapter (2 Samuel 15) the wicked plans of the traitor begin to ripen and unfold themselves, and this, it will be marked, only after the richest grace had been shown him. This indeed was necessary. It was not till the banished one had found means in the grace of the king to return; it was after that which answers as much as anything could to the grace of God in the gospel. Then, consequent on all the mercy shown him, does a more terrible character of antichrist display itself in Absalom than had ever been seen in king Saul. What then appears to be the distinction intended? Is it not that Saul show; us antichrist more as the consequence of Jewish apostasy; Absalom more as the consequence of Christian apostasy? Both these traits must be found in the antichrist of the last days; and this is one reason too why, although there were antichristian features when the Lord Jesus was found here below, the full display of the antichrist could not be until after all the grace of God in Christianity had been fully brought out.

This also explains why there should be a double type of antichrist — one in each of these two Books of Samuel. We have the display of the fullest possible evil of man — one in pride and real envy and affected contempt, and at last of murderous hatred toward David. All this was found in Saul. But in Absalom’s case there was a still deeper character of lawlessness, as there was a nearer and more dependent tie to the king. Besides, there had been the richest manifestation of mercy to himself. The most dreadful wickedness on his own part had been met by greater love and grace on the part of David. After all this then we find Absalom laying his plots and carrying out his schemes for the purpose of supplanting the king his father.

This was the manner of the man: “And it came to pass after, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that bad a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.” Two principal objects are apparent: the undermining of the king, and this in order to the glorifying himself. Hence as the readiest way he Hatters the people, whom he never loved as David did, but despised, and assuredly none so much as those taken in his nets of fair words and good speeches. “Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice I And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” It need not be argued at length that there was neither righteousness nor love in all this; neither the righteousness that discriminated the mutual relationships of himself and of those that came, and yet more of all to the king, without which there could not be anything right; neither was there the love that sought the good of others instead of its own things, but unbridled will and the loftiest ambition. His object was himself, and himself too for the vilest purposes — for his own exaltation by the overthrow of his father, whom God had anointed king of Israel. “And it came to pass,” it is said, “after forty years,

that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto Jehovah, in Hebron. For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If Jehovah shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve Jehovah."

Observe here the profanation of the name of Jehovah, which always accompanies the worst evil of men on the earth. "And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom." Another character is here which was necessary to complete the character of antichrist; that is, the combination of kingly power in Israel with spiritual pretension. There will be the highest assumption of a religious sort. The antichrist is not barely infidel. Infidelity there will be, but always a show of religion along with it, whether in the same personage or in one that is joined with him in type. That which brings in an evil spiritual power is necessary to give the true and full character of the antichrist. Hence Ahithophel is associated with Absalom. So, as we know, the second beast, or false prophet, in the Revelation symbolises this same personage. Notably he has two horns like the lamb. There is a double character of power. It is not simply that he is or has a horn. He is not a mere king, but a beast with two horns. And at this time

it would seem that it is no longer a question of imitating the priestly power of Christ, but he will pretend to have not only a kingly place but a prophet character, an understanding of the mind of God, just as Ahithophel here, as we see, who had been David's counsellor before but is now Absalom's. There is thus a combination of the false prophet with royalty. These at the close will be united in the antichrist.

I am not now speaking of the great imperial power, the beast, in those days that bring on judgment For this we must look elsewhere; for it will not have its seat in Jerusalem, nor will the sphere of its dominion be the land of Israel. There will be the place where the final conflict takes place; there the scene of the destruction of the beast and the false prophet, and of the associated kings that are with them.

Such are a few of the leading points which may help, not only to guide souls, but also to preserve from mistakes too often made, to which we are as liable as any. There is no power of preservation in the truth except by simple subjection to the word of God. If we begin to give ourselves credit for anything like a definite system of truth, more particularly when it takes a traditional shape carried on from one to another, I am persuaded that the Lord will not be with the enterprise. Of all men, we need most to walk in sustained subjection to God and His word. No doubt all the children of God do; but if God has brought us out from the creeds and stereotyped forms of human arrangement, be assured we are not the less in danger. It is not meant in the least that there is no security. Who can overlook the fact that those who have trusted creeds and formularies have little to boast of their orthodoxy at this present time? We can well see

too that there is no end of inconsistency; yea, the grossest contradiction of that which is avowed and confessed may be and is carried on, though one may be thankful for whatever check there is to deadly error; for the value of a creed at best is chiefly in its protest against heterodoxy. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” not by a creed. And the infidelity of men who subscribe all the old creeds is so glaring that mere lawyers and men of the world in general are ashamed at the scandal. This is not said to wound any one, nor as a busy body in other men’s matters, but rather for our souls’ profit, believing that there are none whom God will hold more decidedly to what we profess.

But is it not our joy, and the sure means of security, to cherish continual and unqualified subjection in our souls to the truth of God as He has revealed it — not to the thoughts that we may receive through others, however striking or helpful? Let us be grateful for their help; yet it is our duty to judge all by the word. Let us thankfully enjoy whatever of truth the Lord’s servants can minister to us, but no deductions can ever be a ground of faith. Whatever may be taught by this one or preached by that must be brought to the touchstone of scripture, instead of being taken out of its place and made a test of the truth. The word of God is not only the great source, but the only standard, of the truth. Do we desire from God the truth? We have His precious word to teach us that truth with certainty. Ministry in the word is a blessed help; and it would be proud and base to despise the help of God’s servants — ungrateful towards Him, haughty toward them, and injurious to our own souls. “They shall be all taught of God” is true of all saints, but it in no way

excludes teachers and other ordinary means, though there may be extraordinary instances where they are taught without this or that aid. But it is in general an unfounded pretension to have learnt directly from God through His own word, independently of those He has set in the body of Christ for this express purpose. And it will be found, in fact, that those who boast of not having learnt through such means as He usually employs know little, being really too proud to be taught. To the word of God then we need to pay heed if we would have the assurance of divine teaching, even if it be only a question about the antichrist. It is, of course, apart from those foundation truths that are immediately bound up with our own relationship to God; and we may bless Him that so it is and must be in His wisdom. Still we must remember that it is by the truth that we are sanctified. Nor can we afford, for the Lord's name sake, any more than for our own souls' good, to admit lightly any thought into our minds which is not of Him. Indeed, no matter how distant, where any thing is received into the heart that is not the truth of God, as being false, and a foreign ingredient, it will work evil in various ways; it will surely embroil other scriptures, and make us to confound things that differ. The consequence will be that we know not what the effect of even a trifling departure from the truth may be in thus destroying the symmetry and the perfectness of the truth of God in His word. The fact is that the truth is one, and therefore, where any one part is misapprehended or rejected, there is danger of weakening the rest. I am now speaking, of course, not of that which concerns our own souls with God, but merely of profitably using every part of God's word.

Thus then, if we have been guided aright in what is before us, there is in the type the union of both — on the one hand royal power (and this was what Absalom was affecting for himself); but along with it there was joined with him a falsely prophetic character typified by Ahithophel. The two were connected together, just as we saw Saul himself at the last finding his resource in the witch of Endor. There was an evil spiritual adviser of the lowest kind to which he was driven. See too Pharaoh and the magicians, also Balak and Balaam. So constantly are these two characters linked in opposition to the Christ of God.

However this be, Absalom is seen successful apparently at first; and there speedily follows the solemn sight of the king obliged to be a fugitive from the throne, and the capital, and the sanctuary of Israel. “David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city.”

How beautiful the contrast with a former scene, but too familiar! The people and priests in their panic before the Philistines brought out the ark of God, if peradventure it might serve as a charm against the swords of their enemies; but here David refuses to employ it selfishly and irreverently, whatever his need and peril — a man, if ever there was one of old on earth, with living faith in

God, and real reverence for the sign of His presence in Israel; for there was no one that ever showed such a value, and this believingly, for the ark of God, as king David. Nevertheless in this supreme hour of his deepest extremity and greatest humiliation he refuses to jeopard the ark of God. He will not allow for his own sake the smallest shade cast upon it. What! he, David, call the ark of God out of Jerusalem? Far from it! David bids the sons of Zadok and the Levites carry it back to the city, where it is destined for ever to rest, once the Lord Jesus establishes it; and on this affecting and unselfish ground: "If I shall find favour in the eyes of Jehovah, he will bring me again, and show me both it, and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." Was not this a heart, my brethren, which in the face of all his faults accepted his humiliation, taking it from the hand of God to justify Him? He was one who knew that, whatever the grace of God already shown to him, it was not exhausted yet. Far from yielding to a suspicion of God's goodness to him, questioning his own manifold shortcomings, or palliating his gross failure, we see one prepared to bow to whatever God would do, and to bless Him for it. David would plead for the honour of God, cost what it might to himself. And this is faith, which appropriates to its own need and joy what it sees in God. But just because it is faith, it will never allow that what its little range of vision takes in can equal, but must ever be surpassed by the grace that is in Him. In short, faith, as it always gets what it seeks, so it is always assured that there is more, never pretending to reach up to the fulness of the grace of God. At the same time it does not listlessly stop short, satisfied with what it has, however thankful. But it confesses that faith

in man is never a match for grace in God, so to speak; draw as it may, it can never fathom His goodness. It may dive more and more in, but it can never get to the bottom.

In this spirit it was that we find the king going up by the ascent of mount Olivet. It may remind us of a greater than he; but the One greater than David, though He knew tears as none ever did, did not then go up weeping. Not that His heart was not filled with the deepest feelings of love yet of sorrow for man and Israel, for His own too in their midst, soon to enjoy the Comforter He would send down from heaven as the seal of redemption. But for David it was a day of shame, not only for the people and his guilty son, but not without ground for himself personally; it was a day when he could not deny the righteous hand of God stretched out over him and his seed in the correction of faults neither few nor light. He “wept” therefore “as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.”

But furthermore one told David, saying, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” David turns to God. He knew the gravity of the tidings, but this very thing brought before him the spring of his confidence, as surely as he saw the hand of Satan in it. A father’s love might abstain from pleading against Absalom; but David could now unburden his heart to God. Therefore he says, “O Jehovah, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” And Jehovah heard, and answered.

Nevertheless, the king was not without comfort and joy. He was not without that which consoled, soothed, and

cheered his spirit in the day of his calamity. This is brought out before us in the next chapter (2 Samuel 17),where “Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king’s household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink.” And so it is, beloved friends, that, where grace is in the heart, the Lord will give the opportunity to show it. This He is giving to us at the present time, while Jesus is still despised; and He is despised, although they own Him in words to be seated on the throne.

So too, when we are gone to heaven, will He give to the godly remnant at the end of this age, and accept the sweet fruits of faith which shall display themselves in those that refuse what is false and of the enemy, as they look through clouds and difficulties, no doubt, but not without assurance, to the bright day of the kingdom that is about to be set up here below. This is what is figured by the faith that wrought by love, that we are shown in thus providing for David. But when the king arrives at Bahurim, he is subjected to a fresh trial in the way of insult; for these two things may now be together, fruits of grace and works of flesh inspired by Satan. Here Shimei “cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.” The mighty men naturally knew no small indignation; but we hear the voice of the humbled king reproving his followers, too

hasty to shed blood. No; it was from God that the humiliation came, and David accepts it thoroughly. Shimei shall not provoke him so as to lose a grain of the profit. The arm that would have crushed Shimei in a moment would have deprived David of a lesson never to be forgotten. If then a trusty warrior proposes to punish the wanton insolence of Shimei, the king breathes the spirit of meekness, even at that moment when the basest of men poured contempt on him. “Then said Abishai unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because Jehovah hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?” We must remember that, before the Lord Jesus comes out as King, others will be put to the proof, and their faith and patient grace be tried in their measure as truly as ours. For us indeed the trial of our faith should be always. They will have it for a brief season, and severely. But now there is everything calculated to seduce us into the world, and cause us to overlook the moral glory of our calling, to forget Christ’s rejection and cross.

Indeed, the relationship seen here will apply fully to the latter-day saints, whereas it can only be ours in general spirit. For Christ is own Lord and Head. David was truly the king, and there was none other. But we know that, although the Lord Jesus be not yet sitting on His own throne, He is crowned with glory and honour. We know Him on what is after all a greater throne, and on a deeper title than that of Messiah; we know Him possessed of a larger glory and in a higher sphere; we know that it is He that will confer glory on the throne,

instead of merely receiving glory from it; but for this very reason we have the opportunity of showing how far our faith in Christ exceeds and makes as nothing all Satan's allurements to serve the world and forget our rejected Master. But the same thing in principle will be true for those that shall follow us. They will not, of course, have the same form of relationship to the Lord Jesus as we have; and the special part of the word of God that will bear on their souls and circumstances will be quite different from that which God intends for us now. There is a common groundwork, but much that is distinctive of each. And this is of great importance. It shows convincingly that it is not merely a question of God's word, but of His Spirit; and the same Spirit who brings out the truth, and leads into our relationship with Christ above, will bring out to the souls of the righteous godly Jews by and by the expectation of the true King to come for the overthrow of antichrist with every other enemy at the close of the age, and to reign over Israel and the earth in the age to come.

This will furnish them with opportunities similar in principle to those which the Lord gave to Mephibosheth on the one hand, and of which Shimei took advantage on the other. There will be room both for despite and for reciprocation of grace between the Messiah and all who have waited for Him in that day.

In the end of the chapter we have another scene still reminding us of the great crisis. Hushai goes to Absalom and opposes in every way the counsel of Ahithophel. Thus also in those future days will the Lord know how to defeat all the plans of the devil. There was no doubt that Ahithophel of the two was the subtler — the one best of

all calculated to further the plans of Absalom; but the time was not yet come for anything but a shadowy effort.

There was then as now one “that letteth.” It was not yet the hour for apparent success. God confounds the plans accordingly, and Ahithophel is vexed to the utmost, and more and more as he finds there is one near Absalom who brings to nothing all his devices. This is set fully before us in 2 Samuel 17. The result was that “when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and get him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.”

The next chapter (2 Samuel 18) brings the solemn crisis before us. The battle takes place, and he that lifted himself up so proudly, he that had fawned on Israel to gain them over as his partisans against his father, he who sought dominion but not from God, setting himself against the glory of God and the king of Israel, dies a death of special shame and curse, hanging on a tree. Lifted up, as we know, by the very hair of his head which had been his vanity, as it was a part of his personal beauty, Absalom died as a fool dies; so had Jehovah Himself in His providence ordered the result, as he fled from the scene of his defeat. The king betrays the natural affection of a father’s heart, but, it may be, with too little sense of his son’s impious rebellion, or of God’s righteous retribution This is brought before us in the most touching manner.

What need of details now? Suffice it to say that Joab comes in to reprove the king as he gives way to unmeasured grief, and cries with a loud voice, “O my

son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" The very people that had gained the victory for him could not but be vexed as they read an implied reproof in the king's laments and tears. Joab therefore ventures to say, "Thou hast shamed this day the face of all thy servants which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; in that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by Jehovah, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night." How evident that not yet did the king reign in righteousness; else Joab had never dared so to speak. Thus every type falls short of the truth. It must be so in the nature of things; and is it for us to find fault with the plain truth that the Lord Jesus is thus unapproachable? For what does it tell? The tale of all scripture — the failure of the first man. The only one worthy of all homage and praise, of all confidence and love, is the second Man, the last Adam.

Then the king was pleased to sit in the gate. "And all the people came before the king, for Israel fled every man to his tent." And then king David sends "to Zadok and to Abiathar the priest, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king? And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more

also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal to go to meet the king to conduct the king over Jordan." And there it is that the blaspheming Shimei cowers before the returning king; for now those that had rendered a feigned obedience are being made manifest. Here too the king shows that he was by no means equal to the task that will be taken up and carried out in full by the true David only; for, wrought on by his feelings, he swears to Shimei that he shall not die — an oath that could not avail when Solomon comes to the throne, as we learn from another book of scripture.

Next we find Mephibosheth and his sorrowful tale; and Barzillai the Gileadite comes before us with his grace in due season. The result of all is that the men of Israel come to the king and say, "Why have our brethren the men of Judah" — for it becomes now a rivalry of care and affection and honour for the king — "Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan? And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift? And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye." The king is now their portion and boast. If here we find nature again, nevertheless what a change as the king returned! He is

borne forward to Jerusalem by the returning affections of the people. Another traitor is discovered in the person of Sheba — overthrown still by the prompt zeal, as well as by the courage of Joab — and all was order afresh in the kingdom. The latter part of this chapter shows us that the efforts of the enemy only turn to the greater honour of king David now reinstated in Jerusalem and the throne.

But in 2 Samuel 21 an instructive scene is introduced to us to which we may turn our attention for a moment. Whatever may be the grace and faithfulness of God, for the very same reason God is jealous of His word, and deals righteously wherever His name is pledged. We are all familiar with the fact that in the days of Joshua the Gibeonites had deceived the heads of Israel. They had palmed themselves off on Joshua as coming from a far country, having for their own ends hidden the truth that they belonged to the accursed races of Canaan. The result was that Joshua and the other leaders of Israel committed the name of Jehovah, through the deceit of the Gibeonites, to sparing their lives, though in consequence of that deceit they were reduced to the condition of hewers of wood and drawers of water for the sanctuary. But Saul in his spurious zeal for God lost sight of what was so solemnly assured to the Gibeonites. Are you surprised that the king who would have taken away the life of his own son because of his rash oath, which Jonathan knew not, should feel lightly the oath that had been sworn by Joshua and the other leaders of Israel in the olden time? Wonder not; for the flesh, which here overstrains, there breaks down altogether.

It was no doubt long ago, and there are those who would ignore what is past for present ease. But time makes no

difference, any more than place, in the things of God. What He looks to is His name, and by this are we also bound to keep His word and not deny His name. Saul forgot it. Can we not easily understand this? In him was no living faith whatever. There was only form, and this will sell the Lord when it suits for the price of a slave, though it may at the same time make the greatest show of devotedness. Doubtless Saul could vaunt his own superior zeal for the Lord in this — that he at least was not going to be carried away by a mere name, and an obligation so long ago as to be obsolete. If the Gibeonites were Canaanites, woe be to them from king Saul! And so it was that there was a famine, not immediately after, but now in the days of David for three years. Two things particularly may well arrest attention in this as a great moral truth It was a long time since the name of Jehovah was pledged; but does God ever forget? Secondly, it was by no means a short time since Saul had done the bloody deed, and yet no chastening had yet come from Jehovah. The chastening did not follow till a considerable time after. Such patience tests souls thoroughly. The chastening fell not in the days of Saul, but in those of David. Why? Because God will have all to enquire of Him; He will exercise His people in their common and continuous responsibility; He will make us feel and judge our forgetfulness of heart, our lack of looking to Himself. The evil might have been dealt with personally on Saul; but the patience of God on the one hand, and the solidarity of the people on the other, was more impressively taught when the blow fell in the days of David. People and king were thus forced to review what had been soon forgotten because taken too lightly when done. He at least is occupied with our ways, and

the discipline may tarry a long time. He would have His people learn the reason why His hand was upon them.

If they confide in His righteousness, they will learn why it was the fitting time, and according to the wisdom of God, that the chastening should fall in the days of David rather than in those of Saul. If it had fallen in the days of Saul, the Lord had not been so enquired of. Here was one that felt for the honour of Jehovah. The blow came. If David had felt the sin, if the people had confessed it, if Jehovah's name had been cleared about it, the famine might not have befallen them as it actually did. The evil was done by another who was personally guilty. It is granted that neither David nor they were responsible for his acts, but they were responsible to feel and confess the wrong. It was done publicly by king Saul in Israel. Had they mourned the deed as tarnishing Jehovah's glory? There is no appearance that there was any such confession; and the Lord now will compel them to take up that sin most seriously under the pressure of a famine, repeated till He was glorified in the matter where the wrong was done. In fact the king was guilty, but had the people shown godly horror at his profanation of Jehovah's name? They were careless about it, one cannot doubt; and David wakes up now in answer to the call; and he, chastened of God, does truly feel it, as all Israel had at any rate to smart under the consequences. So then the famine comes, and David enquires of Jehovah. It is very evident that it required a heavy and prolonged dealing from God to make them feel; for it is said, "The famine came in the days of David three years, year after year." It is not that God takes pleasure in inflicting a sore plague on His people; but anything is good that leads us to draw near to God in

self-judgment for a dishonour done to His name. It seems plain then that this scourge was required year after year to rouse the conscience of Israel, possibly even of David also. At length he enquires of Jehovah, who distinctly answers, “It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.”

What a solemn lesson that God will not only not suffer unrighteousness to be done to the people that He loves, but even to the enemies that deceived them! “The righteous Jehovah loveth righteousness.” It would be hard to see or ask a more patent proof of the delicacy and also the tenacity of God’s holding to righteousness than His dealing in this very case with Israel for the oath passed to the Gibeonites. Every one can understand how He must feel about Israel or about David; but that God should be jealous for a wrong done under such circumstances, and so long ago, to the Gibeonites, is to my mind a most wholesome lesson of the God with whom we have to do.

Nor this only. “And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make an atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of Jehovah?” This is another important point: their consciences must be satisfied, their hearts consoled and at rest for the wrong that had been done to them. Yet there is no disguise as to the people in question. Now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel. The Spirit of God expressly calls our attention to their origin and race. They were “of the remnant of the Amorites” — and you know what the Amorites were — “and the children of Israel had sworn unto them, and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.” An excellent thing, is it not — zeal for

the people of God? But zeal only for God's people, or nominally for God Himself, can never sanctify disrespect to His name, even if through trickery only that name had been pledged to His worst enemies. For in truth it was not a question of those to whom the name was pledged, but of His name that was sworn thus. If Jehovah's name was given as a shield to any, Jehovah would be the unswerving and most righteous guardian of its sanctity.

Then of the Gibeonites when they come, David asks, "What shall I do for you? And wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of Jehovah? And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto Jehovah in Gibeah of Saul, whom Jehovah did choose. And the king said, I will give them. But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of Jehovah's oath that was between them." We must carefully look to this, and we shall always find God with us in it. Never should we sacrifice one duty in doing another. However important it may be for instance to pay God homage outside, we must never let slip God's honour at home in the family. It is a blessed thing to serve Him abroad, but there will be a sorry maintenance of His glory outside the house if He is not honoured within. And if we find therefore the Gibeonite's oath from Jehovah on one side, there was no less the oath to Jonathan, Saul's son and his seed on the other. No doubt

a hasty spirit would have sacrificed the one for the other; the wisdom of God enables us to maintain both This is fairly seen in the conduct of David.

And further, the very execution of divine judgment introduces the deeply pathetic story of Saul's concubine: "And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done." This was not a slight thing to David. No doubt God's name demanded vindication, and it was right. It was due to the Gibeonites that they should be satisfied. God was compelling them to judge the case that the guilt might be expiated; but it was more than right — it was beautiful and suitable that Rizpah should thus spread the deep sorrow of her heart before God. At this conjuncture David shows too on his part what v,-as lovely and becoming in the king of Israel. Far was he from insulting the memory of the late king; for the very one that had given up his sons to die went and took the bones of Saul: this was the very time that he took them — showing the last honour to the departed king of Israel and his family. "And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, which had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: and he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged. And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin

in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land."

The close of the chapter tells us of the prowess of some of David's servants on behalf of the waning strength of the king.

But at this point it were well to heed the remarkable manner in which the Spirit of God has put together the two next chapters. Certainly such a conjunction is not after the manner of men. 2 Samuel 22 consists, as is well known, of portions substantially given again in the Book of Psalms. Thus Psalm 18 is made here more striking because it is put along with the last words, as they are called, of David, in 2 Samuel 23. Now a comparison of these two will reward every spiritual mind. For what is the distinctive point of 2 Samuel 22? The identification of Israel's history with David as the type of the Messiah. Nothing can be more striking to any person that would patiently and intelligently meditate the chapter than the remarkable way in which the grand events of the history of Israel — their deliverance from Egypt, their being brought through the Red Sea, the defeat of their enemies — are all blended with the Messiah, first entering into the sorrows and troubles of the people, then brought out of them at last to be their deliverer, the head not only of Israel but of the Gentiles. Here therefore we find a course of sorrow and of suffering that ends in joy and triumph.

How different is the character of 2 Samuel 23! "These be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,

The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds (the anticipation of the day of Jehovah Himself); as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow."

Thus we find two things — the bright expectation of the kingdom, with the solemn sense that the time was not yet come. No man felt it more than king David. The fact that God put into his mouth the anticipations of the Messiah — that he himself knew that he in a striking manner (the most so of any man up to that day) was made the progenitor and type of the Messiah — this very fact made his own shortcomings, errors, and sins more poignantly felt. Well he knew that those failures of himself were darkly shadowed out, and retributively brought to mind, in the grief and shame and dishonour of his house. Thus we find a double current in the heart of David — his faith bright and undimmed in the joy that was coming with the true king who would surely sit upon his throne; but meanwhile his was the softened spirit, the broken and the contrite heart, of a man that knew what moral humiliation means as regarded himself and all his house. What in David could be more lovely in itself, or more suited to the actual state of things, than these two facts, both made true in his soul? And should it not be the very same thing with us now? Is it not

important to see that the sense of our failure, as well as of what we are, is never meant to interfere with the brightness of our confidence in the Lord? Conscience must be exercised unhinderedly; and so must faith also, Grace provides for both in the believer's heart. It is excellent thus to look onward, the eye filled with the glory of the Lord Jesus, and the heart resting on His grace. But there should also be the unsparing judgment of ourselves in the light, and consequently due and suited confession. Where this is, there will be the lowliness that becomes men who have no standing-place but in grace. God forbid that this should be wanting in any Christian. It is hard to preserve the balance of truth; but at least it is well to desire it. Let us beware of having the appearance of one-sidedness. To be cast down with the constant sense of shame because of what we are, to hang our heads as bulrushes, is a poor testimony to the love of Christ, and to the victory God gives us through Him. But it is a worse state where the recognition of His grace is misused to enfeeble conscience and destroy sensibility as to sin, above all as to our own sins.

It is well that we should know that the path of faith is far removed from either of these two things. For we are entitled to enjoy the brightness of what Christ is and has done for us; but there is also the unfailing and never-to-be-forgotten sense of what it cost Him so to suffer for us.

David then anticipated the two things as perhaps no Old Testament saint as far as I am aware up to that day had ever done. It is evident too that, as he began with a very simple confidence in the Lord, so he went through a most heart-breaking process in his experience.

The kingdom is before him here. He sees clearly the judgment of the wicked. “The sons of Belial,” as he says, “shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: but the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.” This will never be till Jesus execute the judgment.

Then follow the names of his mighty men, and certainly there is one act among them that may well read a lesson of the gravest kind to us. I do not allude now to the brave men that broke through the army of the Philistines, and brought to David of the water of Bethlehem that he longed for. I speak of the grace which, when it was brought, refused to touch it, of the faith that could look on that water, much as he had longed for it, as the blood of those mighty men that had risked their lives. Oh for more of this self-renouncing power of faith!

On the great deeds of these heroic men we need not dwell now, save to make this simple remark: God looks for another kind of might now. It is not so much the worth of doing that He values as the lot of suffering, what one of our own poets has called in prose “the irresistible might of weakness.” We may well covet this in the name of the Lord Jesus — that power which is most of all shown in being nothing that Christ may be magnified, in accepting whatever of scorn, shame, loss or persecution, the Lord sees meet for us to bear, because we take our side unqualifiedly with Him and with His truth in a day when not merely the world, or man in general, but even Christendom is departed from Him. And there is no trial so great as this, because in it

we see those that the Lord loves taking part against His name with those that hate Him.

To appear even to blame the children of God ought to be a pain to us. To differ from, and by differing to condemn, in word or deed, those we esteem better than ourselves, must lead to searching of our own heart, but not to question the unerring word of God — rather to confirmation of faith; but not the less ought the testimony He gives us to be taken up and borne unflinchingly, only let us be sure that it is the will of the Lord. There is nothing that gives such firmness both to do and to suffer as the certainty of what the will of the Lord is. May we learn it! This was what these brave men felt and proved. This assurance nerved their arm with might; this by grace gave them victory. It was not their strength, nay, it was their faith, and there are no victories so precious in the eyes of God. But, beloved brethren, I believe that we have and that all the children of God have as bright an opportunity, yea a brighter still. For have not you now the path marked out for you in the world? Oh, may your faith win victory! But remember the only victories that God now registers as precious in His eyes are those won under the shadow and in the power of the cross of Christ — those that most take their stamp from His death. This is our one sign: with this let us conquer in faith. We shall reign with Christ by and by; let us be content to suffer with and for Him now: what can the world do if we suffer? To it an evident token of perdition, to us of salvation.

2 Samuel 24 brings before us one scene more, with which the book closes. “And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against.them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. For

the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people." Oh, what a forgetfulness of the Lord! He was everything to David, and everything to Israel, yet David was now repeating the sin of Saul in principle. The people would have a king, when God was their king; and the king thinks of the people only as his own. The people forgot their highest portion was God, and wanted to be like the nations; and the king whom God gave now sought a people just like a Gentile. It was the worst unfaithfulness in David, now evidently a snare to the king. It was judged in Israel; how much more judged in David! Even Joab was alarmed and shocked. He felt that it was not only a crime, but (what he cared for far more) a blunder. Joab would not have stuck much at a sin if it had seemed useful politically; but Joab was too good a politician to be guilty of a blunder, and his quick eye soon perceived that the numbering of Israel was a fatal mistake; not that he cared to please Jehovah, but he would avoid His displeasure, and felt for the interests of the kingdom of David his uncle.

The king proceeds, spite of Joab's remonstrance; the number is taken, and God seems as if He saw it not and heard it not. Months and months passed on, and the king's will and word was still being carried out; but then comes the heavy sentence from God, and David has to choose which of three strokes of His anger he will have. David, guilty as he was, chose like a man of faith; for the believer shows his faith even after he had been so faulty. David under any circumstances prefers God's hand, though it were stretched out against him, to man's hand.

But God's hand did not slacken. For very love, for His own name's sake, God could not, would not, spare; and the plague swept over the land and people as a terrible scourge. But in the midst of judgment mercy rejoiced against it, and that very Jerusalem from which the guilty order went forth was the place where the hand of judgment was stayed; and if grace thus would prove itself mightier than judgment — and it always will — grace would prove itself in every way, for it was to David that God listened. The guilty one that had brought the plague on Israel pleads and is heard. It was at the threshing-floor of a poor stranger — of a Gentile — that the uplifted hand of the angel was stayed. This purchased possession of the king God would make the site of His house, the blessed connecting link between heaven and earth, between God and man, in days yet to dawn on a world still groaning, but to be surely blessed under the Lord Jesus.

To dwell further on the book is scarcely my task now. I leave the blessed subject with yourselves. God alone can give you a taste of the sweetness and of the power of His own truth through our Lord Jesus.