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**Table of Contents**

**No table of contents entries found.**

Preface

**An Exposition, With Practical Observations, of The First Book of 2Samuel**

This book is the history of the reign of king David. We had in the foregoing book an account of his designation to the government, and his struggles with Saul, which ended at length in the death of his persecutor. This book begins with his accession to the throne, and is entirely taken up with the affairs of the government during the forty years he reigned, and therefore is entitled by the Septuagint. *The Third Book of the Kings*. It gives us an account of David's triumphs and his troubles. I. His triumphs over the house of Saul (ch. 1-4), over the Jebusites and Philistines (ch. 5), at the bringing up of the ark (ch. 6 and 7), over the neighbouring nations that opposed him (ch. 8-10); and so far the history is agreeable to what we might expect from David's character and the choice made of him. But his cloud has a dark side. II. We have his troubles, the causes of them, his sin in the matter of Uriah (ch. 11 and 12), the troubles themselves from the sin of Amnon (ch. 13), the rebellion of Absalom (ch. 14-19) and of Sheba (ch. 20), and the plague in Israel for his numbering the people (ch. 24), besides the famine of the Gibeonites (ch. 21). His son we have (ch. 22), and his words and worthies (ch. 23). Many things in his history are very instructive; but for the hero who is the subject of it, though in many instances he appears here very great, and very good, and very much the favourite of heaven, yet it must be confessed that his honour shines brighter in his Psalms than in his Annals.

## Chapter 1

In the close of the foregoing book (with which this is connected as a continuation of the same history) we had Saul's exit; he went down slain to the pit, though he was the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. We are now to look towards the rising sun, and to enquire where David is, and what he is doing. In this chapter we have, I. Tidings brought him to Ziklag of the death of Saul and Jonathan, by an Amalekite, who undertook to give him a particular narrative of it (v. 1–10). II. David's sorrowful reception of these tidings, (v. 11, 12). III. Justice done upon the messenger, who boasted that he had helped Saul to dispatch himself (v. 13–16). IV. An elegy which David penned upon this occasion (v. 17–27). And in all this David's breast appears very happily free from the sparks both of revenge and ambition, and he observes a very suitable demeanour.

### Verses 1-10

Here is, I. David settling again in Ziklag, his own city, after he had rescued his family and friends out of the hands of the Amalekites (v. 1): He *abode in Ziklag*. Thence he was now sending presents to his friends (1 Sa. 30:26), and there he was ready to receive those that came into his interests; not men in distress and debt, as his first followers were, but persons of quality in their country, *mighty men, men of war, and captains of thousands* (as we find, 1 Chr. 12:1, 8, 20); such came day by day to him, God stirring up their hearts to do so, till he had a *great host, like the host of God*, as it is said, 1 Chr. 12:22. The secret springs of revolutions are unaccountable, and must be resolved into that Providence which turns all hearts as the rivers of water.

II. Intelligence brought him thither of the death of Saul. It was strange that he did not leave some spies about the camp, to bring him early notice of the issue of the engagement, a sign that he desired not Saul's woeful day, nor was impatient to come to the throne, but willing to wait till those tidings were brought to him which many a one would have sent more than half-way to meet. He that believes does not make haste, takes good news when it comes and is not uneasy while it is in the coming. 1. The messenger presents himself to David as an express, in the posture of a mourner for the deceased prince and a subject to the succeeding one. He came with his clothes rent, and made obeisance to David (v. 2), pleasing himself with the fancy that he had the honour to be the first that did him homage as his sovereign, but it proved he was the first that received from him sentence of death as his judge. He told David he came from the camp of Israel, and intimated the bad posture it was in when he said he had escaped out of it, having much ado to get away with his life, v. 3. 2. He gives him a general account of the issue of the battle. David was very desirous to know how the matter went, as one that had more reason than any to be concerned for the public; and he told him very distinctly that the army of Israel was routed, many slain, and, among the rest, Saul and Jonathan, v. 4. He named only Saul and Jonathan, because he knew David would be most solicitous to know their fate; for Saul was the man whom he most feared and Jonathan the man whom he most loved. 3. He gives him a more particular account of the death of Saul. It is probable that David had heard, by the report of others, what the issue of the war was, for multitudes resorted to him, it should seem, in consequence; but he was desirous to know the certainty of the report concerning Saul and Jonathan, either because he was not forward to believe it or because he would not proceed upon it to make his own claims till he was

fully assured of it. He therefore asks, *How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan are dead?* in answer to which the young man tells him a very ready story, putting it past doubt that Saul was dead, for he himself had been not only an eye-witness of his death, but an instrument of it, and therefore David might rely upon his testimony. He says nothing, in his narrative, of the death of Jonathan, knowing how ungrateful that would be to David, but accounts only for Saul, thinking (as David understood it well enough, ch. 4:10) that he should be welcome for that, and rewarded as one that brought good tidings. The account he gives of this matter is, (1.) Very particular. That he happened to go to the place where Saul was (v. 6) as a passenger, not as a soldier, and therefore an indifferent person, that he found Saul endeavouring to run himself through with his own spear, none of his attendants being willing to do it for him; and, it seems, he could not do it dexterously for himself: his hand and heart failed him. The miserable man had not courage enough either to live or die; he therefore called this stranger to him (v. 7), enquired what countryman he was, for, provided he was not a Philistine, he would gladly receive from his hand the *coup de grace* (as the French call it concerning those that are broken on the wheel)—*the merciful stroke*, that might dispatch him out of his pain. Understanding that he was an Amalekite (neither one of his subjects nor one of his enemies), he begs this favour from him (v. 9): *Stand upon me, and slay me*. He is now sick of his dignity and willing to be trampled upon, sick of his life and willing to be slain. Who then would be inordinately fond of life or honour? The case may be such, even with those that have no hope in their death, that yet they may *desire to die, and death flee from them*, Rev. 9:6. *Anguish has come upon me*; so we read it, as a complaint of the pain and terror his spirit was seized with. If his conscience now brought to mind the javelin he had cast at David, his pride, malice, and perfidiousness, and especially the murder of the priests, no marvel that anguish came upon him: moles (they say) open their eyes when they are dying. Sense of unpardoned guilt will make death indeed the king of terrors. Those that have baffled their convictions will perhaps, in their dying moments, be overpowered by them. The margin reads it as a complaint of the inconvenience of his clothes; that his coat of mail which he had for defence, or his embroidered coat which he had for ornament, hindered him, that he could not get the spear far enough into his body, or so straitened him, now that his body swelled with anguish, that he could not expire. Let no man's clothes be his pride, for it may so happen that they may be his burden and snare. "Hereupon," saith our young man, *"I stood upon him, and slew him"* (v. 10) at which word, perhaps, he observed David look upon him with some show of displeasure, and therefore he excuses himself in the next words: *"For I was sure he could not live"*; his life was whole in him indeed, but he would certainly have fallen into the hands of the Philistines or given himself another thrust." (2.) It is doubtful whether this story be true. If it be, the righteousness of God is to be observed, that Saul, who spared the Amalekites in contempt of the divine command, received his death's wound from an Amalekite. But most interpreters think that it was false, and that, though he might happen to be present, yet he was not assisting in the death of Saul, but told David so in expectation that he would reward him for it, as having done him a piece of good service. Those who would rejoice at the fall of an enemy are apt to measure others by themselves, and to think that they will do so too. But a man after God's own heart is not to be judged of by common men. I am not clear whether this young man's story was true or no: it may consist with the narrative in the chapter before, and be an addition to it, as Peter's account of the death of Judas (Acts 1:18) is to the narrative, Mt. 27:5. What is there called *a sword* may here be called *a spear*, or when he

fell upon his sword he leaned on his spear. (3.) However he produced that which was proof sufficient of the death of Saul, the crown that was upon his head and the bracelet that was on his arm. It should seem Saul was so foolishly fond of these as to wear them in the field of battle, which made him a fair mark for the archers, by distinguishing him from those about him; but as *pride* (we say) *feels no cold*, so it fears no danger, from that which gratifies it. These fell into the hands of this Amalekite. Saul spared the best of their spoil, and now the best of his came to one of that devoted nation. He brought them to David, as the rightful owner of them now that Saul was dead, not doubting but by his officiousness herein to recommend himself to the best preferments in his court or camp. The tradition of the Jews is that this Amalekite was the son of Doeg (for the Amalekites were descendants from Edom), and that Doeg, who they suppose was Saul's armour-bearer, before he slew himself gave Saul's crown and bracelet (the ensigns of his royalty) to his son, and bade him carry them to David, to curry favour with him. But this is a groundless conceit. Doeg's son, it is likely, was so well known to Saul that he needed not ask him as he did this Amalekite (v. 8), *Who art thou?* David had been long waiting for the crown, and now it was brought to him by an Amalekite. See how God can serve his own purposes of kindness to his people, even by designing (ill-designing) men, who aim at nothing but to set up themselves.

#### **Verses 11-16**

Here is, I. David's reception of these tidings. So far was he from falling into a transport of joy, as the Amalekite expected, that he fell into a passion of weeping, *rent his clothes* (v. 11), *mourned and fasted* (v. 12), not only for his people Israel and Jonathan his friend but for Saul his enemy. This he did, not only as a man of honour, in observance of that decorum which forbids us to insult over those that are fallen, and requires us to attend our relations to the grave with respect, whatever we lost by their life or got by their death, but as a good man and a man of conscience, that had forgiven the injuries Saul had done him and bore him no malice. He knew it, before his son wrote it (Prov. 24:17, 18), that if we *rejoice when our enemy falls the Lord sees it, and it displeases him*; and that *he who is glad at calamities shall not go unpunished*, Prov. 17:5. By this it appears that those passages in David's psalms which express his desire of, and triumph in, the ruin of his enemies, proceeded not from a spirit of revenge, nor any irregular passion, but from a holy zeal for the glory of God and the public good; for by what he did here, when he heard of Saul's death, we may perceive that his natural temper was very tender, and that he was kindly affected even to those that hated him. He was very sincere, no question, in his mourning for Saul, and it was not pretended, or a copy of his countenance only. His passion was so strong, on this occasion, that it moved those about him; *all that were with him*, at least in complaisance to him, *rent their clothes*, and they *fasted till even*, in token of their sorrow; and probably it was a religious fast: they humbled themselves under the hand of God, and prayed for the repairing of the breaches made upon Israel by this defeat.

II. The reward he gave to him that brought him the tidings. Instead of preferring him, he put him to death, judged him out of his own mouth, as a murderer of his prince, and ordered him to be forthwith executed for the same. What a surprise was this to the messenger, who thought he should have favour shown him for his pains. In vain did he plead that he had Saul's order for it, that it was a real kindness to him, that he must inevitably have died; all those pleas are overruled: *"Thy mouth has testified*

*against thee, saying, I have slain the Lord's anointed* (v. 16), therefore thou must die." Now,

1. David herein did not do unjustly. For, (1.) The man was an Amalekite. This, lest he should have mistaken it in his narrative, he made him own a second time, v. 13. That nation, and all that belonged to it, were doomed to destruction, so that, in slaying him, David did what his predecessor should have done and was rejected for not doing. (2.) He did himself confess the crime, so that the evidence was, by the consent of all laws, sufficient to convict him; for every man is presumed to make the best of himself. If he did as he said, he deserved to die for treason (v. 14), doing that which, it is probable, he heard Saul's own armour-bearer refuse to do; if not, yet by boasting that he had done it he plainly showed that if there had been occasion he would have done it, and would have made nothing of it; and, by boasting of it to David, he showed what opinion he had of him, that he would rejoice in it, as one altogether like himself, which was an intolerable affront to him who had himself once and again refused to *stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed*. And his lying to David, if indeed it was a lie, was highly criminal, and proved, as sooner or later that sin will prove, lying against his own head.

2. He did honourably and well. Hereby he demonstrated the sincerity of his grief, discouraged all others from thinking by doing the like to ingratiate themselves with him, and did that which might probably oblige the house of Saul and win upon them, and recommend him to the people as one that was zealous for public justice, without regard to his own private interest. We may learn from it that to give assistance to any in murdering themselves, directly or indirectly, if done wittingly, incurs the guilt of blood, and that the lives of princes ought to be, in a special manner, precious to us.

#### **Verses 17-27**

When David had rent his clothes, mourned, and wept, and fasted, for the death of Saul, and done justice upon him who made himself guilty of it, one would think he had made full payment of the debt of honour he owed to his memory; yet this is not all: we have here a poem he wrote on that occasion; for he was a great master of his pen as well as of his sword. By this elegy he designed both to express his own sorrow for this great calamity and to impress the like on the minds of others, who ought to lay it to heart. The putting of lamentations into poems made them, 1. The more moving and affecting. The passion of the poet, or singer, is, by this way, wonderfully communicated to the readers and hearers. 2. The more lasting. Thus they were made, not only to spread far, but to continue long, from generation to generation. Those might gain information by poems that would not read history. Here we have,

I. The orders David gave with this elegy (v. 18): *He bade them teach the children of Judah* (his own tribe, whatever others did) *the use of the bow*, either. 1. The bow used in war. Not but that the children of Judah knew how to use the bow (it was so commonly used in war, long before this, that the sword and bow were put for all weapons of war, Gen. 48:22), but perhaps they had of late made more use of slings, as David in killing Goliath, because cheaper, and David would have them now to see the inconvenience of these (for it was the archers of the Philistines that bore so hard upon Saul, 1 Sa. 21:3), and to return more generally to the use of the bow, to exercise themselves in this weapon, that they might be in a capacity to avenge the death of their prince upon the Philistines, and to outdo them at their own weapon. It was a pity but those that had such good heads and hearts as the children of Judah should be well armed. David hereby showed his authority over and concern for the armies of

Israel, and set himself to rectify the errors of the former reign. But we find that the companies which had now come to David to Ziklag were armed with bows (1 Chr. 12:2); therefore, 2. Some understand it either of some musical instrument called *a bow* (to which he would have the mournful ditties sung) or of the elegy itself: *He bade them teach the children of Judah Kesheth, the bow*, that is, this song, which was so entitled for the sake of Jonathan's bow, the achievements of which are here celebrated. Moses commanded Israel to learn his song (Deu. 31:19), so David his. Probably he bade the Levites teach them. It is *written in the book of Jasher*, there it was kept upon record, and thence transcribed into this history. That book was probably a collection of state-poems; what is said to be written in that book (Jos. 10:13) is also poetical, a fragment of an historical poem. Even songs would be forgotten and lost if they were not committed to writing, that best conservatory of knowledge.

II. The elegy itself. It is not a divine hymn, nor given by inspiration of God to be used in divine service, nor is there any mention of God in it; but it is a human composition, and therefore was inserted, not in the book of Psalms (which, being of divine original, is preserved), but in the book of Jasher, which, being only a collection of common poems, is long since lost.

This elegy proves David to have been,

1. A man of an excellent spirit, in four things:—

(1.) He was very generous to Saul, his sworn enemy. Saul was his father-in-law, his sovereign, and the anointed of the Lord; and therefore, though he had done him a great deal of wrong, David does not wreak his revenge upon his memory when he is in his grave; but like a good man, and a man of honour, [1.] He conceals his faults; and, though there was no preventing their appearance in his history, yet they should not appear in this elegy. Charity teaches us to make the best we can of every body and to say nothing of those of whom we can say no good, especially when they are gone. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum—Say nothing but good concerning the dead.* We ought to deny ourselves the satisfaction of making personal reflections upon those who have been injurious to us, much more drawing their character thence, as if every man must of necessity be a bad man that has done ill by us. Let the corrupt part of the memory be buried with the corrupt part of the man—earth to earth, ashes to ashes; let the blemish be hidden and a veil drawn over the deformity. [2.] He celebrates that which was praiseworthy in him. He does not commend him for that which he was not, says nothing of his piety or fidelity. Those funeral commendations which are gathered out of the spoils of truth are not at all to the praise of those on whom they are bestowed, but very much the dispraise of those who unjustly misplace them. But he has this to say in honour of Saul himself, *First*, That he was *anointed with oil* (v. 21), the sacred oil, which signified his elevation to, and qualification for, the government. Whatever he was otherwise, the *crown of the anointing oil of his God was upon him*, as is said of the high priest (Lev. 21:12), and on that account he was to be honoured, because God, the fountain of honour, had honoured him. *Secondly*, That he was a man of war, a *mighty man* (v. 19–21), that he had often been victorious over the enemies of Israel and *vexed them whithersoever he turned*, 1 Sa. 14:47. His *sword returned not empty*, but satiated with blood and spoil, v. 22. His disgrace and fall at last must not make his former successes and services to be forgotten. Though his sun set under a cloud, time was when it shone brightly. *Thirdly*, That take him with Jonathan he was a man of a very agreeable temper, that recommended himself to the affections of his subjects (v. 23): *Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant*. Jonathan was always so, and Saul was so as long as he concurred

with him. Take them together, and in the pursuit of the enemy, never were men more bold, more brave; they were *swifter than eagles and stronger than lions*. Observe, Those that were most fierce and fiery in the camp were no less sweet and lovely in the court, as amiable to the subject as they were formidable to the foe; a rare combination of softness and sharpness they had, which makes any man's temper very happy. It may be understood of the harmony and affection that for the most part subsisted between Saul and Jonathan: they were lovely and pleasant one to another, Jonathan a dutiful son, Saul an affectionate father; and therefore dear to each other in their lives, and *in their death they were not divided*, but kept close together in the stand they made against the Philistines, and fell together in the same cause. *Fourthly*, That he had enriched his country with the spoils of conquered nations, and introduced a more splendid attire. When they had a king like the nations, they must have clothes like the nations; and herein he was, in a particular manner, obliging to his female subjects, v. 24. The *daughters of Israel* he clothed *in scarlet*, which was their delight.

(2.) He was very grateful to Jonathan, his sworn friend. Besides the tears he shed over him, and the encomiums he gives of him in common with Saul, he mentions him with some marks of distinction (v. 25): *O Jonathan! thou wast slain in thy high places!* which (compared with v. 19) intimates that he meant him by *the beauty of Israel*, which, he there says, was slain upon the high places. He laments Jonathan as his particular friend (v. 26): *My brother, Jonathan;* not so much because of what he would have been to him if he had lived, very serviceable no doubt in his advancement to the throne and instrumental to prevent those long struggles which, for want of his assistance, he had with the house of Saul (had this been the only ground of his grief it would have been selfish), but he lamented him for what he had been: *"Very pleasant hast thou been unto me; but that pleasantness is now over, and I am distressed for thee."* He had reason to say that Jonathan's love to him was wonderful; surely never was the like, for a man to love one who he knew was to take the crown over his head, and to be so faithful to his rival: this far surpassed the highest degree of conjugal affection and constancy. See here, [1.] That nothing is more delightful in this world than a true friend, that is wise and good, that kindly receives and returns our affection, and is faithful to us in all our true interests. [2.] That nothing is more distressful than the loss of such a friend; it is parting with a piece of one's self. It is the vanity of this world that what is most pleasant to us we are most liable to be distressed in. The more we love the more we grieve.

(3.) He was deeply concerned for the honour of God; for this is what he has an eye to when he fears lest *the daughters of the uncircumcised*, that are out of covenant with God, should triumph over Israel, and the God of Israel, v. 20. Good men are touched in a very sensible part by the reproaches of those that reproach God.

(4.) He was deeply concerned for the public welfare. It was the beauty of Israel that was slain (v. 19) and the honour of the public that was disgraced: *The mighty have fallen* (this is three times lamented, v. 19, 25, 27), and so the strength of the people is weakened. Public losses are most laid to heart by men of public spirit. David hoped God would make him instrumental to repair those losses and yet laments them.

2. A man of a fine imagination, as well as a wise and holy man. The expressions are all excellent, and calculated to work upon the passions. (1.) The embargo he would fain lay upon Fame is elegant (v. 20): *Tell it not in Gath*. It grieved him to the heart to

think that it would be proclaimed in the cities of the Philistines, and that they would insult over Israel upon it, and the more in remembrance of the triumphs of Israel over them formerly, when they sang, *Saul has slain his thousands*; for this would now be retorted. (2.) The curse he entails on the mountains of Gilboa, the theatre on which this tragedy was acted: *Let there be no dew upon you, nor fields of offerings*, v. 21. This is a poetical strain, like that of Job, *Let the day perish wherein I was born*. Not as if David wished that any part of the land of Israel might be barren, but, to express his sorrow for the thing, he speaks with a seeming indignation at the place. Observe, [1.] How the fruitfulness of the earth depends upon heaven. The worst thing he could wish to the mountains of Gilboa was barrenness and unprofitableness to man: those are miserable that are useless. It was the curse Christ pronounced on the fig-tree, *Never fruit grow on thee more*, and that took effect—the fig-tree withered away: this, on the mountains of Gilboa, did not. But, when he wished them barren, he wished there might be no rain upon them; and, if the heavens be brass, the earth will soon be iron. [2.] How the fruitfulness of the earth must therefore be devoted to heaven, which is intimated in his calling the fruitful fields *fields of offerings*. Those fruits of their land that were offered to God were the crown and glory of it: and therefore the failure of the offerings is the saddest consequent of the failure of the corn. See Joel 1:9. To want that wherewith we should honour God is worse than to want that wherewith we should sustain ourselves. This is the reproach David fastens upon the mountains of Gilboa, which, having been stained with royal blood, thereby forfeited celestial dews. In this elegy Saul had a more honourable interment than that which the men of Jabesh-Gilead gave him.

## Chapter 2

David had paid due respect to the memory of Saul his prince and Jonathan his friend, and what he did was as much his praise as theirs; he is now considering what is to be done next. Saul is dead, now therefore David arise. I. By direction from God he went up to Hebron, and was there anointed king (v. 1-4). II. He returned thanks to the men of Jabesh-Gilead for burying Saul (v. 5-7). III. Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, is set up in opposition to him (v. 8-11). IV. A warm encounter happens between David's party and Ishbosheth's, in which, 1. Twelve of each side engaged hand to hand and were all slain (v. 12-16). 2. Saul's party was beaten (v. 17). 3. Asahel, on David's side, was slain by Abner (v. 18-23). 4. Joab, at Abner's request, sounds a retreat, (v. 24-28). 5. Abner makes the best of his way (v. 29), and the loss on both sides is computed (v. 30-32). So that here we have an account of a civil war in Israel, which, in process of time, ended in the complete settlement of David on the throne.

### Verses 1-7

When Saul and Jonathan were dead, though David knew himself anointed to be king, and now saw his way very clear, yet he did not immediately send messengers through all the coasts of Israel to summon all people to come in and swear allegiance to him, upon pain of death, but proceeded leisurely; for he that believeth doth not make haste, but waits God's time for the accomplishment of God's promises. Many had come in to his assistance from several tribes while he continued at Ziklag, as we find (1 Chr. 12:1-22), and with such a force he might have come in by conquest. But he that will rule with meekness will not rise with violence. Observe here,

I. The direction he sought and had from God in this critical juncture, v. 1. He doubted not of success, yet he used proper means, both divine and human. Assurance of hope in God's promise will be so far from slackening that it will quicken pious endeavours. If I be elected to the crown of life, it does not follow, Then I will do nothing; but, Then I will do all that he directs me, and follow the guidance of him who chose me. This good use David made of his election, and so will all whom God has chosen. 1. David, according to the precept, *acknowledged God in his way*. He enquired of the Lord by the breast-plate of judgment, which Abiathar brought to him. We must apply to God not only when we are in distress, but even when the world smiles upon us and second causes work in favour of us. His enquiry was, *Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?* Shall I stir hence? Though Ziklag be in ruins, he will not quit it without direction from God. "If I stir hence, *Shall I go to one of the cities of Judah?*" not limiting God to them (if God should so direct him, he would go to any of the cities of Israel), but thus expressing his prudence (in the cities of Judah he would find most friends), and his modesty—he would look no further at present than his own tribe. In all our motions and removals it is comfortable to see God going before us; and we may, if by faith and prayer we set him before us. 2. God, according to the promise, directed his path, bade him go up, told him whither, unto Hebron, a priest's city, one of the cities of refuge, so it was to David, and an intimation that God himself would be to him a little sanctuary. The sepulchres of the patriarchs, adjoining to Hebron, would remind him of the ancient promise, on which God had caused him to hope. God sent him not to Bethlehem, his own city, because that was *little among the thousands of Judah* (Mic. 5:2), but to Hebron, a more considerable place, and which perhaps was then as the county-town of that tribe.

II. The care he took of his family and friends in his removal to Hebron. 1. He took his wives with him (v. 2), that, as they had been companions with him in tribulation, they might be so in the kingdom. It does not appear that as yet he had any children; his first was born in Hebron, ch. 3:2. 2. He took his friends and followers with him, v. 3. They had accompanied him in his wanderings, and therefore, when he gained a settlement, they settled with him. Thus, if we *suffer with Christ, we shall reign with him*, 2 Tim. 2:12. Nay, Christ does more for his good soldiers than David could do for his; David found lodging for them—*They dwelt in the cities of Hebron, and adjacent towns*; but to those who *continue with Christ in his temptations he appoints a kingdom, and will feast them at his own table*, Lu. 22:29, 30.

III. The honour done him by the men of Judah: They *anointed him king over the house of Judah*, v. 4. The tribe of Judah had often stood by itself more than any other of the tribes. In Saul's time it was numbered by itself as a distinct body (1 Sa. 15:4) and those of this tribe had been accustomed to act separately. They did so now; yet they did it for themselves only; they did not pretend to anoint him king *over all Israel* (as Jdg. 9:22), but only *over the house of Judah*. The rest of the tribes might do as they pleased, but, as for them and their house, they would be ruled by him whom God had chosen. See how David rose gradually; he was first anointed king *in reversion*, then *in possession* of one tribe only, and at last of all the tribes. Thus the kingdom of the Messiah, the Son of David, is set up by degrees; he is Lord of all by divine designation, but *we see not yet all things put under him*, Heb. 2:8. David's reigning at first over the house of Judah only was a tacit intimation of Providence that his kingdom would in a short time be reduced to that again, as it was when the ten tribes revolted from his grandson; and it would be an encouragement to the godly kings of Judah that David himself at first reigned over Judah only.

IV. The respectful message he sent to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, to return them thanks for their kindness to Saul. Still he studies to honour the memory of his predecessor, and thereby to show that he was far from aiming at the crown from any principle of ambition or enmity to Saul, but purely because he was called of God to it. It was told him that the men of Jabesh-Gilead buried Saul, perhaps by some that thought he would be displeased at them as over-officious. But he was far from that.

1. He commends them for it, v. 5. According as our obligations were to love and honour any while they lived, we ought to show respect to their remains (that is, their bodies, names, and families) when they are dead. "Saul was your lord," says David, "and therefore you did well to show him this kindness and do him this honour." 2. He prays to God to bless them for it, and to recompense it to them: *Blessed are you, and blessed may you be of the Lord, who will deal kindly with those in a particular manner that dealt kindly with the dead*, as it is in Ruth 1:8. Due respect and affection shown to the bodies, names, and families of those that are dead, in conscience towards God, is a piece of charity which shall in no wise lose its reward: *The Lord show kindness and truth to you* (v. 6), that is, kindness according to the promise. What kindness God shows is in truth, what one may trust to. 3. He promises to make them amends for it: *I also will requite you*. He does not turn them over to God for a recompence that he may excuse himself from rewarding them. Good wishes are good things, and instances of gratitude, but they are too cheap to be rested in where there is an ability to do more. 4. He prudently takes this opportunity to gain them to his interest, v. 7. They had paid their last respects to Saul, and he would have them to be the last: *"The house of Judah have anointed me king, and it will be your wisdom to concur with them and in that to be valiant."* We must not so dote on the dead,

how much soever we have valued them, as to neglect or despise the blessings we have in those that survive, whom God has raised up to us in their stead.

### **Verses 8-17**

Here is, I. A rivalryship between two kings—David, whom God made king, and Ishbosheth, whom Abner made king. One would have thought, when Saul was slain, and all his sons that had sense and spirit enough to take the field with him, David would come to the throne without any opposition, since all Israel knew, not only how he had signalized himself, but how manifestly God had designated him to it; but such a spirit of contradiction is there, in the devices of men, to the counsels of God, that such a weak and silly thing as Ishbosheth, who was not thought fit to go with his father to the battle, shall yet be thought fit to succeed him in the government, rather than David shall come peaceably to it. Herein David's kingdom was typical of the Messiah's, against which *the heathens rage* and the *rulers take counsel*, Ps. 2:1, 2. 1. Abner was the person who set up Ishbosheth in competition with David, perhaps in his zeal for the lineal succession (since they must have a king like the nations, in *this* they must be like them, that the crown must descend from father to son), or rather in his affection to his own family and relations (for he was Saul's uncle), and because he had no other way to secure to himself the post of honour he was in, as captain of the host. See how much mischief the pride and ambition of one man may be the occasion of. Ishbosheth would never have set up himself if Abner had not set him up, and made a tool of him to serve his own purposes. 2. Mahanaim, the place where he first made his claim, was on the other side Jordan, where it was thought David had the least interest, and being at a distance from his forces they might have time to strengthen themselves. But having set up his standard there, the unthinking people of all the tribes of Israel (that is, the generality of them) submitted to him (v. 9), and Judah only was entirely for David. This was a further trial of the faith of David in the promise of God, and of his patience, whether he could wait God's time for the performance of that promise. 3. Some difficulty there is about the time of the continuance of this competition. David reigned about seven years over Judah only (v. 11), and yet (v. 10) Ishbosheth reigned over Israel but two years: before those two years, or after, or both, it was in general for the house of Saul (ch. 3:6), and not any particular person of that house, that Abner declared. Or these two years he reigned before the war broke out (v. 12), which continued long, even the remaining five years, ch. 3:1.

#### II. An encounter between their two armies.

1. It does not appear that either side brought their whole force into the field, for the slaughter was but small, v. 30, 31. We may wonder, (1.) That the men of Judah did not appear and act more vigorously for David, to reduce all the nation into obedience to him; but, it is likely, David would not suffer them to act offensively, choosing rather to wait till the thing would do itself or rather till God would do it for him, without the effusion of Israelitish blood; for to him, as a type of Christ, that was very precious, Ps. 72:14. Even those that were his adversaries he looked upon as his subjects, and would treat them accordingly. (2.) That the men of Israel could in a manner stand neuter, and sit down tamely under Ishbosheth, for so many years, especially considering what characters many of the tribes displayed at this time (as we find, 1 Chr. 12:23, etc.): *Wise men, mighty men, men of valour, expert in war*, and not of double heart, and yet for seven years together, for aught that appears, most of them

seemed indifferent in whose hand the public administration was. Divine Providence serves its own purposes by the stupidity of men at some times and the activity of the same persons at other times; they are unlike themselves, and yet the motions of Providence are uniform.

2. In this battle Abner was the aggressor. David sat still to see how the matter would fall, but the house of Saul, and Abner at the head of it, gave the challenge, and they went by the worst. Therefore *go not forth hastily to strive*, nor be forward to begin quarrels, *lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof*, Prov. 25:8. A fool's lips and hands enter into contention.

3. The seat of the war was Gibeon. Abner chose it because it was in the lot of Benjamin, where Saul had the most friends; yet, since he offered battle, Joab, David's general, would not decline it, but there joined issue with him, and met him *by the pool of Gibeon*, v. 13. David's cause, being built upon God's promise, feared not the disadvantages of the ground. The pool between them gave both sides time to deliberate.

4. The engagement was at first proposed by Abner, and accepted by Joab, to be between twelve and twelve of a side. (1.) It should seem this trial of skill began in sport. Abner made the motion (v. 14): *Let the young men arise and play before us*, as gladiators. Perhaps Saul had used his men to these barbarous pastimes, like a tyrant indeed, and Abner had learnt of him to make a jest of wounds and death and divert himself with the scenes of blood and horror. He meant, "Let them *fight* before us," when he said, "Let them *play* before us." *Fools thus make a mock at sin*. but he is unworthy the name of a man that can be thus prodigal of human blood, that can thus *throw about firebrands, arrows, and death*, and say, *Am not I in sport?* Prov. 26:18, 19. Joab, having been bred up under David, had so much wisdom as not to make such a proposal, yet had not resolution enough to resist and gainsay it when another made it; for he stood upon a point of honour, and thought it a blemish to his reputation to refuse a challenge, and therefore said, *Let them arise*; not that he was fond of the sport, or expected that the duels would be decisive, but he would not be hector'd by his antagonist. How many precious lives have thus been sacrificed to the caprices of proud men! Twelve of each side were accordingly called out as champions to enter the lists, a double jury of life and death, not of others', but their own; and the champions on Abner's side seem to have been most forward, for they took the field first (v. 15), having perhaps been bred up in a foolish ambition thus to serve the humour of their commander-in-chief. But, (2.) However it began, it ended in blood (v. 16): They thrust *every man his sword into his fellow's side* (spurred on by honour, not by enmity); so they *fell down together*, that is, all the twenty-four were slain, such an equal match were they for one another, and so resolute, that neither side would either beg or give quarter; they did as it were by agreement (says *Josephus*) dispatch one another with mutual wounds. Those that strike at other men's lives often throw away their own and death only conquers and rides in triumph. The wonderful obstinacy of both sides was remembered in the name given to the place: *Heldath-hazzurim—the field of rocky men*, men that were not only strong in body, but of firm and unshaken constancy, that stirred not at the sight of death. Yet *the stout-hearted were spoiled, and slept their sleep*, Ps. 76:5. Poor honour for men to purchase at so vast an expense! Those that lose their lives for Christ shall find them.

5. The whole army at length engaged, and Abner's forces were routed, v. 17. The former was a drawn battle, in which all were killed on both sides, and therefore they must put it upon another trial, in which (as it often happens) those that gave the

challenge went away with loss. David had God on his side; his side therefore was victorious.

### Verses 18-24

We have here the contest between Abner and Asahel. Asahel, the brother of Joab and cousin-german to David, was one of the principal commanders of David's forces, and was famous for swiftness in running: he was *as light of foot as a wild roe* (v. 18); this he got the name of by swift pursuing, not swift flying. Yet, we may suppose, he was not comparable to Abner as a skilful experienced soldier; we must therefore observe,

I. How rash he was in aiming to make Abner his prisoner. He pursued after him, and no other, v. 19. Proud of his relation to David and Joab, his own swiftness, and the success of his party, no less a trophy of victory would now serve the young warrior than Abner himself, either slain or bound, which he thought would put an end to the war and effectually open David's way to the throne. This made him very eager in the pursuit, and careless of the opportunities he had of seizing others in his way, on his right hand and on his left; his eye was on Abner only. The design was brave, had he been *par negotio—equal to its accomplishment*: but let not the swift man glory in his swiftness, any more than the strong man in his strength; *magnis excidit ausis—he perished in an attempt too vast for him*.

II. How generous Abner was in giving him notice of the danger he exposed himself to, and advising him not to *meddle to his own hurt*, 2 Chr. 25:19. 1. He bade him content himself with a less prey (v. 21): "*Lay hold of one of the young men, plunder him and make him thy prisoner, meddle with thy match, but pretend not to one who is so much superior to thee.*" It is wisdom in all contests to compare our own strength with that of our adversaries, and to take heed of being partial to ourselves in making the comparison, lest we prove in the issue *enemies to ourselves*, Lu. 14:31. 2. He begged of him not to put him upon the necessity of slaying him in his own defence, which he was very loth to do, but must do rather than be slain by him, v. 22. Abner, it seems, either loved Joab or feared him; for he was very loth to incur his displeasure, which he would certainly do if he slew Asahel. It is commendable for enemies to be thus respectful one to another. Abner's care how he should lift up his face to Joab gives cause to suspect that he really believed David would have the kingdom at last, according to the divine designation, and then, in opposing him, he acted against his conscience.

III. How fatal Asahel's rashness was to him. He refused to turn aside, thinking that Abner spoke so courteously because he feared him; but what came of it? Abner, as soon as he came up to him, gave him his death's wound with a back stroke (v. 23): *He smote him with the hinder end of his spear*, from which he feared no danger. This was a pass which Asahel was not acquainted with, nor had learned to stand upon his guard against; but Abner, perhaps, had formerly used it, and done execution with it; and here it did effectual execution. Asahel died immediately of the wound. See here, 1. How death often comes upon us by ways that we least suspect. Who would fear the hand of a flying enemy or the butt-end of a spear? yet from these Asahel receives his death's wound. 2. How we are often betrayed by the accomplishments we are proud of. Asahel's swiftness, which he presumed so much upon, did him no kindness, but forwarded his fate, and with it he ran upon his death, instead of running from it. Asahel's fall was not only Abner's security from him, but put a full stop to the conqueror's pursuit and gave Abner time to rally again; for all that came to the place stood still, only Joab and Abishai, instead of being disheartened, were exasperated

by it, pursued Abner with so much the more fury (v. 24), and overtook him at last about sunset, when the approaching night would oblige them to retire.

### **Verses 25-32**

Here, I. Abner, being conquered, meanly begs for a cessation of arms. He rallied the remains of his forces on the top of a hill (v. 25), as if he would have made head again, but becomes a humble supplicant to Joab for a little breathing-time, v. 26. He that was most forward to fight was the first that had enough of it. He that made a jest of bloodshed (*Let the young men arise and play before us*, v. 14) is now shocked at it, when he finds himself on the losing side, and the sword he made so light of drawing threatening to touch himself. Observe how his note is changed. Then it was but playing with the sword; now, *Shall the sword devour for ever?* It had devoured but one day, yet to him it seemed forever, because it went against him; and very willing he is now that the sun should not go down upon the wrath. Now he can appeal to Joab himself concerning the miserable consequences of a civil war: *Knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end?* It will be reflected upon with regret when the account comes to be made up; for, whoever gets in a civil war, the community is sure to lose. Perhaps he refers to the bitterness that there was in the tribes of Israel, in the end of their war with Benjamin, when they wept sorely for the desolations which they themselves had made, Jdg. 21:2. Now he begs of Joab to sound a retreat, and pleads that they were brethren, who ought not thus to bite and devour one another. He that in the morning would have Joab bid the people fall upon their brethren now would have him bid them lay down their arms. See here, 1. How easy it is for men to use reason when it makes for them who would not use it if it made against them. If Abner had been the conqueror, we should not have had him complaining of the voraciousness of the sword and the miseries of a civil war, nor pleading that both sides were brethren; but, finding himself beaten, all these reasonings are mustered up and improved for the securing of his retreat and the saving of his scattered troops from being cut off. 2. How the issue of things alters men's minds. The same thing which looked pleasant in the morning at night looked dismal. Those that are forward to enter into contention will perhaps repent it before they have done with it, and therefore had better leave it off before it be meddled with, as Solomon advises. It is true of every sin (O that men would consider it in time!) that it will be *bitterness in the latter end. At the last it bites like a serpent* those on whom it fawned.

II. Joab, though a conqueror, generously grants it, and sounds a retreat, knowing very well his master's mind and how averse he was to the shedding of blood. He does indeed justly upbraid Abner with his forwardness to engage, and lays the blame upon him that there had been so much bloodshed as there was (v. 27): *"Unless thou hadst spoken,"* that is, "hadst given orders to fight, hadst bidden the young men arise and play before us, none of us would have struck a stroke, nor drawn a sword against our brethren. Thou complainest that the sword devours, but who first unsheathed it? Who began? Now thou wouldst have the people parted, but remember who set them on to fight. We should have retired in the morning if thou hadst not given the challenge." Those that are forward to make mischief are commonly the first to complain of it. This might have served to excuse Joab if he had pushed on his victory, and made a full end of Abner's forces; but like one that pitied the mistake of his adversaries, and scorned to make an army of Israelites pay dearly for the folly of their commander, he very honourably, by sound of trumpet, put a stop to the pursuit (v. 28) and suffered Abner to make an orderly retreat. It is good husbandry to be

sparing of blood. As the soldiers were here very obsequious to the general's orders, so he, no doubt, observed the instructions of his prince, who sought the welfare of all Israel and therefore not the hurt of any.

III. The armies being separated, both retired to the places whence they came, and both marched in the night, Abner to Mahanaim, on the other side Jordan (v. 29), and Joab to Hebron, where David was, v. 32. The slain on both sides are computed. On David's side only nineteen men were missing, besides Asahel (v. 30), who was worth more than all; on Abner's side 360, v. 31. In civil wars formerly great slaughters had been made (as Jdg. 12:6, 20, 44), in comparison with which this was nothing. It is to be hoped that they had grown wiser and more moderate. Asahel's funeral is here mentioned; the rest they buried in the field of battle, but he was carried to Bethlehem, and buried in the sepulchre of his father, v. 32. Thus are distinctions made between the dust of some and that of others; but in the resurrection no other difference will be made but that between godly and ungodly, which will remain for ever.

## Chapter 3

The battle between Joab and Abner did not end the controversy between the two houses of Saul and David, but it is in this chapter working towards a period. Here is, I. The gradual advance of David's interest (v. 1). II. The building up of his family (v. 2-5). III. Abner's quarrel with Ish-bosheth, and his treaty with David (v. 6-12). IV. The preliminaries settled (v. 13-16). V. Abner's undertaking and attempt to bring Israel over to David (v. 17-21). VI. The treacherous murder of Abner by Joab, when he was carrying on this matter (v. 22-27). VII. David's great concern and trouble for the death of Abner (v. 28-39).

### Verses 1-6

Here is, I. The struggle that David had with the house of Saul before his settlement in the throne was completed, v. 1. 1. Both sides contested. Saul's house, though beheaded and diminished, would not fall tamely. It is not strange between them, but one would wonder it should be a long war, when David's house had right on its side, and therefore God on its side; but, though truth and equity will triumph at last, God made for wise and holy ends prolonged the conflict. The length of this war tried the faith and patience of David, and made his establishment at last the more welcome to him. 2. David's side got ground. The house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker, lost places, lost men, sunk in its reputation, grew less considerable, and was foiled in every engagement. But the house of David grew stronger and stronger. Many deserted the declining cause of Saul's house, and prudently came into David's interest, being convinced that he would certainly win the day. The contest between grace and corruption in the hearts of believers, who are sanctified but in part, may fitly be compared to this recorded here. There is a long war between them, the flesh lusted against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; but, as the work of sanctification is carried on, corruption, like the house of Saul, grows weaker and weaker; while grace, like the house of David, grows stronger and stronger, till it come to a perfect man, and judgment be brought forth unto victory.

II. The increase of his own house. Here is an account of six sons he had by six several wives, in the seven years he reigned in Hebron. Perhaps this is here mentioned as that which strengthened David's interest. Every child, whose welfare was embarked in the common safety, was a fresh security given to the commonwealth for his care of it. He that has his quiver filled with these arrows shall *speake with his enemy in the gate*, Ps. 127:5. As the death of Saul's sons weakened his interest, so the birth of David's strengthened his. 1. It was David's fault thus to multiply wives, contrary to the law (Deu. 17:17), and it was a bad example to his successors. 2. It does not appear that in these seven years he had above one son by each of these wives; some have had as numerous a progeny, and with much more honour and comfort, by one wife. 3. We read not that any of these sons came to be famous (three of them were infamous, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah); we have therefore reason to rejoice with trembling in the building up of our families. 4. His son by Abigail is called *Chileab* (v. 3), whereas (1 Chr. 3:1) he is called *Daniel*. Bishop Patrick mentions the reason which the Hebrew doctors give for these names, that his first name was *Daniel*—*God has judged me* (namely, against Nabal), but David's enemies reproached him, and said, "It is Nabal's son, and not David's," to confute which calumny Providence so ordered it that, as he grew up, he became, in his countenance and features, extremely like David, and resembled him more than any of his children, upon which he gave him the name of *Chileab*, which

signifies, *like his father*, or the father's picture. 5. Absalom's mother is said to be the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur, a heathen prince. Perhaps David thereby hoped to strengthen his interest, but the issue of the marriage was one that proved his grief and shame. 6. The last is called *David's wife*, which therefore, some think, was Michal, his first and most rightful wife, called here by another name; and, though she had no child after she mocked David, she might have had before.

Thus was David's house strengthened; but it was Abner that *made himself strong for the house of Saul*, which is mentioned (v. 6) to show that, if he failed them, they would fall of course.

### **Verses 7-21**

Here, I. Abner breaks with Ish-bosheth, and deserts his interest, upon a little provocation which Ish-bosheth unadvisedly gave him. God can serve his own purposes by the sins and follies of men. 1. Ish-bosheth accused Abner of no less a crime than debauching one of his father's concubines, v. 7. Whether it was so or no does not appear, nor what ground he had for the suspicion: but, however it was, it would have been Ish-bosheth's prudence to be silent, considering how much it was his interest not to disoblige Abner. If the thing was false, and his jealousy groundless, it was very disingenuous and ungrateful to entertain unjust surmises of one who had ventured his all for him, and was certainly the best friend he had in the world. 2. Abner resented the charge very strongly. Whether he was guilty of the *fault concerning this woman* or no he does not say (v. 8), but we suspect he was guilty, for he does not expressly deny it; and, though he was, he lets Ish-bosheth know, (1.) That he scorned to be reproached with it by him, and would not take reproof at his hands. "What!" says Abner, "*Am I a dog's head*, a vile and contemptible animal, that thou exposest me thus? v. 8. Is this my recompence for the kindness I have shown to thee and thy father's house, and the good services I have done you?" He magnifies the service with this, that it was against Judah, the tribe on which the crown was settled, and which would certainly have it at last, so that, in supporting the house of Saul, he acted both against his conscience and against his interest, for which he deserved a better requital than this: and yet, perhaps, he would not have been so zealous for the house of Saul if he had not thereby gratified his own ambition and hoped to find his own account in it. Note, Proud men will not bear to be reprov'd, especially by those whom they think they have oblig'd. (2.) That he would certainly be revenged on him, v. 9, 10. With the utmost degree of arrogance and insolence he lets him know that, as he had raised him up, so he could pull him down again and would do it. He knew that God had sworn to David to give him the kingdom, and yet oppos'd it with all his might from a principle of ambition; but now he complies with it from a principle of revenge, under colour of some regard to the will of God, which was but a pretence. Those that are slaves to their lusts have many masters, which drive, some one way and some another, and, according as they make head, men are violently hurried into self-contradictions. Abner's ambition made him zealous for Ish-bosheth, and now his revenge made him as zealous for David. If he had sincerely regarded God's promise to David, and acted with an eye to that, he would have been steady and uniform in his counsels, and acted in consistency with himself. But, while Abner serves his own lusts, God by him serves his own purposes, makes even his wrath and revenge to praise him, and ordains strength to David by it. *Lastly*, See how Ish-bosheth was thunder-struck by Abner's insolence: He *could not answer him again*, v. 11. If Ish-bosheth had had the spirit of a man, especially of a prince, he might have answered him that his merits were the aggravation of his crimes, that he would not

be served by so base a man, and doubted not but to do well enough without him. But he was conscious to himself of his own weakness, and therefore said not a word, lest he should make bad worse. His heart failed him, and he now became, as David had foretold concerning his enemies, like a bowing wall and a *tottering fence*, Ps. 62:3.

II. Abner treats with David. We must suppose that he began to grow weary of Ish-bosheth's cause, and sought an opportunity to desert it, or else, however he might threaten Ish-bosheth with it, for the quashing of the charge against himself, he would not have made good his angry words so soon as he did, v. 12. He *sent messengers to David*, to tell him that he was at his service. "*Whose is the land? Is it not thine? For thou hast the best title to the government and the best interest in the people's affections.*" Note, God can find out ways to make those serviceable to the kingdom of Christ who yet have no sincere affection for it and who have vigorously set themselves against it. Enemies are sometimes made a footstool, not only to be trodden upon, but to ascend by. The earth helped the woman.

III. David enters into a treaty with Abner, but upon condition that he shall procure him the restitution of Michal his wife, v. 13. Hereby, 1. David showed the sincerity of his conjugal affection to his first and most rightful wife; neither her marrying another, nor his, had alienated him from her. Many waters could not quench that love. 2. He testified his respect to the house of Saul. So far was he from trampling upon it, now that it was fallen, that even in his elevation he valued himself not a little on his relation to it. He cannot be pleased with the honours of the throne unless he have Michal, Saul's daughter, to share with him in them, so far is he from bearing any malice to the family of his enemy. Abner sent him word that he must apply to Ish-bosheth, which he did (v. 14), pleading that he had purchased her at a dear rate, and she was wrongfully taken from him. Ish-bosheth durst not deny his demand, now that he had not Abner to stand by him, but took her from Phaltiel, to whom Saul had married her (v. 15), and Abner conducted her to David, not doubting but that then he should be doubly welcome when he brought him a wife in one hand and a crown in the other. Her latter husband was loth to part with her, and followed her *weeping* (v. 16), but there was no remedy: he must thank himself; for when he took her he knew that another had a right to her. Usurpers must expect to resign. Let no man therefore set his heart on that to which he is not entitled. If any disagreement has separated husband and wife, as they expect the blessing of God let them be reconciled, and come together again; let all former quarrels be forgotten, and let them live together in love, according to God's holy ordinance.

IV. Abner uses his interest with the elders of Israel to bring them over to David, knowing that whichever way they went the common people would follow of course. Now that it serves his own turn he can plead in David's behalf that he was, 1. Israel's choice (v. 17): "*You sought for him in times past to be king over you*, when he had signalized himself in so many engagements with the Philistines and done you so much good service; no man can pretend to greater personal merit than David nor to less than Ish-bosheth. You have tried them both, *Detur digniori—Give the crown to him that best deserves it*. Let David be your king." 2. God's choice (v. 18): "*The Lord hath spoken of David*. Compare v. 9. When God appointed Samuel to anoint him he did, in effect, promise that by his hand he would save Israel; for for that end he was made king. God having promised, by David's hand, to save Israel, it is both your duty, in compliance with God's will, and your interest, in order to your victories over your enemies, to submit to him; and it is the greatest folly in the world to oppose him." Who would have expected such

reasonings as these out of Abner's mouth? But thus God will make the enemies of his people to know and own *that he has loved them*, Rev. 3:9. He particularly applied to the men of Benjamin, those of his own tribe, on whom he had the greatest influence, and whom he had drawn in to appear for the house of Saul. He was the man that had deceived them, and therefore he was concerned to undeceive them. Thus the multitude are as they are managed.

V. David concludes the treaty with Abner; and he did wisely and well therein; for, whatever induced Abner to it, it was a good work to put an end to the war, and to settle the Lord's anointed on the throne; and it was as lawful for David to make use of his agency as it is for a poor man to receive alms from a Pharisee, who gives it in pride and hypocrisy. Abner reported to David the sense of the people and the success of his communications with them, v. 19. He came now, not as at first privately, but with a retinue of twenty men, and David entertained them with *a feast* (v. 20) in token of reconciliation and joy and as a pledge of the agreement between them: it was a feast upon a covenant, like that, Gen. 26:30. *If thy enemy hunger, feed him*; but, if he submit, feast him. Abner, pleased with his entertainment, the prevention of his fall with Saul's house (which would have been inevitable if he had not taken this course), and much more with the prospect he had of preferment under David, undertakes in a little time to perfect the revolution, and to bring all Israel into obedience to David, v. 21. He tells David he shall *reign over all that his heart desired*. He knew David's elevation took rise from God's appointment, yet he insinuates that it sprang from his own ambition and desire of rule; thus (as bad men often do) he measured that good man by himself. However, David and he parted very good friends, and the affair between them was well settled. Thus it behoves all who fear God and keep his commandments to avoid strife, even with the wicked, to live at peace with all men, and to show the world that they are children of the light.

### **Verses 22-39**

We have here an account of the murder of Abner by Joab, and David's deep resentment of it.

I. Joab very insolently fell foul upon David for treating with Abner. He happened to be abroad upon service when Abner was with David, pursuing a troop, either of Philistines or of Saul's party; but, upon his return, he was informed that Abner was just gone (v. 22, 23), and that a great many kind things had passed between David and him. He had all the reason in the world to be satisfied of David's prudence and to acquiesce in the measures he took, knowing him to be a wise and good man himself and under a divine conduct in all his affairs; and yet, as if he had the same sway in David's cause that Abner had in Ish-bosheth's, he chides David, and reproaches him to his face as impolitic (v. 24, 25): *What hast thou done?* As if David were accountable to him for what he did: *"Why hast thou sent him away, when thou mightest have made him a prisoner? He came as a spy, and will certainly betray thee."* I know not whether to wonder more that Joab had impudence enough to give such an affront to his prince or that David had patience enough to take it. He does, in effect, call David *a fool* when he tells him he knew Abner came to deceive him and yet he trusted him. We find no answer that David gave him, not because he feared him, as Ish-bosheth did Abner (v. 11), but because he despised him, or because Joab had not so much good manners as to stay for an answer.

II. He very treacherously sent for Abner back, and, under colour of a private conference with him, barbarously killed him with

his own hand. That he made use of David's name, under pretence of giving him some further instructions, is intimated in that, *but David knew it not*, v. 26. Abner, designing no harm, feared none, but very innocently returned to Hebron, and, when he found Joab waiting for him at the gate, turned aside with him to speak with him privately, forgetting what he himself had said when he slew Asahel, *How shall I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?* (ch. 2:22), and there Joab murdered him (v. 27), and it is intimated (v. 30) that Abishai was privy to the design, and was aiding and abetting, and would have come in to his brother's assistance if there had been occasion; he is therefore charged as an accessory: *Joab and Abishai slew Abner*, though perhaps he only knew it who is privy to the thoughts and intents of men's hearts. Now in this, 1. It is certain that the Lord was righteous. Abner had maliciously, and against the convictions of his conscience, opposed David. He had now basely deserted Ish-bosheth, and betrayed him, under pretence of regard to God and Israel, but really from a principle of pride, and revenge, and impatience of control. God will not therefore use so bad a man, though David might, in so good a work as the uniting of Israel. Judgments are prepared for such scorers as Abner was. But, 2. It is as certain that Joab was unrighteous, and, in what he did, did wickedly. David was a man after God's own heart, but could not have those about him, no, not in places of the greatest trust, after his own heart. Many a good prince, and a good master, has been forced to employ bad men. (1.) Even the pretence for doing this was very unjust. Abner had indeed slain his brother Asahel, and Joab and Abishai pretended herein to be the avengers of his blood (v. 27, 30); but Abner slew Asahel in an open war, wherein Abner indeed had given the challenge, but Joab himself had accepted it and had slain many of Abner's friends. He did it likewise in his own defence, and not till he had given him fair warning (which he would not take), and he did it with reluctancy; but Joab here shed *the blood of war in peace*, 1 Ki. 2:5. (2.) That which we have reason to think was at the bottom of Joab's enmity to Abner made it much worse. Joab was now general of David's forces; but, if Abner should come into his interest, he would possibly be preferred before him, being a senior officer, and more experienced in the art of war. This Joab was jealous of, and could better bear the guilt of blood than the thoughts of a rival. (3.) He did it treacherously, and under pretence of speaking peaceably to him, Deu. 27:24. Had he challenged him, he would have done like a soldier; but to assassinate him was done villainously and like a coward. *His words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords*, Ps. 55:21. Thus he basely slew Amasa, ch. 20:9, 10. (4.) The doing of it was a great affront and injury to David, who was now in treaty with Abner, as Joab knew. Abner was now actually in his master's service, so that, through his side, he struck at David himself. (5.) It was a great aggravation of the murder that he did it in the gate, openly and avowedly, as one that was not ashamed, nor could blush. The gate was the place of judgment and the place of concourse, to that he did it in defiance of justice, both the just sentence of the magistrates and the just resentment of the crowd, as one that neither feared God nor regarded men, but thought himself above all control: and Hebron was a Levites' city and a city of refuge.

III. David laid deeply to heart and in many ways expressed his detestation of this execrable villany.

1. He washed his hands from the guilt of Abner's blood. Lest any should suspect that Joab had some secret intimation from David to do as he did (and the rather because he went so long unpunished), he here solemnly appeals to God concerning his innocence: *I and my kingdom are guiltless* (and my kingdom is so because I am so) *before the Lord for ever*, v. 28. It is a

comfort to be able to say, when any bad thing is done, that we had no hand in it. *We have not shed this blood*, Deu. 21:7. However we may be censured or suspected, *our hearts shall not reproach us*.

2. He entailed the curse for it upon Joab and his family (v. 29): "*Let it rest on the head of Joab*. Let the blood cry against him, and let divine vengeance follow him. Let the iniquity be visited upon his children and children's children, in some hereditary disease or other. The longer the punishment is delayed, the longer let it last when it shall come. Let his posterity be stigmatized, blemished with an issue or a leprosy, which will shut them out from society; let them be beggars, or cripples, or come to some untimely end, that it may be said, He is one of Joab's race." This intimates that the guilt of blood brings a curse upon families; if men do not avenge it, God will, and will lay up the iniquity for the children. But methinks a resolute punishment of the murderer himself would better have become David than this passionate imprecation of God's judgments upon his posterity.

3. He called upon all about him, even Joab himself, to lament the death of Abner (v. 31): *Rend your clothes and mourn before Abner*, that is, before the hearse of Abner, as Abraham is said to mourn *before his dead* (Gen. 23:2, 3), and he gives a reason why they should attend his funeral with sincere and solemn mourning (v. 38), because there is *a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel*. His alliance to Saul, his place as general, his interest, and the great services he had formerly done, were enough to denominate him *a prince and a great man*. When he could not call him a saint or a good man, he said nothing of that, but what was true he gave him the praise of, though he had been his enemy, that he was *a prince and a great man*. "Such a man has fallen in Israel, and fallen *this day*, just when he was doing the best deed he ever did in his life, *this day*, when he was likely to be so serviceable to the public peace and welfare and could so ill be spared." (1.) Let them all lament it. The humbling change death puts all men under is to be lamented, especially as affecting princes and great men. Alas! alas! (see Rev. 18:10) how mean, how little, are those made by death who made themselves the terror of the mighty in the land of the living! But we are especially obliged to lament the fall of useful men in the midst of their usefulness and when there is most need of them. A public loss must be every man's grief, for every man shares in it. Thus David took care that honour should be done to the memory of a man of merit, to animate others. (2.) Let Joab, in a particular manner, lament it, which he has less heart but more reason to do than any of them. If he could be brought to do it sincerely, it would be an expression of repentance for his sin in slaying him. If he did it in show only, as it is likely he did, yet it was a sort of penance imposed upon him, and a present commutation of the punishment. If he do not as yet expiate the murder with his blood, let him do something towards it with tears. This, perhaps, Joab submitted to with no great reluctancy, now he had gained his point. Now that he is on the bier, no matter in what pomp he lies. *Sit divus, modo non sit vivus—Let him be canonized, so that he be but killed*.

4. David himself followed the corpse as chief mourner, and made a funeral oration at the grave. He attended the bier (v. 31) *and wept at the grave*, v. 32. Though Abner had been his enemy, and might possibly have proved no very firm friend, yet because he had been a man of bravery in the field, and might have done great service in the public counsels at this critical juncture, all former quarrels are forgotten and David is a true mourner for his fall. What he said over the grave fetched fresh floods of tears from the eyes of all that were present, when they thought they had already paid the debt in full (v. 33, 34): *Died*

*Abner as a fool dieth?* (1.) He speaks as one vexed that Abner was fooled out of his life, that so great a man as he, so famed for conduct and courage, should be imposed upon by a colour of friendship, slain by surprise, and so die as a fool dies. The wisest and stoutest of men have no fence against treachery. To see Abner, who thought himself the main hinge on which the great affairs of Israel turned, so considerable as himself to be able to turn the scale of a trembling government, his head full of great projects and great prospects, to see him made a fool of by a base rival, and falling on a sudden a sacrifice to his ambition and jealousy—this stains the pride of all glory, and should put one out of conceit with worldly grandeur. *Put not your trust in princes*, Ps. 146:3, 4. And let us therefore make that sure which we cannot be fooled out of. A man may have his life, and all that is dear to him, taken from him, and not be able to prevent it with all his wisdom, care, and integrity; but there is that which no thief can break through to steal. See here how much more we are beholden to God's providence than to our own prudence for the continuance of our lives and comforts. Were it not for the hold God has of the consciences of bad men, how soon would the weak and innocent become an easy prey to the strong and merciless and the wisest die as fools! Or, (2.) He speaks as one boasting that Abner did not fool himself out of his life: "*Died Abner as a fool dies?* No, he did not, not as a criminal, a traitor or felon, that forfeits his life into the hands of public justice; his hands were not pinioned, nor his feet fettered, as those of malefactors are: Abner falls not before just men, by a judicial sentence; but as *a man, an innocent man, falleth before wicked men*, thieves and robbers, so fellest thou." *Died Abner as Nabal died?* so the Septuagint reads it. Nabal died as he lived, like himself, like a sot; but Abner's fate was such as might have been the fate of the wisest and best man in the world. Abner did not throw away his life as Asahel did, who wilfully ran upon the spear, after fair warning, but he was struck by surprise. Note, It is a sad thing to die like a fool, as those do that in any way shorten their own days, and much more those that make no provision for another world.

5. He fasted all that day, and would by no means be persuaded to eat any thing till night, v. 35. It was then the custom of great mourners to refrain for the time from bodily refreshments, as ch. 1:12; 1 Sa. 31:13. How incongruous is it then to turn the house of mourning into a house of feasting! This respect which David paid to Abner was very pleasing to the people and satisfied them that he was not, in the least, accessory to the murder (v. 36, 37), of which he was solicitous to avoid the suspicion, lest Joab's villany should make him odious, as that of Simeon and Levi did Jacob, Gen. 34:30. On this occasion it is said, *Whatever the king did pleased all the people*. This intimates, (1.) His good affection to them. He studied to please them in every thing and carefully avoided what might be disobliging. (2.) Their good opinion of him. They thought every thing he did well done. Such a mutual willingness to please, and easiness to be pleased, will make every relation comfortable.

6. He bewailed it that he could not with safety do justice on the murderers, v. 30. He was weak, his kingdom was newly planted, and a little shake would overthrow it. Joab's family had a great interest, were bold and daring, and to make them his enemies now might be of bad consequence. These sons of Zeruah were too hard for him, too big for the law to take hold of; and therefore, though by man, by the magistrate, the blood of a murderer *should be shed* (Gen. 9:6), David bears the sword in vain, and contents himself, as a private person, to leave them to the judgment of God: *The Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness*. Now this is a diminution, (1.) To David's greatness. He is anointed king, and yet is kept in awe by

his own subjects, and some of them are too hard for him. Who would be fond of power when a man may have the name of it, and must be accountable for it, and yet be hampered in the use of it? (2.) To David's goodness. He ought to have done his duty, and trusted God with the issue. *Fiat justitia, ruat coelum—Let justice be done, though the heavens should fall asunder.* If the law had had its course against Joab, perhaps the murder of Ishbosheth, Amnon, and others, would have been prevented. It was carnal policy and cruel pity that spared Joab. Righteousness supports the throne and will never shake it. Yet it was only a reprieve that David gave to Joab; on his death-bed he left it to Solomon (who could the better wield the sword of justice because he had no occasion to draw the sword of war) to avenge the blood of Abner. Evil pursues sinners, and will overtake them at last. David preferred Abner's son Jaasiel, 1 Chr. 27:21.

## Chapter 4

When Abner was slain David was at a loss for a friend to perfect the reduction of those tribes that were yet in Ish-bosheth's interest. Which way to adopt for the accomplishment of it he could not tell; but here Providence brings it about by the removal of Ish-bosheth. I. Two of his own servants slew him, and brought his head to David (v. 1-8). II. David, instead of rewarding them, put them to death for what they had done (v. 9-12).

### Verses 1-8

Here is, I. The weakness of Saul's house. Still it grew weaker and weaker. 1. As for Ishbosheth, who was in possession of the throne, his hands were feeble, v. 1. All the strength they ever had was from Abner's support, and now that he was dead he had no spirit left in him. Though Abner had, in a passion, deserted his interest, yet he hoped, by his means, to make good terms with David; but now even this hope fails him, and he sees himself forsaken by his friends and at the mercy of his enemies. All the Israelites that adhered to him were troubled and at a loss what to do, whether to proceed in their treaty with David or no. 2. As for Mephibosheth, who in the right of his father Jonathan had a prior title, his feet were lame, and he was unfit for any service, v. 4. He was but five years old when his father and grandfather were killed. His nurse, hearing of the Philistines' victory, was apprehensive that, in pursuit of it, they would immediately send a party to Saul's house, to cut off all that pertained to it, and would especially aim at her young master, who was now next heir to the crown. Under the apprehension of this, she fled with the child in her arms, to secure it either in some secret place where he could not be found, or in some strong place where he could not be got at; and, making more haste than good speed, she fell with the child, and by the fall some bone was broken or put out, and not well set, so that he was lame of it as long as he lived, and unfit either for court or camp. See what sad accidents children are liable to in their infancy, the effect of which may be felt by them, to their great uneasiness, all their days. Even the children of princes and great men, the children of good men, for such a one Jonathan was, children that are well tended, and have nurses of their own to take care of them, yet are not always safe. What reason have we to be thankful to God for the preservation of our limbs and senses to us, through the many perils of the weak and helpless state of infancy, and to own his goodness in giving his angels a charge concerning us, to bear us up in their arms, out of which there is no danger of falling, Ps. 91:12.

II. The murder of Saul's son. We are here told,

1. Who were the murderers: *Baanah and Rechab*, v. 2, 3. They were own brothers, as Simeon and Levi, and partners in iniquity. They were or had been Ish-bosheth's own servants, employed under him, so much the more base and treacherous was it in them to do him a mischief. They were Benjamites, of his own tribe. They were of the city of Beeroth; for some reason which we cannot now account for care is here taken to let us know (in a parenthesis) that that city belonged to the lot of Benjamin, so we find (Jos. 18:25), but that the inhabitants, upon some occasion or other, perhaps upon the death of Saul, retired to Gittaim, another city which lay not far off in the same tribe, and was better fortified by nature, being situate (if we may depend upon Mr. Fuller's map) between the two rocks Bozez and Seneh. There the Beerothites were when this was

written, and probably took root there, and never returned to Beeroth again, which made Beeroth, that had been one of the cities of the Gibeonites (Jos. 9:17), to be forgotten, and Gittaim to be famous long after, as we find, Neh. 11:33.

2. How the murder was committed, v. 5-7. See here, (1.) The slothfulness of Ish-bosheth. He lay upon his bed at noon. It does not appear that the country was at any time of the year so hot as to oblige the inhabitants to retire at noon, as we are told they do in Spain in the heat of summer; but Ishbosheth was a sluggish man, loved his ease and hated business: and when he should have been, at this critical juncture, at the head of his forces in the field, or at the head of his counsels in a treaty with David, he was lying upon his bed and sleeping, for his hands were feeble (v. 1), and so were his head and heart. When those difficulties dispirit us which should rather invigorate us and sharpen our endeavours we betray both our crowns and lives. *Love not sleep, lest thou come to poverty and ruin.* The idle soul is an easy prey to the destroyer. (2.) The treachery of Baanah and Rechab. They came into the house, under pretence of fetching wheat for the victualling of their regiments; and such was the plainness of those times that the king's corn-chamber and his bed-chamber lay near together, which gave them an opportunity, when they were fetching wheat, to murder him as he lay on the bed. We know not when and where death will meet us. When we lie down to sleep we are not sure but that we may sleep the sleep of death before we awake; nor do we know from what unsuspected hand a fatal stroke may come. Ish-bosheth's own men, who should have protected his life, took it away.

3. The murderers triumphed in what they had done. As if they had performed some very glorious action, and the doing of it for David's advantage was enough not only to justify it, but to sanctify it, they made a present of Ish-bosheth's head to David (v. 8): *Behold the head of thy enemy*, than which they thought nothing could be more acceptable to him; yea, and they made themselves instruments of God's justice, ministers to bear his sword, though they had no commission: *The Lord hath avenged thee this day of Saul and of his seed.* Not that they had any regard either to God or to David's honour; they aimed at nothing but to make their own fortunes (as we say) and to get preferment in David's court; but, to ingratiate themselves with him, they pretended a concern for his life, a conviction of his title, and a zealous desire to see him in full possession of the throne. Jehu pretended *zeal for the Lord of hosts* when an ambition to set up himself and his own family was the spring of his actions.

### **Verses 9-12**

We have here justice done upon the murderers of Ish-bosheth.

I. Sentence passed upon them. There needed no evidence, their own tongues witnessed against them; they were so far from denying the fact that they gloried in it. David therefore shows them the heinousness of the crime, and that blood called for blood from his hand, who was now the chief magistrate, and was by office the avenger of blood. And, perhaps, he was the more vigorous in the prosecution because for reasons of state he had spared Joab: *"Shall I not require the blood of the slain at the hand of the slayers*, and, since they cannot make restitution, take theirs instead of it?" Observe, 1. How he aggravates the crime, v. 11. Ish-bosheth was a righteous person, he had done them no wrong, nor designed them any. As to himself, David was satisfied that what opposition he gave him was not from malice, but mistake, from an idea he had of his own title to the crown, and the influence of others upon him, who urged him to put in for it. Note, Charity teaches us to make the best, not only of our friends, but of our enemies, and to think those may be righteous persons who yet, in some instances, do us wrong. I must

not presently judge a man a bad man because I think him so to me. David owns Ish-bosheth an honest man, though he had created him a great deal of trouble unjustly. The manner of it much aggravated the crime. To slay him in his own house, which should have been his castle, and upon his bed, when he was in no capacity of making any opposition, this is treacherous and barbarous, and all that is base, and that which the heart of every man who is not perfectly lost to all honour and humanity will rise with indignation at the thought of. Assassinating is confessedly the most odious and villainous way of murdering. *Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly.* 2. He quotes a precedent (v. 10): he had put him to death who had brought him the tidings of the death of Saul, because he thought it would be good tidings to David. Nothing is here said of that Amalekite's helping Saul to kill himself, only of his bringing the tidings of his death, by which it should seem that the story he told was upon enquiry found to be false, and that he lied against his own head. "Now" (says David) "did I treat him as a criminal, and not a favourite" (as he expected), "who brought me Saul's crown, and shall those be held guiltless that bring me Ish-bosheth's head?" 3. He ratifies the sentence with an oath (v. 9): *As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity.* He expresses himself thus resolutely, to prevent the making of any intercession for the criminals by those about him, and thus piously to intimate that his dependence was upon God for the putting of him in possession of the promised throne, and that he would not be beholden to any man to help him to it by any indirect or unlawful practices. God had redeemed him from all adversity hitherto, helped him over many a difficulty and through many a danger, and therefore he would depend upon him to crown and complete his own work. He speaks of his redemption from all adversity as a thing done, though he had many a storm yet before him, because he knew that he who had delivered would deliver. 4. Hereupon he signs a warrant for the execution of these men, v. 12. This may seem severe, when they intended him a kindness in what they did; but, (1.) He would thus show his detestation of the villany. When he heard that *the Lord smote Nabal, he gave thanks* (1 Sa. 25:38, 39), *for he is the God to whom vengeance belongeth*; but, if wicked men smite Ish-bosheth, they deserve to die for taking God's work out of his hand. (2.) He would thus show his resentment of the great affront they put upon him in expecting that he should patronize and reward it; they could scarcely have done him a greater injury than thus to think him altogether such a one as themselves, one that cared not what blood he waded through to the crown.

II. Execution done. The murderers were put to death according to law, and their hands and feet were hung up; not their whole bodies, the law forbade that; but only their hands and feet, *in terrorem—to frighten others*, to be monuments of David's justice, and to make that to be taken notice of which would recommend him to the esteem of the people, as a man fit to rule, and that aimed not at his own preferment, nor had any enmity to the house of Saul, but only and sincerely designed the public welfare. But what a confusion was this to the two murderers! What a horrid disappointment! And such those will meet with who think to serve the interests of the Son of David by any immoral practices, by war and persecution, fraud and rapine, who, under colour of religion, murder princes, break solemn contracts, lay countries waste, *hate their brethren, and cast them out, and say, Let the Lord be glorified, kill them, and think they do God good service.* However men may canonize such methods of serving the church and the catholic cause, Christ will let them know, another day, that Christianity was not intended to destroy humanity; and those who thus think to merit heaven shall not escape the damnation of hell.



## Chapter 5

How far Abner's deserting the house of Saul, his murder, and the murder of Ish-bosheth, might contribute to the perfecting of the revolution, and the establishing of David as king over all Israel, does not appear; but, it should seem, that happy change followed presently thereupon, which in this chapter we have an account of. Here is, I. David anointed king by all the tribes (v. 1-5). II. Making himself master of the strong-hold of Zion (v. 6-10). III. Building himself a house and strengthening himself in his kingdom (v. 11, 12). IV. His children that were born after this (v. 13-16). V. His victories over the Philistines (v. 17-25).

### Verses 1-5

Here is, I. The humble address of all the tribes to David, beseeching him to take upon him the government (for they were now as sheep having no shepherd), and owning him for their king. Though David might by no means approve the murder of Ish-bosheth, yet he might improve the advantages he gained thereby, and accept the applications made to him thereupon. Judah had submitted to David as their king above seven years ago, and their ease and happiness, under his administration, encouraged the rest of the tribes to make their court to him. What numbers came from each tribe, with what zeal and sincerity they came, and how they were entertained for three days at Hebron, when they were all of one heart to make David king, we have a full account, 1 Chr. 12:23-40. Here we have only the heads of their address, containing the grounds they went upon in making David king. 1. Their relation to him was some inducement: "*We are thy bone and thy flesh* (v. 1), not only thou art our bone and our flesh, not a stranger, unqualified by the law to be king (Deu. 17:15), but we are thine," that is, "we know that thou considerest us as thy bone and thy flesh, and hast as tender a concern for us as a man has for his own body, which Saul and his house had not. *We are thy bone and thy flesh*, and therefore thou wilt be as glad as we shall be to put an end to this long civil war; and thou wilt take pity on us, protect us, and do thy utmost for our welfare." Those who take Christ for their king may thus plead with him: "*We are thy bone and thy flesh*, thou hast made thyself in all things *like unto thy brethren* (Heb. 2:17); therefore be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand," Isa. 3:6. 2. His former good services to the public were a further inducement (v. 2): "*When Saul was king* he was but the cypher, thou wast the figure, *thou wast he that leddest out* Israel to battle, and broughtest them in in triumph; and therefore who so fit now to fill the vacant throne?" He that is faithful in a little deserves to be entrusted with more. Former good offices done for us should be gratefully remembered by us when there is occasion. 3. The divine appointment was the greatest inducement of all: *The Lord said, Thou shalt feed my people Israel*, that is, thou shalt rule them; for princes are to feed their people as shepherds, in every thing consulting the subjects' benefit, feeding them and not fleecing them. "And thou shalt be not only a king to govern in peace, but a captain to preside in war, and be exposed to all the toils and perils of the camp." Since God has said so, now at length, when need drives them to it, they are persuaded to say so too.

II. The public and solemn inauguration of David, v. 3. A convention of the states was called; all the elders of Israel came to him; the contract was settled, the *pacta conventa*—*covenants*, sworn to, and subscribed on both sides. He obliged himself to protect them as their judge in peace and captain in war; and they obliged themselves to obey him. He *made a league* with them

to which God was a witness: it was *before the Lord*. Hereupon he was, for the third time, anointed king. His advances were gradual, that his faith might be tried and that he might gain experience. And thus his kingdom typified that of the Messiah, which was to come to its height by degrees; for *we see not yet all things put under him* (Heb. 2:8), but we shall see it, 1 Co. 15:25.

III. A general account of his reign and age. He was thirty years old when he began to reign, upon the death of Saul, v. 4. At that age the Levites were at first appointed to begin their administration, Num. 4:3. About that age the Son of David entered upon his public ministry, Lu. 3:23. Then men come to their full maturity of strength and judgment. He reigned, in all, forty years and six months, of which seven years and a half in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem, v. 5. Hebron had been famous, Jos. 14:15. It was a priest's city. But Jerusalem was to be more so, and to be the holy city. Great kings affected to raise cities of their own, Gen. 10:11, 36, 32-35. David did so, and Jerusalem was the city of David. It is a name famous to the end of the Bible (Rev. 21), where we read of a new Jerusalem.

### **Verses 6-10**

If Salem, the place of which Melchizedec was king, was Jerusalem (as seems probable from Ps. 76:2), it was famous in Abraham's time. Joshua, in his time, found it the chief city of the south part of Canaan, Jos. 10:1-3. It fell to Benjamin's lot (Jos. 18:28), but joined close to Judah's, Jos. 15:8. The children of Judah had taken it (Jdg. 1:8), but the children of Benjamin suffered the Jebusites to dwell among them (Jdg. 1:21), and they grew so upon them that it became a *city of Jebusites*, Jdg. 19:11. Now the very first exploit David did, after he was anointed king over all Israel, was to gain Jerusalem out of the hand of the Jebusites, which, because it belonged to Benjamin, he could not well attempt till that tribe, which long adhered to Saul's house (1 Chr. 12:29), submitted to him. Here we have,

I. The Jebusites' defiance of David and his forces. They said, *Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither*, v. 6. They sent David this provoking message, because, as it is said afterwards, on another occasion, they could not believe that *ever an enemy would enter into the gates of Jerusalem*, Lam. 4:12. They confided either, 1. In the protection of their gods, which David, in contempt, had called *the blind and the lame*, for *they have eyes and see not, feet and walk not*. "But," say they, "these are the guardians of our city, and except thou take these away (which thou canst never do) thou canst not come in hither." Some think they were constellated images of brass set up in the recess of the fort, and entrusted with the custody of the place. They called their idols their *Mauzzim*, or *strong-holds* (Dan. 11:38) and as such relied on them. *The name of the Lord is our strong tower*, and his arm is strong, his eyes are piercing. Or, 2. In the strength of their fortifications, which they thought were made so impregnable by nature or art, or both, that the blind and the lame were sufficient to defend them against the most powerful assailant. The strong-hold of Zion they especially depended on, as that which could not be forced. Probably they set blind and lame people, invalids or maimed soldiers, to make their appearance upon the walls, in scorn of David and his men, judging them an equal match for him. Though there remain but wounded men among them, yet they should serve to beat back the besiegers. Compare Jer. 37:10. Note, The enemies of God's people are often very confident of their own strength and most secure when their day to fall draws nigh.

II. David's success against the Jebusites. Their pride and insolence, instead of daunting him, animated him, and when he made a general assault he gave this order to his men: "*He that smiteth the Jebusites, let him also throw down into the ditch, or gutter, the lame and the blind,* which are set upon the wall to affront us and our God." It is probable they had themselves spoken blasphemous things, and were therefore hated of David's soul. Thus v. 8 may be read; we fetch our reading of it from 1 Chr. 11:6, which speaks only of smiting the Jebusites, but nothing of the blind and the lame. The Jebusites had said that if these images of theirs did not protect them *the blind and the lame should not come into the house*, that is, they would never again trust their palladium (so Mr. Gregory understands it) nor pay the respect they had paid to their images; and David, having gained the fort, said so too, that these images, which could not protect their worshippers, should never have any place there more.

III. His fixing his royal seat in Sion. He himself dwelt in the fort (the strength whereof, which had given him opposition, and was a terror to him, now contributed to his safety), and he built houses round about for his attendants and guards (v. 9) from Millo (the town-hall, or state-house) and inward. He proceeded and prospered in all he set his hand to, grew great in honour, strength, and wealth, more and more honourable in the eyes of his subjects and formidable in the eyes of his enemies; for *the Lord God of hosts was with him*. God has all creatures at his command, makes what use he pleases of them, and serves his own purposes by them; and he was with him, to direct, preserve, and prosper him, Those that have the Lord of hosts for them need not fear what hosts of men or devils can do against them. Those who grow great must ascribe their advancement to the presence of God with them, and give him the glory of it. The church is called *Sion*, and the *city of the living God*. The Jebusites, Christ's enemies, must first be conquered and dispossessed, the blind and the lame taken away, and then Christ divides the spoil, sets up his throne there, and makes it his residence by the Spirit.

#### **Verses 11-16**

Here is, I. David's house built, a royal palace, fit for the reception of the court he kept and the homage that was paid to him, v. 11. The Jews were husbandmen and shepherds, and did not much addict themselves either to merchandise or manufactures; and therefore Hiram, king of Tyre, a wealthy prince, when he sent to congratulate David on his accession to the throne, offered him workmen to build him a house. David thankfully accepted the offer, and Hiram's workmen built David a house to his mind. Many have excelled in arts and sciences who were strangers to the covenants of promise. Yet David's house was never the worse, nor the less fit to be dedicated to God, for being built by the sons of the stranger. It is prophesied of the gospel church, *The sons of the strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee*, Isa. 60:10.

II. David's government settled and built up, v. 12. 1. His kingdom was established, there was nothing to shake it, none to disturb his possession or question his title. He that made him king established him, because he was to be a type of Christ, with whom God's hand should be established, and his *covenant stand fast*, Ps. 89:21–28. Saul was made king, but not established; so Adam in innocency. David was established king, so is the Son of David, with all who through him are made to our God *kings and priests*. 2. It was exalted in the eyes both of its friends and enemies. Never had the nation of Israel looked so great or made such a figure as it began now to do. Thus it is promised of Christ that he shall be *higher than the kings of the earth*, Ps.

89:27. God has *highly exalted him*, Phil. 2:9. 3. David perceived, by the wonderful concurrence of providences to his establishment and advancement, that God was with him. *By this I know that thou favourest me*, Ps. 41:11. Many have the favour of God and do not perceive it, and so want the comfort of it: but to be exalted to that and established in it, and to perceive it, is happiness enough. 4. He owned that it was for his people Israel's sake that God had done great things for him, that he might be a blessing to them and they might be happy under his administration. God did not make Israel his subjects for his sake, that he might be great, and rich, and absolute: but he made him their king for their sake, that he might lead, and guide, and protect them. Kings are *ministers of God to their people for good*, Rom. 13:4.

III. David's family multiplied and increased. All the sons that were born to him after he came to Jerusalem are here mentioned together, eleven in all, besides the six that were born to him before in Hebron, ch. 3:2, 5. *There* the mothers are mentioned, not *here*; only, in general, it is said that he *took more concubines and wives*, v. 13. Shall we praise him for this? We praise him not; we justify him not; nor can we scarcely excuse him. The bad example of the patriarchs might make him think there was no harm in it, and he might hope it would strengthen his interest, by multiplying his alliances, and increasing the royal family. *Happy is the man that has his quiver full of these arrows*. But one vine by the side of the house, with the blessing of God, may send boughs to the sea and branches to the rivers. Adam, by one wife, peopled the world, and Noah re-peopled it. David had many wives, and yet that did not keep him from coveting his neighbour's wife and defiling her; for men that have once broken the fence will wander endlessly. Of David's concubines, see 2 Sa. 15:16; 16:22; 19:5. Of his sons, see 1 Chr. 3:1-9.

### **Verses 17-25**

The particular service for which David was raised up was to *save Israel out of the hand of the Philistines*, ch. 3:18. This therefore divine Providence, in the first place, gives him an opportunity of accomplishing. Two great victories obtained over the Philistines we have here an account of, by which David not only balanced the disgrace and retrieved the loss Israel had sustained in the battle wherein Saul was slain, but went far towards the total subduing of those vexatious neighbours, the last remains of the devoted nations.

I. In both these actions the Philistines were the aggressors, stirred first towards their own destruction, and pulled it on their own heads. 1. In the former they *came up to seek David* (v. 17), because they *heard that he was anointed king over Israel*. He that under Saul had slain his ten thousands, what would he do when he himself came to be king! They therefore thought it was time to look about them, and try to crush his government in its infancy, before it was well settled. Their success against Saul, some years ago, perhaps encouraged them to make this attack upon David; but they considered not that David had that presence of God with him which Saul had forfeited and lost. The kingdom of the Messiah, as soon as ever it was set up in the world, was thus vigorously attacked by the powers of darkness, who, with the combined force both of Jews and Gentiles, made head against it. The heathen raged, and the kings of the earth set themselves to oppose it; but all in vain, Ps. 2:1, etc. The destruction will turn, as this did, upon Satan's own kingdom. They took counsel together, but were *broken in pieces*, Isa. 8:9, 10. 2. In the latter they *came up yet again*, hoping to recover what they had lost in the former engagement, and their hearts being hardened to their destruction, v. 22. 3. In both they *spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim*, which lay very near Jerusalem. That city

they hoped to make themselves masters of before David had completed the fortifications of it. Jerusalem, from its infancy, has been aimed at, and struck at, with a particular enmity. Their spreading themselves intimates that they were very numerous and that they made a very formidable appearance. We read of the church's enemies *going up on the breadth of the earth* (Rev. 20:9), but the further they spread themselves the fairer mark they are to God's arrows.

II. In both, David, though forward enough to go forth against them (for as soon as he heard it he *went down to the hold*, to secure some important and advantageous post, v. 17), yet entered not upon action till he had *enquired of the Lord* by the breast-plate of judgment, v. 19, and again, v. 23. His enquiry was twofold:-1. Concerning his duty: "*Shall I go up?* Shall I have a commission from heaven to engage them?" One would think he needed not doubt this; what was he made king for, but to fight the battles of the Lord and Israel? But a good man loves to see God going before him in every step he takes. "Shall I go up *now?*" It is to be done, but is it to be done at this time? *In all thy ways acknowledge him*. And besides, though the Philistines were public enemies, yet some of them had been his particular friends. Achish had been kind to him in his distress, and had protected him. "Now," says David, "ought not I, in remembrance of that, rather to make peace with them than to make war with them?" "No," says God, "they are Israel's enemies, and are doomed to destruction, and therefore scruple not, but *go up.*" 2. Concerning his success. His conscience asked the former question, *Shall I go up?* His prudence asked this, *Wilt thou deliver them into my hand?* Hereby he owns his dependence on God for victory, that he could not conquer them unless God delivered them into his hand, and refers his cause to the good pleasure of God: *Wilt thou do it?* Yea, says God, *I will doubtless do it*. If God send us, he will bear us out and stand by us. The assurance God has given us of victory over our spiritual enemies, that he will tread Satan under our feet shortly, should animate us in our spiritual conflicts. We do not fight at uncertainty.

David had now a great army at command and in good heart, yet he relied more on God's promise than his own force.

III. In the former of these engagements David routed the army of the Philistines by dint of sword (v. 20): He *smote them*; and when he had done, 1. He gave his God the glory; he said, "*The Lord has broken forth upon my enemies before me*. I could not have done it if he had not done it before me; he opened the breach like the breach of waters in a dam, which when once opened grows wider and wider." The principal part of the work was God's doing; nay, he did all; what David did was not worth speaking of; and therefore, *Not unto us, but unto the Lord, give glory*. He hoped likewise that this breach, like that of waters, was as the opening of the sluice, to let in a final desolation upon them; and, to perpetuate the remembrance of it, he called the place *Baal-perazim, the master of the breaches*, because, God having broken in upon their forces, he soon had the mastery of them. Let posterity take notice of it to God's honour. 2. He put their gods to shame. They brought the images of their gods into the field as their protectors, in imitation of the Israelites bringing the ark into their camp; but, being put to flight, they could not stay to carry off their images, for they were a *burden to the weary beasts* (Isa. 46:1), and therefore they left them to fall with the rest of their baggage into the hands of the conqueror. Their images failed them, and gave them no assistance, and therefore they left their images to shift for themselves. God can make men weary of those things that they have been most fond of, and compel them to desert what they dote upon, and cast even *the idols of silver and gold to the moles and the bats*, Isa. 2:20, 21. David and his men converted to their own use the rest of the plunder, but the images they burnt, as God had appointed (Deu.

7:5): "You shall burn their graven images with fire, in token of your detestation of idolatry, and lest they should be a snare." Bishop Patrick well observes here that when the ark fell into the Philistines' hands it consumed them, but, when these images fell into the hands of Israel, they could not save themselves from being consumed.

IV. In the latter of these engagements God gave David some sensible tokens of his presence with him, bade him not fall upon them directly, as he had done before, but *fetch a compass behind them*, v. 23. 1. God appoints him to draw back, as *Israel stood still to see the salvation of the Lord*. 2. He promised him to charge the enemy himself, by an invisible host of angels, v. 24. "Thou shalt hear the *sound of a going*, like the march of an army in the air, *upon the tops of the mulberry trees*." Angels tread light, and he that can walk upon the clouds can, when he pleases, walk on the tops of trees, or (as bishop Patrick understands it) at the head of the mulberry-trees, that is, of the wood, or hedge-row of those trees. "And, by that sign, thou shalt know that *the Lord goes out before thee*; though thou see him not, yet thou shalt hear him, and faith shall come and be confirmed by hearing. He goes forth *to smite the host of the Philistines*." When David had himself smitten them (v. 20), he ascribed it to God: *The Lord has broken forth upon my enemies*, to reward him for which thankful acknowledgment the next time God did it himself alone, without putting him to any toil or peril. Those that own God in what he has done for them will find him doing more. But observe, Though God promised to *go before him and smite the Philistines*, yet David, when he heard the sound of the going must bestir himself and be ready to pursue the victory. Note, God's grace must quicken our endeavours. If God work in us both to will and to do, it does not follow that we must sit still, as those that have nothing to do, but we must therefore, *work out our own salvation* with all possible care and diligence, Phil. 2:12, 13. The sound of the going was, (1.) A signal to David when to move; it is comfortable going out when God goes before us. And, (2.) Perhaps it was an alarm to the enemy, and put them into confusion. Hearing the march of an army against their front, they retreated with precipitation, and fell into David's army which lay behind them in their rear. Of those whom God fights against it is said (Lev. 26:36), *The sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them*. (3.) The success of this is briefly set down, v. 25. David observed his orders, waited till God moved, and stirred them, but not till then. Thus he was trained up in a dependence on God and his providence. God performed his promise, went before him, and routed all the enemies' force, and David failed not to improve his advantages; he smote the Philistines, even to the borders of their own country. When the kingdom of the Messiah was to be set up, the apostles that were to beat down the devil's kingdom must not attempt any thing till they received the promise of the Spirit, who *came with a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind* (Acts 2:2), which was typified by this sound of the going on the tops of the mulberry trees; and, when they heard that, they must bestir themselves, and did so; they went forth conquering and to conquer.

## Chapter 6

The obscurity of the ark, during the reign of Saul, had been as great a grievance to Israel as the insults of the Philistines. David, having humbled the Philistines and mortified them in gratitude for that favour, and in pursuance of his designs for the public welfare, is here bringing up the ark to his own city, that it might be near him, and be an ornament and strength to his new foundation. Here is, I. An attempt to do it, which failed and miscarried. The design was well laid (v. 1, 2). But, 1. They were guilty of an error in carrying it in a cart (v. 3-5). 2. They were punished for that error by the sudden death of Uzzah (v. 6, 7), which was a great terror to David (v. 8, 9) and put a stop to his proceedings (v. 10, 11). II. The great joy and satisfaction with which it was at last done (v. 12-15). And, 1. The good understanding between David and his people (v. 17-19). 2. The uneasiness between David and his wife upon that occasion (v. 16, 20-23). And, when we consider that the ark was both the token of God's presence and a type of Christ, we shall see that this story is very instructive.

### Verses 1-5

We have not heard a word of the ark since it was lodged in Kirjath-jearim, immediately after its return out of its captivity among the Philistines (1 Sa. 7:1, 2), except that, once, Saul called for it, 1 Sa. 14:18. That which in former days had made so great a figure is now thrown aside, as a neglected thing, for many years. And, if now the ark was for so many years in a house, let it not seem strange that we find the church so long in the wilderness, Rev. 12:14. Perpetual visibility is no mark of the true church. God is graciously present with the souls of his people even when they want the external tokens of his presence. But now that David is settled in the throne the honour of the ark begins to revive, and *Israel's care of it to flourish again, wherein also, no doubt, the good people among them had been careful, but they lacked opportunity.* See Phil. 4:10.

I. Here is honourable mention made of the ark. Because it had not been spoken of a great while, now that it is spoken of observe how it is described (v. 2): it is *the ark of God whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubim, or at which the name, even the name of the Lord of hosts, was called upon, or upon which the name of the Lord of hosts was called, or because of which the name is proclaimed, the name of the Lord of hosts* (that is, God was greatly magnified in the miracles done before the ark), or *the ark of God, who is called the name* (Lev. 24:11, 16), *the name of the Lord of hosts, sitting on the cherubim upon it.* Let us learn hence, 1. To think and speak highly of God. He is the name above every name, *the Lord of hosts*, that has all the creatures in heaven and earth at his command, and receives homage from them all, and yet is pleased to dwell between the cherubim, over the propitiatory or mercy-seat, graciously manifesting himself to his people, reconciled in a Mediator, and ready to do them good. 2. To think and speak honourably of holy ordinances, which are to us, as the ark was to Israel, the tokens of God's presence (Mt. 28:2), and the means of our communion with him, Ps. 27:4. It is the honour of the ark that it is the ark of God; he is jealous for it, is magnified in it, his name is called upon it. The divine institution puts a beauty and grandeur upon holy ordinances, which otherwise have no form nor comeliness. Christ is our ark. In and by him God manifests his favour and communicates his grace to us, and accepts our adoration and addresses. II. Here is an honourable attendance given to the ark upon the removal of it. Now, at length, it is enquired after, David made

the motion (1 Chr. 13:1-3), and the heads of the congregation agreed to it, v. 4. All the chosen men of Israel are called together to grace the solemnity, to pay their respect to the ark, and to testify their joy in its restoration. The nobility and gentry, elders and officers, came to the number of 30,000 (v. 1), and the generality of the common people besides (1 Chr. 13:5); for, some think, it was done at one of the three great festivals. This would make a noble cavalcade, and would help to inspire the young people of the nation, who perhaps had scarcely heard of the ark, with a great veneration for it, for this was certainly a treasure of inestimable value which the king himself and all the great men waited upon, and were a guard to.

III. Here are great expressions of joy upon the removal of the ark, v. 5. David himself, and all that were with him that were musically inclined, made use of such instruments as they had to excite and express their rejoicing upon this occasion. It might well put them into a transport of joy to see the ark rise out of obscurity and move towards a public station. It is better to have the ark in a house than not at all, better in a house than a captive in Dagon's temple; but it is very desirable to have it in a tent pitched on purpose for it, where the resort to it may be more free and open. As secret worship is better the more secret it is, so public worship is better the more public it is; and we have reason to rejoice when restraints are taken off, and the ark of God finds welcome in the city of David, and has not only the protection and support, but the countenance and encouragement, of the civil powers; for joy of this they *played before the Lord*. Note, Public joy must always be as *before the Lord*, with an eye to him and terminating in him, and must not degenerate into that which is carnal and sensual. Dr. Lightfoot supposes that, upon this occasion, David penned the 68th Psalm, because it begins with that ancient prayer of Moses at the removing of the ark, *Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered*; and notice is taken there (v. 25) of the *singers and players on instruments* that attended, and (v. 27) of the princes of several of the tribes; and perhaps those words in the last verse, *O God, thou art terrible out of thy holy places*, were added upon occasion of the death of Uzzah.

IV. Here is an error that they were guilty of in this matter, that they carried the ark in a cart or carriage, whereas the priests should have carried it upon their shoulders, v. 3. The Kohathites that had the charge of the ark had no wagons assigned them, because *their service was to bear it upon their shoulders*, Num. 7:9. The ark was no such heavy burden but that they might, among them, have carried it as far as Mount Sion upon their shoulders, they needed not to put it in a cart like a common thing. It was no excuse for them that the Philistines had done so and were not punished for it; they knew no better, nor had they any priests or Levites with them to undertake the carrying of it; better carry it in a cart than that any of Dagon's priests should carry it. Philistines may cart the ark with impunity; but, if Israelites do so, they do it at their peril. And it mended the matter very little that it was a new cart; old or new, it was not what God had appointed. I wonder how so wise and good a man as David was, that conversed so much with the law of God, came to be guilty of such an oversight. We will charitably hope that it was because he was so extremely intent upon the substance of the service that he forgot to take care of this circumstance.

#### **Verses 6-11**

We have here Uzzah struck dead for touching the ark, when it was upon its journey towards the city of David, a sad providence, which damped their mirth, stopped the progress of the ark, and for the present, dispersed this great assembly, which had come together to attend it, and sent them home in a fright.

I. Uzzah's offence seems very small. He and his brother Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, in whose house the ark had long been lodged, having been used to attend it, to show their willingness to prefer the public benefit to their own private honour and advantage, undertook to drive the cart in which the ark was carried, this being perhaps the last service they were likely to do it; for others would be employed about it when it came to the city of David. Ahio went before, to clear the way, and, if need were, to lead the oxen. Uzzah followed close to the side of the cart. It happened that the oxen shook it, v. 6. The critics are not agreed about the signification of the original word: *They stumbled* (so our margin); *they kicked* (so some), perhaps against the goad with which Uzzah drove them; *they stuck in the mire*, by some. By some accident or other the ark was in danger of being overthrown. Uzzah thereupon laid hold of it, to save it from falling, we have reason to think with a very good intention, to preserve the reputation of the ark and to prevent a bad omen. Yet this was his crime. Uzzah was a Levite, but priests only might touch the ark. The law was express concerning the Kohathites, that, though they were to carry the ark by the staves, yet *they must not touch any holy thing, lest they die*, Num. 4:15. Uzzah's long familiarity with the ark, and the constant attendance he had given to it, might occasion his presumption, but would not excuse it.

II. His punishment for this offence seems very great (v. 7): *The anger of the Lord was kindled against him* (for in sacred things he is a jealous God) and he *smote him there for his rashness*, as the word is, and struck him dead upon the spot. There he sinned, and there he died, *by the ark of God*; even the mercy-seat would not save him. Why was God thus severe with him? 1. The touching of the ark was forbidden to the Levites expressly under pain of death—*lest they die*; and God, by this instance of severity, would show how he might justly have dealt with our first parents, when they had eaten that which was forbidden under the same penalty—*lest you die*. 2. God saw the presumption and irreverence of Uzzah's heart. Perhaps he affected to show, before this great assembly, how bold he could make with the ark, having been so long acquainted with it. Familiarity, even with that which is most awful, is apt to breed contempt. 3. David afterwards owned that Uzzah died for an error they were all guilty of, which was carrying the ark in a cart. Because it was not carried on the Levites' shoulders, *the Lord made that breach upon us*, 1 Chr. 15:13. But Uzzah was singled out to be made an example, perhaps because he had been most forward in advising that way of conveyance; however he had fallen into another error, which was occasioned by that. Perhaps the ark was not covered, as it should have been, with the covering of badgers' skins (Num. 4:6), and that was a further provocation. 4. God would hereby strike an awe upon the thousands of Israel, would convince them that the ark was never the less venerable for its having been so long in mean circumstances, and thus he would teach them to rejoice with trembling, and always to treat holy things with reverence and holy fear. 5. God would hereby teach us that a good intention will not justify a bad action; it will not suffice to say of that which is ill done that it was well meant. He will let us know that he can and will secure his ark, and needs not any man's sin to help him to do it. 6. If it was so great a crime for one to lay hold on the ark of the covenant that had no right to do so, what is it for those to lay claim to the privileges of the covenant that come not up to the terms of it? To the wicked God says, *What hast thou to do to take my covenant in thy mouth?* Ps. 50:16. *Friend, how camest thou in hither?* If the ark was so sacred, and not to be touched irreverently, what is the *blood of the covenant?* Heb. 10:29.

III. David's feelings on the infliction of this stroke were keen, and perhaps not altogether as they should have been. He should

have humbled himself under God's hand, confessed his error, acknowledged God's righteousness, and deprecated the further tokens of his displeasure, and then have gone on with the good work he had in hand. But we find, 1. He was displeased. It is not said because Uzzah had affronted God, but because God had made a breach upon Uzzah (v. 8): *David's anger was kindled*. It is the same word that is used for God's displeasure, v. 7. Because God was angry, David was angry and out of humour. As if God might not assert the honour of his ark, and frown upon one that touched it rudely, without asking David leave. Shall mortal man pretend to be more just than God, arraign his proceedings, or charge him with iniquity? David did not now act like himself, like *a man after God's own heart*. It is not for us to be displeased at any thing that God does, how unpleasing soever it is to us. The death of Uzzah was indeed an eclipse to the glory of a solemnity which David valued himself upon more than any thing else, and might give birth to some speculations among those that were disaffected to him, as if God were departing from him too; but he ought nevertheless to have subscribed to the righteousness and wisdom of God in it, and not to have been displeased at it. When we lie under God's anger we must keep under our own. 2. He was afraid, v. 9. It should seem he was afraid with amazement; for he said, *How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?* As if God sought advantages against all that were about him, and was so extremely tender of his ark that there was no dealing with it; and therefore better for him to keep it at a distance. *Que procul a Jove, procul a fulmine—To retire from Jove is to retire from the thunder-bolt*. He should rather have said, "Let the ark come to me, and I will take warning by this to treat it with more reverence." *Provoke me not* (says God, Jer. 25:6) *and I will do you no hurt*. Or this may be looked upon as a good use which David made of this tremendous judgment. He did not say, "Surely Uzzah was a sinner above all men, because he suffered such things," but is concerned for himself, as one conscious, not only of his own unworthiness of God's favour, but his obnoxiousness to God's displeasure. "God might justly strike me dead as he did Uzzah. *My flesh trembles for fear of thee,*" Ps. 119:120. This God intends in his judgments, that others may hear and fear. David therefore will not bring the ark into his own city (v. 10) till he is better prepared for its reception. 3. He took care to perpetuate the remembrance of this stroke by a new name he gave to the place: *Perez-uzzah, the breach of Uzzah*, v. 8. He had been lately triumphing in the breach made upon his enemies, and called the place *Baal-perazim, a place of breaches*. But here is a breach upon his friends. When we see one breach, we should consider that we know not where the next will be. The memorial of this stroke would be a warning to posterity to take heed of all rashness and irreverence in dealing about holy things; for *God will be sanctified in those that come nigh unto him*. 4. He lodged the ark in a good house, the house of Obed-edom a Levite, which happened to be near the place where this disaster happened, and there, (1.) It was kindly entertained and welcomed, and continued there *three months*, v. 10, 11. Obed-edom knew what slaughter the ark had made among the Philistines that imprisoned it and the Bethshemites that looked into it. He saw Uzzah struck dead for touching it, and perceived that David himself was afraid of meddling with it; yet he cheerfully invites it to his own house, and opens his doors to it without fear, knowing it was a *savour of death unto death* only to those that treated it ill. "O the courage," says bishop Hall, "of an honest and faithful heart! nothing can make God otherwise than amiable to his own people: even his very justice is lovely." (2.) It paid well for its entertainment: *The Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household*. The same hand that punished Uzzah's proud presumption rewarded Obed-edom's humble boldness, and made the ark to him a *savour of life*

*unto life.* Let none think the worse of the gospel for the judgements inflicted on those that reject it, but set in opposition to them the blessings it brings to those that duly receive it. None ever had, nor ever shall have, reason to say that *it is in vain to serve God.* Let masters of families be encouraged to keep up religion in their families, and to serve God and the interests of his kingdom with their houses and estates, for that is the way to bring a blessing upon all they have. The ark is a guest which none shall lose by that bid it welcome. Josephus says that, whereas before Obed-edom was poor, on a sudden, in these three months, his estate increased, to the envy of his neighbours. Piety is the best friend to prosperity. In wisdom's left hand are riches and honour. His household shared in the blessing. It is good living in a family that entertains the ark, for all about it will fare the better for it.

### **Verses 12-19**

We have here the second attempt to bring the ark home to the city of David; and this succeeded, though the former miscarried.

I. It should seem the blessing with which the house of Obed-edom was blessed for the ark's sake was a great inducement to David to bring it forward; for when that was told him (v. 12) he hastened to fetch it to him. For, 1. It was an evidence that God was reconciled to them, and his anger was turned away. As David could read God's frowns upon them all in Uzzah's stroke, so he could read God's favour to them all in Obed-edom's prosperity; and, if God be at peace with them, they can cheerfully go on with their design. 2. It was an evidence that the ark was not such a burdensome stone as it was taken to be, but, on the contrary, happy was the man that had it near him. Christ is indeed a *stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*, to those that are disobedient; but to those who believe he is a *corner-stone, elect, precious*, 1 Pt. 2:6-8. When David heard that Obed-edom had such joy of the ark, then he would have it in his own city. Note, The experience others have had of the gains of godliness should encourage us to be religious. Is the ark a blessing to others' houses? let us bid it welcome to ours; we may have it, and the blessing of it, without fetching it from our neighbours.

II. Let us see how David managed the matter now. 1. He rectified the former error. He did not put the ark in a cart now, but ordered those whose business it was to carry it on their shoulders. This is implied here (v. 13) and expressed 1 Chr. 15:15. Then we make a good use of the judgments of God on ourselves and others when we are awakened by them to reform and amend whatever has been amiss. 2. At their first setting out he offered sacrifices to God (v. 13) by way of atonement for their former errors and in a thankful acknowledgment of the blessings bestowed on the house of Obed-edom. Then we are likely to speed in our enterprises when we begin with God and give diligence to make our peace with him, When we attend upon God in holy ordinances our eye must be to the great sacrifice, to which we owe it that we are taken into covenant and communion with God, Ps. 50:5. 3. He himself attended the solemnity with the highest expressions of joy that could be (v. 14): *He danced before the Lord with all his might*; he leaped for joy, as one transported with the occasion, and the more because of the disappointment he met with the last time. It is a pleasure to a good man to see his errors rectified and himself in the way of his duty. His dancing, I suppose, was not artificial, by any certain rule or measure, nor do we find that any danced with him; but it was a natural expression of his great joy and exultation of mind. He did it with all his might; so we should perform all our religious services, as those that are intent upon them and desire to do them in the best manner. All our might is little enough to

be employed in holy duties: the work deserves it all. On this occasion David laid aside his imperial purple, and put on a plain linen ephod, which was light and convenient for dancing, and was used in religious exercises by those who were no priests, for Samuel wore one, 1 Sa. 2:18. That great prince thought it no disparagement to him to appear in the habit of a minister to the ark. 4. All the people triumphed in this advancement of the ark (v. 15): *They brought it up* into the royal city *with shouting*, and *with sound of trumpet*, so expressing their own joy in loud acclamations, and giving notice to all about them to rejoice with them. The public and free administration of ordinances, not only under the protection, but under the smiles, of the civil powers, is just matter of rejoicing to any people. 5. the ark was safely brought to, and honourably deposited in, the place prepared for it, v. 17. They set it in *the midst of the tabernacle*, or tent, *which David had pitched for it*; not the tabernacle which Moses reared, for that was at Gibeon (2 Chr. 1:13), and, we may suppose, being made of cloth, in so many hundred years it had gone to decay and was not fit to be removed; but this was a tent set up on purpose to receive the ark. He would not bring it into a private house, no, not his own, lest it should seem to be too much engrossed, and people's resort to it, to pray before it, should be less free; yet he would not build a house for it, lest that should supersede the building of a more stately temple in due time, and therefore, for the present, he placed it within curtains, under a canopy, in imitation of Moses's tabernacle. As soon as ever it was lodged, he offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings, in thankfulness to God that the business was now done without any more errors or breaches, and in supplication to God for the continuance of his favour. Note, All our joys must be sanctified both with praises and prayers; *for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. Now, it should seem, he penned the 132nd Psalm. 6. The people were then dismissed with great satisfaction. He sent them away, (1.) With a gracious prayer: *He blessed them in the name of the Lord of hosts* (v. 18), having not only a particular interest in heaven as a prophet, but an authority over them as a prince; *for the less is blessed of the better*, Heb. 7:7. He prayed to God to bless them, and particularly to reward them for the honour and respect they had now shown to his ark, assuring them they should be no losers by their journey, but the blessing of God upon their affairs at home would more than bear their charges. He testified his desire for their welfare by this prayer for them, and let them know they had a king that loved them. (2.) With a generous treat; for so it was, rather than a distribution of alms. The great men, it is probable, he entertained at his own house, but to the *multitude of Israel, men and women* (and *children*, says Josephus), he dealt to every one a *cake of bread* (a *spice-cake*, so some), a *good piece of flesh*—a *handsome decent piece* (so some)—a *part of the peace-offerings* (so Josephus), that they might feast with him *upon the sacrifice*, and a *flagon*, or bottle, *of wine*, v. 19. Probably he ordered this provision to be made for them at their respective quarters, and this he did, [1.] In token of his joy and gratitude to God. When the heart is enlarged in cheerfulness the hand should be opened in liberality. The feast of Purim was observed with *sending portions one to another*, Esth. 9:22. As those to whom God is merciful ought to show mercy in forgiving, so those to whom God is bountiful ought to exercise bounty in giving. [2.] To recommend himself to the people, and confirm his interest in them; for *every one is a friend to him that giveth gifts*. Those that cared not for his prayers would love him for his generosity; and this would encourage them to attend him another time if he saw cause to call them together.

### **Verses 20-23**

David, having dismissed the congregation with a blessing, *returned to bless his household* (v. 20), that is, to pray with them and for them, and to offer up his family thanksgiving for this national mercy. Ministers must not think that their public performances will excuse them from their family-worship; but when they have, with their instructions and prayers, blessed the solemn assemblies, they must return in the same manner to bless their households, for with them they are in a particular manner charged. David, though he had prophets, and priests, and Levites, about him, to be his chaplains, yet did not devolve the work upon them, but himself *blessed his household*. It is angels' work to worship God, and therefore surely that can be no disparagement to the greatest of men.

Never did David return to his house with so much pleasure and satisfaction as he did now that he had got the ark into his neighbourhood; and yet even this joyful day concluded with some uneasiness, occasioned by the pride and peevishness of his wife. Even the palaces of princes are not exempt from domestic troubles. David had pleased all the multitude of Israel, but Michal was not pleased with his dancing before the ark. For this, when he was at a distance, she scorned him, and when he came home she scolded him. She was not displeased at his generosity to the people, nor did she grudge the entertainment he gave them; but she thought he degraded himself too much in dancing before the ark. It was not her covetousness, but her pride, that made her fret.

I. When she saw David in the street dancing before the Lord she *despised him in her heart*, v. 16. She thought this mighty zeal of his for the ark of God, and the transport of joy he was in upon its coming home to him, was but a foolish thing, and unbecoming so great a soldier, and statesman, and monarch, as he was. It would have been enough for him to encourage the devotion of others, but she looked upon it as a thing below him to appear so very devout himself. "What a fool" (thinks she) "does my husband make of himself now! How fond is he of this ark, that might as well have lain still where it had lain for so many years! Much devotion has almost made him mad." Note, The exercises of religion appear very mean in the eyes of those that have little or no religion themselves.

II. When he came home in the very best disposition she began to upbraid him, and was so full of disdain and indignation that she could not contain till she had him in private, but went out to meet him with her reproaches. Observe,

1. How she taunted him (v. 20): "*How glorious was the king of Israel to-day! What a figure didst thou make to-day in the midst of the mob! How unbecoming thy post and character!*" Her contempt of him and his devotion began in the heart, but out of the abundance of that the mouth spoke. That which displeased her was his affection to the ark, which she wished he had no greater kindness for than she had: but she basely represents his conduct, in dancing before the ark, as lewd and immodest; and, while really she was displeased at it as a diminution to his honour, she pretended to dislike it as a reproach to his virtue, that he *uncovered himself in the eyes of the maid-servants*, as no man would have done but *one of the vain fellows* that cared not how much he shamed himself. We have no reason to think that this was true in fact. David, no doubt, observed decorum, and governed his zeal with discretion. But it is common for those that reproach religion thus to put false colours upon it and lay it under the most odious characters. To have abused any man thus for his pious zeal would have been very profane, but to abuse her own husband thus, whom she ought to have revered, and one whose prudence and virtue were above the reach of

malice itself to disparage, one who had shown such affection for her that he would not accept a crown unless he might have her restored to him (ch. 3:13), was a most base and wicked thing, and showed her to have more of Saul's daughter in her than of David's wife or Jonathan's sister.

2. How he replied to her reproach. He did not upbraid her with her treacherous departure from him to embrace the bosom of a stranger. He had forgiven that, and therefore had forgotten it, though, it may be, his own conscience, on this occasion, upbraided him with his folly in receiving her again (for that is said to pollute the land, Jer. 3:1), but he justifies himself in what he did.

(1.) He designed thereby to honour God (v. 21): *It was before the Lord*, and with an eye to him. Whatever invidious construction she was pleased to put upon it, he had the testimony of his conscience for him that he sincerely aimed at the glory of God, for whom he thought he could never do enough. Here he reminds her indeed of the setting aside of her father's house, to make way for him to the throne, that she might not think herself the most proper judge of propriety: *"God chose me before thy father, and appointed me to be ruler over Israel*, and now I am the fountain of honour; and, if the expressions of a warm devotion to God were looked upon as mean and unfashionable in thy father's court, yet *I will play before the Lord*, and thereby bring them into reputation again. And, if this be to be vile (v. 22), *I will be yet more vile.*" Note, [1.] We should be afraid of censuring the devotion of others though it may not agree with our sentiments, because, for aught that we know, the heart may be upright in it, and who are we that we should despise those whom God has accepted? [2.] If we can approve ourselves to God in what we do in religion, and do it as before the Lord, we need not value the censures and reproaches of men. If we appear right in God's eyes, no matter how mean we appear in the eyes of the world. [3.] The more we are vilified for well-doing the more resolute we should be in it, and hold our religion the faster, and bind it the closer to us, for the endeavours of Satan's agents to shake us and to shame us out of it. *I will be yet more vile.*

(2.) He designed thereby to humble himself: *"I will be base in my own sight*, and will think nothing too mean to stoop to for the honour of God." In the throne of judgment, and in the field of battle, none shall do more to support the grandeur and authority of a prince than David shall; but in acts of devotion he lays aside the thought of majesty, humbles himself to the dust before the Lord, joins in with the meanest services done in honour of the ark, and thinks all this no diminution to him. The greatest of men is less than the least of the ordinances of Jesus Christ.

(3.) He doubted not but even this would turn to his reputation among those whose reproach Michal pretended to fear: *Of the maid-servants shall I be had in honour.* The common people would be so far from thinking the worse of him for these pious condescensions that they would esteem and honour him so much the more. Those that are truly pious are sometimes *manifested in the consciences* even of those that speak ill of them, 2 Co. 5:11. Let us never be driven from our duty by the fear of reproach; for to be steady and resolute in it will perhaps turn to our reputation more than we think it will. Piety will have its praise. Let us not then be indifferent in it, nor afraid or ashamed to own it.

David was contented thus to justify himself, and did not any further animadvert upon Michal's insolence; but God punished her for it, writing her for ever childless from this time forward, v. 23. She unjustly reproached David for his devotion, and

therefore God justly put her under the perpetual reproach of barrenness. *Those that honour God he will honour; but those that despise him, and his servants and service, shall be lightly esteemed.*

## Chapter 7

Still the ark is David's care as well as his joy. In this chapter we have, I. His consultation with Nathan about building a house for it; he signifies his purpose to do it (v. 1, 2) and Nathan approves his purpose (v. 3). II. His communion with God about it. 1. A gracious message God sent him about it, accepting his purpose, countermanding the performance, and promising him an entail of blessings upon his family (v. 4–17). 2. A very humble prayer which David offered up to God in return to that gracious message, thankfully accepting God's promises to him, and earnestly praying for the performance of them (v. 18–29). And, in both these, there is an eye to the Messiah and his kingdom.

### Verses 1-3

Here is, I. David at rest. *He sat in his house* (v. 1), quiet and undisturbed, having no occasion to take the field: *The Lord had given him rest round about*, from all those that were enemies to his settlement in the throne, and he set himself to enjoy that rest. Though he was a man of war, he was *for peace* (Ps. 120:7) and did not delight in war. He had not been long at rest, nor was it long before he was again engaged in war; but at present he enjoyed a calm, and he was in his element when he was sitting in his house, meditating in the law of God.

II. David's thought of building a temple for the honour of God. He had built a palace for himself and a city for his servants; and now he thinks of building a habitation for the ark. 1. Thus he would make a grateful return for the honours God put upon him. Note, When God, in his providence, has remarkably done much for us, it should put us upon contriving what we may do for him and his glory. *What shall I render unto the Lord?* 2. Thus he would improve the present calm, and make a good use of the rest God had given him. Now that he was not called out to serve God and Israel in the high places of the field, he would employ his thoughts, and time, and estate, in serving him another way, and not indulge himself in ease, much less in luxury. When God, in his providence, gives us rest, and finds us little to do of worldly business, we must do so much the more for God and our souls. How different were the thoughts of David when he sat in his palace from Nebuchadnezzar's when he *walked in his!* Dan. 4:29, 30. That proud man thought of nothing but the might of his own power, and the honour of his own majesty; this humble soul is full of contrivance how to glorify God, and give honour to him. And how God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace and glory to the humble, the event showed. David considered (v. 2) the stateliness of his own habitation (*I dwell in a house of cedar*), and compared with that the meanness of the habitation of the ark (*the ark dwells within curtains*), and thought this incongruous, that he should dwell in a palace and the ark in a tent. David had been uneasy till he found out *a place for the ark* (Ps. 132:4, 5), and now he is uneasy till he finds out a better place. Gracious grateful souls, (1.) Never think they can do enough for God, but, when they have done much, are still projecting to do more and devising liberal things. (2.) They cannot enjoy their own accommodations while they see the church of God in distress and under a cloud. David can take little pleasure in a house of cedar for himself, unless the ark have one. Those who *stretched themselves upon beds of ivory*, and were *not grieved for the affliction of Joseph*, though they had David's music, had not David's spirit (Amos 6:4, 6) nor those who dwelt in their ceiled houses while God's house lay waste.

III. His communicating this thought to Nathan the prophet. He told him, as a friend and confidant, whom he used to advise with. Could not David have gone about it himself? Was it not a good work? Was not he himself a prophet? Yes, but *in the multitude of counsellors there is safety*. David told him, that by him he might know the mind of God. It was certainly a good work, but it was uncertain whether it was the will of God that David should have the doing of it.

IV. Nathan's approbation of it: *Go, do all that is in thy heart; for the Lord is with thee*, v. 3. We do not find that David told him that he purposed to build a temple, only that it was a trouble to him that there was not one built, from which Nathan easily gathered what was in his heart, and bade him go on and prosper. Note, We ought to do all we can to encourage and promote the good purposes and designs of others, and put in a good word, as we have opportunity, to forward a good work. Nathan spoke this, not in God's name, but as from himself; not as a prophet, but as a wise and good man; it was agreeable to the revealed will of God, which requires that all in their places should lay out themselves for the advancement of religion and the service of God, though it seems his secret will was otherwise, that David should not do this. It was Christ's prerogative always to speak the mind of God, which he perfectly knew. Other prophets spoke it only when the spirit of prophecy was upon them; but, if in any thing they mistook (as Samuel, 1 Sa. 16:6, and Nathan here) God soon rectified the mistake.

#### **Verses 4-17**

We have here a full revelation of God's favour to David and the kind intentions of that favour, the notices and assurances of which God sent him by Nathan the prophet, whom he entrusted to deliver this long message to him. The design of it is to take him off from his purpose of building the temple and it was therefore sent, 1. By the same hand that had given him encouragement to do it, lest, if it had been sent by any other, Nathan should be despised and insulted and David should be perplexed, being encouraged by one prophet and discouraged by another. 2. The same night, that Nathan might not continue long in an error nor David have his head any further filled with thoughts of that which he must never bring to pass. God might have said this to David himself immediately, but he chose to send it by Nathan, to support the honour of his prophets, and to preserve in David a regard to them. Though he be the head, they must be the eyes by which he must see the visions of the Almighty, and the tongue by which he must hear the word of God. He that delivered this long message to Nathan assisted his memory to retain it, that he might deliver it fully (he being resolved to deliver it faithfully) as he received it of the Lord. Now in this message,

I. David's purpose to build God a house is superseded. God took notice of that purpose, for he knows what is in man; and he was well pleased with it, as appears 1 Ki. 8:18, *Thou didst well that it was in thy heart*; yet he forbade him to go on with his purpose (v. 5): *"Shalt thou build me a house? No, thou shalt not* (as it is explained in the parallel place, 1 Chr. 17:4); there is other work appointed for thee to do, which must be done first." David is a man of war, and he must enlarge the borders of Israel, by carrying on their conquests. David is a sweet psalmist, and he must prepare psalms for the use of the temple when it is built, and settle the courses of the Levites; but his son's genius will better suit for building the house, and he will have a better treasure to bear the charge of it, and therefore let it be reserved for him to do. *As every man hath received the gift, so let him minister*. The building of a temple was to be a work of time, and preparation made for it; but it was a thing that had never

been spoken of till now. God tells him, 1. That hitherto he had never had a house built for him (v. 6), a tabernacle had served hitherto, and it might serve awhile longer. God regards not outward pomp in his service; his presence was as surely with his people when the ark was in a tent as when it was in a temple. David was uneasy that the ark was in curtains (a mean and movable habitation), but God never complained of it as any uneasiness to him. He did not dwell, but walk, and yet fainted not, nor was weary. Christ, like the ark, when here on earth walked in a tent or tabernacle, for he *went about doing good*, and dwelt not in any house of his own, till he ascended on high, to the mansions above, in his Father's house, and there he sat down. The church, like the ark, in this world is ambulatory, dwells in a tent, because its present state is both pastoral and military; its continuing city is to come. David, in his psalms, often calls the tabernacle a temple (as Ps. 5:7; 27:4; 29:9; 65:4; 138:2), because it answered the intention of a temple, though it was made but of curtains. Wise and good men value not the show, while they have the substance. David perhaps had more true devotion, and sweeter communion with God, in a house of curtains, than any of his successors in the house of cedar. 2. That he had never given any orders or directions, or the least intimation, to any of the sceptres of Israel, that is, to any of the judges, 1 Chr. 17:6 (for rulers are called *sceptres*, Eze. 19:14, the great Ruler is called so, Num. 24:17), concerning the building of the temple, v. 7. That worship only is acceptable which is instituted; why should David therefore design what God never ordained? Let him wait for a warrant, and then let him do it. Better a tent of God's appointing than a temple of his own inventing.

II. David is reminded of the great things God had done for him, to let him know that he was a favourite of heaven, though he had not the favour to be employed in this service, as also that God was not indebted to him for his good intentions, but, whatever he did for God's honour, God was beforehand with him, v. 8, 9. 1. He had raised him from a very mean and low condition: *He took him from the sheep-cote*. It is good for those who have come to great preferment to be often reminded of their small beginnings, that they may always be humble and thankful. 2. He had given him success and victory over his enemies (v. 9): *"I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest*, to protect thee when pursued, to prosper thee when pursuing. *I have cut off all thy enemies*, that stood in the way of thy advancement and settlement." 3. He had crowned him not only with power and dominion in Israel, but with honour and reputation among the nations about: *I have made thee a great name*. He had become famous for his courage, conduct, and great achievements, and was more talked of than any of the great men of his day. A great name is what those who have it have great reason to be thankful for and may improve to good purposes, but what those who have it not have no reason to be ambitious of: a good name is more desirable. A man may pass through the world very obscurely and yet very comfortably.

III. A happy establishment is promised to God's Israel, v. 10, 11. This comes in in a parenthesis, before the promises made to David himself, to let him understand that what God designed to do for him was for Israel's sake, that they might be happy under his administration, and to give him the satisfaction of foreseeing peace upon Israel, when it was promised him that he should *see his children's children*, Ps. 128:6. A good king cannot think himself happy unless his kingdom be so. The promises that follow relate to his family and posterity; these therefore, which speak of the settlement of Israel, intend the happiness of his own reign. Two things are promised:-1. A quiet place: *I will appoint a place for my people Israel*. It was appointed long

ago, yet they were disappointed, but now that appointment should be made good. Canaan should be clearly their own without any ejection or molestation. 2. A quiet enjoyment of that place: *The children of wickedness* (meaning especially the Philistines, who had been so long a plague to them) *shall not afflict them any more; but, as in the time that I caused judges to be over my people Israel, I will cause thee to rest from all thy enemies* (so v. 11 may be read), that is, "I will continue and complete that rest; the land shall rest from war, as it did under the judges."

IV. Blessings are entailed upon the family and posterity of David. David had purposed to build God a house, and, in requital, God promises to *build him a house*, v. 11. Whatever we do for God, or sincerely design to do though Providence prevents our doing it, *we shall in no wise lose our reward*. He had promised to make him a name (v. 9); here he promises to make him a house, which should bear up that name. It would be a great satisfaction to David, while he lived, to have the inviolable assurance of a divine promise that his family should flourish when he was dead. Next to the happiness of our souls, and the church of God, we should desire the happiness of our seed, that those who come of us may be praising God on earth when we are praising him in heaven.

1. Some of these promises relate to Solomon, his immediate successor, and to the royal line of Judah. (1.) That God would advance him to the throne. Those words, *when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers*, intimate that David himself should come to his grave in peace; and then *I will set up thy seed*. This favour was so much the greater because it was more than God had done for Moses, or Joshua, or any of the judges whom he called to feed his people. David's government was the first that was entailed; for the promise made to Christ of the kingdom was to reach to his spiritual seed. *If children, then heirs*. (2.) That he would settle him in the throne: *I will establish his kingdom* (v. 12), *the throne of his kingdom*, v. 13. His title shall be clear and uncontested, his interest confirmed, and his administration steady. (3.) That he would employ him in that good work of building the temple, which David had only the satisfaction of designing: *He shall build a house for my name*, v. 13. The work shall be done, though David shall not have the doing of it. (4.) That he would take him into the covenant of adoption (v. 14, 15): *I will be his father, and he shall be my son*. We need no more to make us and ours happy than to have God to be a Father to us and them; and all those to whom God is a Father he by his grace makes his sons, by giving them the disposition of children. If he be a careful, tender, bountiful Father to us, we must be obedient, tractable, dutiful children to him. The promise here speaks *as unto sons*. [1.] That his Father would correct him when there was occasion; for *what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?* Afflictions are an article of the covenant, and are not only consistent with, but flow from, God's fatherly love. *"If he commit iniquity, as it proved he did (1 Ki. 11:1), I will chasten him* to bring him to repentance, but it shall be *with the rod of men*, such a rod as men may wield—I will not *plead against him with the great power of God,*" Job 23:6. Or rather such a rod as *men may bear*—"I will consider his frame, and correct him with all possible tenderness and compassion when there is need, and no more than there is need of; it shall be with *the stripes*, the *touches* (so the word is) *of the children of men*; not a stroke, or wound, but a gentle touch." [2.] That yet he would not disinherit him (v. 15): *My mercy* (and that is the inheritance of sons) *shall not depart from him*. The revolt of the ten tribes from the house of David was their correction for iniquity, but the constant adherence of the other two to that family, which was a competent support of the royal

dignity, perpetuated the mercy of God to the seed of David, according to this promise; though that family was cut short, yet it was not cut off, as the house of Saul was. Never any other family swayed the sceptre of Judah than that of David. This is that covenant of royalty celebrated (Ps. 89:3, etc.) as typical of the covenant of redemption and grace.

2. Others of them relate to Christ, who is often called *David* and the *Son of David*, that Son of David to whom these promises pointed and in whom they had their full accomplishment. He was of the *seed of David*, Acts 13:23. To him God gave the *throne of his father David* (Lu. 1:32), all power both in heaven and earth, and authority to execute judgment. He was to build the gospel temple, a house for God's name, Zec. 6:12, 13. That promise, *I will be his Father, and he shall be my Son*, is expressly applied to Christ by the apostle, Heb. 1:5. But the establishing of his house, and his throne, and his *kingdom, for ever* (v. 13, and again, and a third time v. 16. *for ever*), can be applied to no other than Christ and his kingdom. David's house and kingdom have long since come to an end; it is only the Messiah's kingdom that is everlasting, and *of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*. The supposition of committing iniquity cannot indeed be applied to the Messiah himself, but it is applicable (and very comfortable) to his spiritual seed. True believers have their infirmities, for which they may expect to be corrected, but they shall not be cast off. Every transgression in the covenant will not throw us out of covenant. Now, (1.) This message Nathan faithfully delivered to David (v. 17); though, in forbidding him to build the temple, he contradicted his own words, yet he was not backward to do it when he was better informed concerning the mind of God. (2.) These promises God faithfully performed to David and his seed in due time. Though David came short of making good his purpose to build God a house, yet God did not come short of making good his promise to build him a house. Such is the tenour of the covenant we are under; though there are many failures in our performances, there are none in God's.

### **Verses 18-29**

We have here the solemn address David made to God, in answer to the gracious message God had sent him. We are not told what he said to Nathan; no doubt he received him very kindly and respectfully as God's messenger. But his answer to God he took himself, and did not send by Nathan. When ministers deliver God's message to us, it is not to them, but to God, that our hearts must reply; he understands the language of the heart, and to him we may come boldly. David had no sooner received the message than, while the impressions of it were fresh, he retired to return an answer. Observe,

I. The place he retired to: He *went in before the Lord*, that is, into the tabernacle where the ark was, which was the token of God's presence; before *that* he presented himself. God's will now is that men pray everywhere; but, wherever we pray, we must set ourselves as before the Lord and set him before us.

II. The posture he put himself into: He *sat before the Lord*. 1. It denotes the posture of his body. Kneeling or standing is certainly the most proper gesture to be used in prayer; but the Jews, from this instance, say, "It was allowed to the kings of the house of David to sit in the temple, and to no other." But this will by no means justify the ordinary use of that gesture in prayer, whatever may be allowed in a case of necessity. *David went in, and took his place before the Lord*, so it may be read; but, when he prayed, he stood up as the manner was. Or he *went in and continued before the Lord*, staid some time silently meditating, before he began his prayer, and then remained longer than usual in the tabernacle. Or, 2. It may denote the frame of

his spirit at this time. He went in, and composed himself before the Lord; thus we should do in all our approaches to God. *O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed.*

III. The prayer itself, which is full of the breathings of pious and devout affection towards God.

1. He speaks very humbly of himself and his own merits. So he begins as one astonished: *Who am I, O Lord God! and what is my house?* v. 18. God had reminded him of the meanness of his original (v. 8) and he subscribed to it; he had low thoughts, (1.) Of his personal merits: *Who am I?* He was upon all accounts a very considerable and valuable man. His endowments both of body and mind were extraordinary. His gifts and graces were eminent. He was a man of honour, success, and usefulness, the darling of his country and the dread of its enemies. Yet, when he comes to speak of himself before God, he says, "*Who am I? A man not worth taking notice of.*" (2.) Of the merits of his family: *What is my house?* His house was of the royal tribe, and descended from the prince of that tribe; he was allied to the best families of the country, and yet, like Gideon, thinks his family poor in Judah and himself *the least in his father's house*, Jdg. 6:15. David thus humbled himself when Saul's daughter was proposed to him for a wife (1 Sa. 18:18), but now with much more reason. Note, It very well becomes the greatest and best of men, even in the midst of the highest advancements, to have low and mean thoughts of themselves; for the greatest of men are worms, the best are sinners, and those that are highest advanced have nothing but what they have received: "*What am I, that thou hast brought me hitherto*, brought me to the kingdom, and to a settlement in it, and rest from all my enemies?" It intimates that he could not have reached this himself by his own management, if God had not brought him to it. All our attainments must be looked upon as God's vouchsafements.

2. He speaks very highly and honourably of God's favours to him. (1.) In what he had done for him: "*Thou hast brought me hitherto*, to this great dignity and dominion. Hitherto thou hast helped me." Though we should be left at uncertainty concerning further mercy, we have great reason to be thankful for that which has been done for us hitherto, Acts 26:22. (2.) In what he had yet further promised him. God had done great things for him already, and yet, as if those had been nothing, he had promised to do much more, v. 19. Note, What God has laid out upon his people is much, but what he has laid up for them is infinitely more, Ps. 31:19. The present graces and comforts of the saints are invaluable gifts; and yet, as if these were too little for God to bestow upon his children, he has spoken concerning them for a great while to come, even as far as eternity itself reaches. Of this we must own, as David here, [1.] That it is far beyond what we could expect: *Is this the manner of men?* that is, *First*, Can man expect to be so dealt with by his Maker? *Is this the law of Adam?* Note, Considering what the character and condition of man are, it is very surprising and amazing that God should deal with him as he does. Man is a mean creature, and therefore under a law of distance—unprofitable to God, and therefore under a law of disesteem and disregard—guilty and obnoxious, and therefore under a law of death and damnation. But how unlike are God's dealings with man to this law of Adam! He is brought near to God, purchased at a high rate, taken into covenant and communion with God; could this ever have been thought of? *Secondly*, Do men usually deal thus with one another? No, the way of our God is far above the manner of men. Though he be high, he has respect to the lowly; and is this the manner of men? Though he is offended by us, he beseeches us to be reconciled, waits to be gracious, multiplies his pardons: and is this the manner of men? Some give another sense of this,

reading it thus: *And this is the law of man, the Lord Jehovah*, that is, "This promise of one whose kingdom shall be established for ever must be understood of one that is a man and yet the Lord Jehovah, this must be the law of such a one. A Messiah from my loins must be man, but, reigning for ever, must be God." [2.] That beyond this there is nothing we can desire: "*And what can David say more unto thee?*" v. 20. What can I ask or wish for more? *Thou, Lord, knowest thy servant*, knowest what will make me happy, and what thou hast promised is enough to do so." The promise of Christ includes all. If that man, the Lord God, be ours, what can we ask or think of more? Eph. 3:20. The promises of the covenant of grace are framed by him that knows us, and therefore knows how to adapt them to every branch of our necessity. He knows us better than we know ourselves; and therefore let us be satisfied with the provision he has made for us. What can we say more for ourselves in our prayers than he has said for us in his promises?

3. He ascribes all to the free grace of God (v. 21), both the great things he had done for him and the great things he had made known to him. All was, (1.) For his word's sake, that is, for the sake of Christ the eternal Word; it is all owing to his merit. Or, "That thou mayest magnify thy word of promise above all thy name, in making it the stay and store-house of thy people." (2.) According to thy own heart, thy gracious counsels and designs, *ex mero motu—of thy own good pleasure. Even so, Father, because it seemed good in thy eyes*. All that God does for his people in his providences, and secures to them in his promises, is for his pleasure and for his praise, the pleasure of his will and the praise of his word.

4. He adores the greatness and glory of God (v. 22): *Thou art great, O Lord God! for there is none like thee*. God's gracious condescension to him, and the honour he had put upon him, did not at all abate his awful veneration for the divine Majesty; for the nearer any are brought to God the more they see of his glory, and the dearer we are in his eyes the greater he should be in ours. And this we acknowledge concerning God, that there is no being like him, nor any God besides him, and that what we have seen with our eyes of his power and goodness is according to all that we have heard with our ears, and the one half not told us.

5. He expresses a great esteem for the Israel of God, v. 23, 24. As there was none among the gods to be compared with Jehovah, so none among the nations to be compared with Israel, considering, (1.) The works he had done for them. He went to redeem them, applied himself to it as a great work, went about it with solemnity. *Elohim halecu, dii iveruni—Gods went*, as if there was the same consultation and concurrence of all the persons in the blessed Trinity about the work of redemption that there was about the work of creation, when God said, *Let us make man. Whom those that were sent of God went to redeem*; so the Chaldee, meaning, I suppose, Moses and Aaron. The redemption of Israel, as described here, was typical of our redemption by Christ in that, [1.] They were redeemed from the nations and their gods; so are we from all iniquity and all conformity to this present world. Christ came to save his people from their sins. [2.] They were redeemed to be a peculiar people unto God, purified and appropriated to himself, that he might make himself a great name and do for them great things. The honour of God, and the eternal happiness of the saints, are the two things aimed at in their redemption.

(2.) The covenant he had made with them, v. 24. It was, [1.] Mutual: "They to be a people to thee, and thou to be a God to

them; all their interests consecrated to thee, and all thy attributes engaged for them." [2.] Immutable: "Thou hast confirmed them." He that makes the covenant makes it sure and will make it good.

6. He concludes with humble petitions to God. (1.) He grounds his petitions upon the message which God had sent him (v. 27): *Thou hast revealed this to thy servant*, that is, "Thou hast of thy own good will given me the promise that thou wilt build me a house, else I could never have found in my heart to pray such a prayer as this. I durst not have asked such great things if I had not been directed and encouraged by thy promise to ask them. They are indeed too great for me to beg, but not too great for thee to give. Thy servant has found in his heart to pray this prayer;" so it is in the original, and the Septuagint. Many, when they go to pray, have their hearts to seek, but David's heart was found, that is, it was fixed, gathered in from its wanderings, and entirely engaged to the duty and employed in it. That prayer which is found in the tongue only will not please God; it must be found in the heart; the heart must be lifted up and poured out before God. *My son, give God thy heart*. (2.) He builds his faith and hopes to speed upon the fidelity of God's promise (v. 25): "*Thou art that God* (thou art *he*, even *that God*, the *Lord of hosts*, and *God of Israel*, or *that God whose words are true*, that God whom one may depend upon); and *thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant*, which I am therefore bold to pray for." (3.) Thence he fetches the matter of his prayer, and refers to that as the guide of his prayers. [1.] He prays for the performance of God's promise (v. 25): "Let the word be made good to me, *on which thou hast caused me to hope* (Ps. 119:49) *and do as thou hast said*; I desire no more, and I expect no less; so full is the promise, and so firm." Thus we must turn God's promises into prayers, and then they shall be turned into performances; for, with God, saying and doing are not two things, as they often are with men. God will do as he hath said. [2.] He prays for the glorifying of God's name (v. 26): *Let thy name be magnified for ever*. This ought to be the summary and centre of all our prayers, the Alpha and the Omega of them. Begin with *Hallowed be thy name*, and end with *Thine is the glory for ever*. "Whether I be magnified or no, *let thy name be magnified*." And he reckons that nothing magnifies God's name more than this, to say, with suitable affections, *The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel*. This bespeaks the *God of Israel gloriously great*, that he is the *Lord of hosts*; and this bespeaks the *Lord of hosts gloriously good*, that he is *God over Israel*. In both, *let his name be magnified for ever*. Let all the creatures and all the churches give him the glory of these two. David desired the performance of God's promise for the honour, not of his own name, but of God's. Thus the Son of David prayed, *Father, glorify thy name* (Jn. 12:28), and (Jn. 17:1), *Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee*. [3.] He prays for his house, for to that the promise has special reference, *First*, That it might be happy (v. 29): *Let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant*; and again, *with thy blessing*. "Let the house of thy servant be truly and eternally blessed. *Those whom thou blessest are blessed indeed*." The care of good men is very much concerning their families; and the best entail on their families is that of the blessing of God. The repetition of this request is not a vain repetition, but expressive of the value he had of the divine blessing, and his earnest desire of it, as all in all to the happiness of his family. *Secondly*, That the happiness of it might remain: "Let it be *established before thee* (v. 26); let it *continue for ever before thee*." v. 29. He prayed, 1. That the entail of the crown might not be cut off, but remain in his family, that none of his might ever forfeit it, but that they might walk before God, which would be their establishment. 2. That his kingdom might have its perfection and perpetuity in the kingdom of the

Messiah. When Christ for ever sat down on the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12), and received all possible assurance that his seed and throne shall be as the days of heaven, this prayer of David the son of Jesse for his seed was abundantly answered, that it might *continue before God for ever*. See Ps. 72:17. The perpetuity of the Messiah's kingdom is the desire and faith of all good people.

## Chapter 8

David having sought first the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof, settling the ark as soon as he was himself well settled, we are here told how all other things were added to him. Here is an account, I. Of his conquests. He triumphed, 1. Over the Philistines (v. 1). 2. Over the Moabites (v. 2). 3. Over the king of Zobah (v. 3, 4). 4. Over the Syrians (v. 5–8, 13). 5. Over the Edomites (v. 14). II. Of the presents that were brought him and the wealth he got from the nations he subdued, which he dedicated to God (v. 9–12). III. Of his court, the administration of his government (v. 15), and his chief officers (v. 16–18). This gives us a general idea of the prosperity of David's reign.

### Verses 1-8

God had given David rest from all his enemies that opposed him and made head against him; and he having made a good use of that rest, has now commission given him to make war upon them, and to act offensively for the avenging of Israel's quarrels and the recovery of their rights; for as yet they were not in full possession of that country to which by the promise of God they were entitled.

I. He quite subdued the Philistines, v. 1. They had attacked him when they thought him weak (ch. 5:17), and went by the worst then; but, when he found himself strong, he attacked them, and made himself master of their country. They had long been vexatious and oppressive to Israel. Saul got no ground against them; but David completed Israel's deliverance out of their hands, which Samson had begun long before, Jdg. 13:5. *Metheg-ammah* was *Gath* (the chief and royal city of the Philistines) and the towns belonging to it, among which there was a constant garrison kept by the Philistines on the hill Ammah (2 Sa. 2:24), which was *Metheg*, a *bridle* (so it signifies) or *curb* upon the people of Israel; this David took out of their hand and used it as a curb upon them. Thus, when the strong man is disarmed, the armour wherein he trusted is taken from him, and used against him, Lu. 11:22. And after the long and frequent struggles which the saints have had with the powers of darkness, like Israel with the Philistines, the Son of David shall tread them all under their feet and make the saints more than conquerors.

II. He smote the Moabites, and made them tributaries to Israel, v. 2. He divided the country into three parts, two of which he destroyed, casting down the strong-holds, and putting all to the sword; the third part he spared, to till the ground and be servants to Israel. Dr. Lightfoot says, "He laid them on the ground and measured them with a cord, who should be slain and who should live;" and this is called *meting out the valley of Succoth*, Ps. 60:6. The Jews say he used this severity with the Moabites because they had slain his parents and brethren, whom he put under the protection of the king of Moab during his exile, 1 Sa. 22:3, 4. He did it in justice, because they had been dangerous enemies to the Israel of God; and in policy, because, if left in their strength, they still would have been so. But observe, Though it was necessary that two-thirds should be cut off, yet the line that was to keep alive, though it was but one, is ordered to be a full line. Be sure to give that length enough; let the line of mercy be stretched to the utmost *in favorem vitae—so as to favour life*. Acts of indemnity must be construed so as to enlarge the favour. Now Balaam's prophecy was fulfilled, *A sceptre shall arise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab*, to the utmost of which the fatal line extended, Num. 24:17. The Moabites continued tributaries to Israel till after the

death of Ahab, 2 Ki. 3:4, 5. Then they rebelled and were never reduced.

III. He smote the Syrians or Aramites. Of them there were two distinct kingdoms, as we find them spoken of in the title of the 60th Psalm: *Aram Naharaim*,—*Syria of the rivers*, whose head city was Damascus (famed for its rivers, 2 Ki. 5:12), and *Aram Zobah*, which joined to it, but extended to Euphrates. These were the two northern crowns. 1. David began with the Syrians of Zobah, v. 3, 4. As he went to settle his border at the river Euphrates (for so far the land conveyed by the divine grant to Abraham and his seed did extend, Gen. 15:18), the king of Zobah opposed him, being himself possessed of those countries which belonged to Israel; but David routed his forces, and took his chariots and horsemen. The horsemen are here said to be 700, but 1 Chr. 18:4 they are said to be 7000. If they divided their horse by ten in a company, as it is probable they did, the captains and companies were 700, but the horsemen were 7000. David houghed the horses, cut the sinews of their hams, and so lamed them, and made them unserviceable, at least in war, God having forbidden them to *multiply horses*, Deu. 17:16. David reserved only 100 chariots out of 1000 for his own use: for he placed his strength not in chariots nor horses, but in the living God (Ps. 20:7), and wrote it from his own observation that *a horse is a vain thing for safety*, Ps. 33:16, 17. 2. The Syrians of Damascus coming in to the relief of the king of Zobah fell with him. 22,000 were slain in the field, v. 5. So that it was easy for David to make himself master of the country, and garrison it for himself, v. 6. The enemies of God's church, that think to secure themselves, will prove, in the end, to ruin themselves, by their confederacies with each other. *Associate yourselves, and you shall be broken in pieces*, Isa. 8:9.

IV. In all these wars, 1. David was protected: *The Lord preserved him whithersoever he went*. It seems, he went in person, and, in the cause of God and Israel, jeopardized his own life in the high places of the field; but God covered his head in the day of battle, which he often speaks of, in his psalms, to the glory of God. 2. He was enriched. He took the shields of gold which the servants of Hadadezer had in their custody (v. 7) and much brass from several cities of Syria (v. 8), which he was entitled to, not only *jure belli*—*by the uncontrollable right of the longest sword* ("Get it, and take it"); but by commission from heaven, and the ancient entail of these countries on the seed of Abraham.

#### **Verses 9-14**

Here is, 1. The court made to David by the king of Hamath, who, it seems was at this time at war with the king of Zobah. He hearing of David's success against his enemy, sent his own son ambassador to him (v. 9, 10), to congratulate him on his victory, to return him thanks for the favour he had done him in breaking the power of one he was in fear of, and to beg his friendship. Thus he not only secured but strengthened himself. And David lost nothing by taking this little prince under his protection, any more than the old Romans did by the like policy; for the wealth he had from the countries he conquered by way of spoil he had from this by way of present or gratuity: *Vessels of silver and gold*. Better get by composition than by compulsion. 2. The offering David made to God of the spoils of the nations and all the rich things that were brought him. He dedicated all to the Lord, v. 11, 12. This crowned all his victories, and made them far to out-shine Alexander's or Caesar's, that they sought their own glory, but he aimed at the glory of God. All the precious things he was master of were dedicated things, that is, they were designed for the building of the temple; and a good omen it was of kindness to the Gentiles in the fulness of

time, and of the making of God's house a house of prayer for all people, that the temple was built of the spoils and presents of Gentile nations, in allusion to which we find *the kings of the earth bringing their glory and honour into the new Jerusalem*, Rev. 21:24. Their gods of gold David burnt (2 Sa. 5:21), but their vessels of gold he dedicated. Thus in the conquest of a soul, by the grace of the Son of David, what stands in opposition to God must be destroyed, every lust mortified and crucified, but what may glorify him must be dedicated and the property of it altered. Even the merchandise and the hire must be *holiness to the Lord* (Isa. 23:18), the gain *consecrated to the Lord of the whole earth* (Mic. 4:13), and then it is truly our own and that most comfortably. 3. The reputation he got, in a particular manner, by his victory over the Syrians and their allies the Edomites, who acted in conjunction with them, as appears by comparing the title of the 60th Psalm, which was penned on this occasion, with v. 13. *He got himself a name* for all that conduct and courage which are the praise of a great and distinguished general. Something extraordinary, it is likely, there was in that action, which turned very much to his honour, yet he is careful to transfer the honour to God, as appears by the psalm he penned on this occasion, v. 12. It is through God that we do valiantly. 4. His success against the Edomites. They all became David's servants, v. 14. Now, and not till now, Isaac's blessing was accomplished, by which Jacob was made Esau's Lord (Gen. 27:37–40) and the Edomites continued long tributary to the kings of Judah, as the Moabites were to the kings of Israel, till, in Joram's time, they revolted (2 Chr. 21:8) as Isaac had there foretold that Esau should, in process of time, break the yoke from off his neck. Thus David by his conquests, (1.) Secured peace to his son, that he might have time to build the temple. And, (2.) Procured wealth for his son, that he might have wherewith to build it. God employs his servants variously, some in one employment, others in another, some in the spiritual battles, others in the spiritual buildings; and one prepares work for the other, that God may have the glory of all. All David's victories were typical of the success of the gospel against the kingdom of Satan, in which the Son of David rode forth, conquering and to conquer, and he shall reign till he has brought down all opposing rule, principality, and power: and he has, as David had (v. 2), a line to kill and a line to save; for the same gospel is to some a savour of life unto life, to others a savour of death unto death.

### **Verses 15-18**

David was not so engaged in his wars abroad as to neglect the administration of the government at home.

I. His care extended itself to all the parts of his dominion: *He reigned over all Israel* (v. 15); not only he had a right to reign over all the tribes, but he did so; they were all safe under his protection, and shared in the fruits of his good government.

II. He did justice with an unbiased unshaken hand: *He executed judgment unto all his people*, neither did wrong nor denied or delayed right to any. This intimates, 1. His industry and close application to business, his easiness of access and readiness to admit all addresses and appeals made to him. All his people, even the meanest, and those too of the meanest tribes, were welcome to his council-board. 2. His impartiality and the equity of his proceedings, in administering justice. He never perverted justice through favour or affection, nor had respect of persons in judgment. Herein he was a type of Christ, who was faithful and true, and who doth *in righteousness both judge and make war*, Rev. 19:11. See Ps. 72:1, 2.

III. He kept good order and good officers in his court. David being the first king that had an established government (for Saul's reign was short and unsettled) he had the modelling of the administration. In Saul's time we read of no other great officer than

Abner, that was captain of the host. But David appointed more officers: Joab that was general of the forces in the field, and Banaiah that was over the Cherethites and Pelethites, who were either the city train-bands (*archers and slingers*, so the Chaldee), or rather the life-guards, or standing force, that attended the king's person, the pretorian band, the militia. They were ready to do service at home, to assist in the administering of justice, and to preserve the public peace. We find them employed in proclaiming Solomon, 1 Ki. 1:38. 2. Two ecclesiastical officers: *Zadok and Ahimelech were priests*, that is, they were most employed in the priests' work under Abiathar, the high priest. 3. Two civil officers: one that was recorder, or remembrancer, to put the king in mind of business in its season (he was prime minister of state, yet not entrusted with the custody of the king's conscience, as they say of our lord chancellor, but only of the king's memory; let the king be put in mind of business and he would do it himself); another that was scribe, or secretary of state, that drew up public orders and despatches, and recorded judgments given. 4. David's sons, as they grew up to be fit for business, were made chief rulers; they had places of honour and trust assigned them, in the household, or in the camp, or in the courts of justice, according as their genius led them. They were chief about the king (so it is explained, 1 Chr. 18:17), employed near him, that they might be under his eye. Our Lord Jesus has appointed officers in his kingdom, for his honour and the good of the community; when he ascended on high *he gave these gifts* (Eph. 4:8–11), *to every man his work*, Mk. 13:34. David made his sons chief rulers; but all believers, Christ's spiritual seed, are better preferred, for they are *made to our God kings and priests*, Rev. 1:6.

## Chapter 9

The only thing recorded in this chapter is the kindness David showed to Jonathan's seed for his sake. I. The kind enquiry he made after the remains of the house of Saul, and his discovery of Mephibosheth (v. 1-4). II. The kind reception he gave to Mephibosheth, when he was brought to him (v. 5-8). III. The kind provision he made for him and his (v. 9-13).

### Verses 1-8

Here is, I. David's enquiry after the remains of the ruined house of Saul, v. 1. This was a great while after his accession to the throne, for it should seem that Mephibosheth, who was but five years old when Saul died, had now a son born, v. 12. David had too long forgotten his obligations to Jonathan, but now, at length, they are brought to his mind. It is good sometimes to bethink ourselves whether there be any promises or engagements that we have neglected to make good; better do it late than never. The compendium which Paul gives us of the life of David is this (Acts 13:36), that he *served his generation according to the will of God*, that is, he was a man that made it his business to do good; witness this instance, where we may observe, 1. That he sought an opportunity to do good. He might perhaps have satisfied his conscience with the performance of his promise to Jonathan if he had been only ready, upon request or application made to him by any of his seed, to help and succour them. But he does more, he enquires of those about him first (v. 1), and, when he met with a person that was likely to inform him, asked him particularly, *Is there any yet left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness?* v. 3. "Is there any, not only to whom I may do justice (Num. 5:8), but to whom I may show kindness?" Note, Good men should seek opportunities of doing good. *The liberal deviseth liberal things*, Isa. 32:8. For, the most proper objects of our kindness and charity are such as will not be frequently met with without enquiry. The most necessitous are the least clamorous.

2. Those he enquired after were the remains of the house of Saul, to whom he would show kindness for Jonathan's sake: *Is there any left of the house of Saul?* Saul had a very numerous family (1 Chr. 8:33), enough to replenish a country, and was yet so emptied that none of it appeared; but it was a matter of enquiry, *Is there any left?* See how the providence of God can empty full families; see how the sin of man will do it. Saul's was a bloody house, no marvel it was thus reduced, ch. 21:1. But, though God visited the iniquity of the father upon the children, David would not. "Is there any left that I can show kindness to, not for Saul's own sake, but for Jonathan's?" (1.) Saul was David's sworn enemy, and yet he would show kindness to his house with all his heart and was forward to do it. He does not say, "Is there any left of the house of Saul, that I may find some way to take them off, and prevent their giving disturbance to me or my successor?" It was against Abimelech's mind that any one was left of the house of Gideon (Jdg. 9:5), and against Athaliah's mind that any one was left of *the seed royal*, 2 Chr. 22:10, 11. Those were usurped governments. David's needed no such vile supports. He was desirous to show kindness to the house of Saul, not only because he trusted in God and feared not what they could do unto him, but because he was of a charitable disposition and forgave what they had done to him. Note, We must evince the sincerity of our forgiving those that have been any way unjust or injurious to us by being ready, as we have opportunity, to show kindness both to them and theirs. We must not only not avenge ourselves upon them, but we must love them, and *do them good* (Mt. 5:44), and not be backward to do any office of love and

good-will to those that have done us many an injury. 1 Pt. 3:9,—*but, contrari-wise, blessing*. This is the way to overcome evil, and to find mercy for ourselves and ours, when we or they need it. (2.) Jonathan was David's sworn friend, and therefore he would show kindness to his house. This teaches us, [1.] To be mindful of our covenant. The kindness we have promised we must conscientiously perform, though it should not be claimed. God is faithful to us; let us not be unfaithful to one another. [2.] To be mindful of our friendships, our old friendships. Note, Kindness to our friends, even to them and theirs, is one of the laws of our holy religion. *He that has friends must show himself friendly*, Prov. 18:24. If Providence has raised us, and our friends and their families are brought low, yet we must not forget former acquaintance, but rather look upon that as giving us so much the fairer opportunity of being kind to them: then our friends have most need of us and we are in the best capacity to help them. Though there be not a solemn league of friendship tying us to this constancy of love, yet there is a sacred law of friendship no less obliging, that to him that is in misery pity should be shown by his friend, Job 6:14. *A brother is born for adversity*. Friendship obliges us to take cognizance of the families and surviving relations of those we have loved, who, when they left us, left behind them their bodies, their names, and their posterity, to be kind to.

3. The kindness he promised to show them he calls the *kindness of God*; not only great kindness, but, (1.) Kindness in pursuance of the covenant that was between him and Jonathan, to which God was a witness. See 1 Sa. 20:42. (2.) Kindness after God's example; for we must be merciful as he is. He spares those whom he has advantage against, and so must we. Jonathan's request to David was (1 Sa. 20:14, 15), "*Show me the kindness of the Lord, that I die not, and the same to my seed.*" The kindness of God is some greater instance of kindness than one can ordinarily expect from men. (3.) It is kindness done after a godly sort, and with an eye to God, and his honour and favour.

II. Information given him concerning Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. Ziba was an old retainer to Saul's family, and knew the state of it. He was sent for and examined, and informed the king that Jonathan's son was living, but *lame* (how he came to be so we read before, ch. 4:4), and that he lived in obscurity, probably among his mother's relations in Lo-debar in Gilead, on the other side Jordan, where he was *forgotten, as a dead man out of mind*, but bore this obscurity the more easily because he could remember little of the honour he fell from.

III. The bringing of him to court. The king sent (Ziba, it is likely) to bring him up to Jerusalem with all convenient speed, v. 5. Thus he eased Machir of his trouble, and perhaps recompensed him for what he had laid out on Mephibosheth's account. This Machir appears to have been a very generous free-hearted man, and to have entertained Mephibosheth, not out of any disaffection to David or his government, but in compassion to the reduced son of a prince, for afterwards we find him kind to David himself when he fled from Absalom. He is named (ch. 17:27) among those that furnished the king with what he wanted at Mahanaim, though David, when he sent for Mephibosheth from him, little thought that the time would come when he himself would gladly be beholden to him: and perhaps Machir was then the more ready to help David in recompence for his kindness to Mephibosheth. Therefore we should be forward to give, because we know not but we ourselves may some time be in want, Eccl. 11:2. *And he that watereth shall be watered also himself*, Prov. 11:25. Now,

1. Mephibosheth presented himself to David with all the respect that was due to his character. Lame as he was, *he fell on his*

*face, and did homage*, v. 6. David had thus made his honours to Mephibosheth's father, Jonathan, when he was next to the throne (1 Sa. 20:41, *he bowed himself to him three times*), and now Mephibosheth, in like manner, addresses him, when affairs are so completely reversed. Those who, when they are in inferior relations, show respect, shall, when they come to be advanced, have respect shown to them.

2. David received him with all the kindness that could be. (1.) He spoke to him as one surprised, but pleased to see him.

"Mephibosheth! Why, is there such a man living?" He remembered his name, for it is probable that he was born about the time of the intimacy between him and Jonathan. (2.) He bade him not be afraid: *Fear not*, v. 7. It is probable that the sight of David put him into some confusion, to free him from which he assures him that he sent for him, not out of any jealousy he had of him, nor with any bad design upon him, but to show him kindness. Great men should not take a pleasure in the timorous approaches of their inferiors (for the great God does not), but should encourage them. (3.) He gives him, by grant from the crown, *all the land of Saul his father*, that is, his paternal estate, which was forfeited by Ishbosheth's rebellion and added to his own revenue. This was a real favour, and more than giving him a kind word. True friendship will be generous. (4.) Though he had thus given him a good estate, sufficient to maintain him, yet for Jonathan's sake (whom perhaps he saw some resemblance of in Mephibosheth's face), he will take him to be a constant guest at his own table, where he will not only be comfortably fed, but have company and attendance suitable to his birth and quality. Though Mephibosheth was lame and unsightly, and does not appear to have had any great fitness for business, yet, for his good father's sake, David took him to be one of his family.

3. Mephibosheth accepts this kindness with great humility and self-abasement. He was not one of those that take every favour as a debt, and think every thing too little that their friends do for them; but, on the contrary, speaks as one amazed at the grants David made him (v. 8): *What is thy servant, that thou shouldst look upon such a dead dog as I am?* How does he vilify himself! Though the son of a prince, and the grandson of a king, yet his family being under guilt and wrath, and himself poor and lame, he calls himself *a dead dog* before David. Note, It is good to have the heart humble under humbling providences. If, when divine Providence brings our condition down, divine grace brings our spirits down with it, we shall be easy. And those who thus humble themselves shall be exalted. How does he magnify David's kindness! It would have been easy to lessen it if he had been so disposed. Had David restored him his father's estate? It was but giving him his own. Did he take him to his table? This was policy, that he might have an eye upon him. But Mephibosheth considered all that David said and did as very kind, and himself as less than the least of all his favours. See 1 Sa. 18:18.

### **Verses 9-13**

The matter is here settled concerning Mephibosheth. 1. This grant of his father's estate is confirmed to him, and Ziba called to be a witness to it (v. 9); and, it should seem, Saul had a very good estate, for his father was a mighty man of substance (1 Sa. 9:1), and he had fields and vineyards to bestow, 1 Sa. 22:7. Be it ever so much, Mephibosheth is now master of it all. 2. The management of the estate is committed to Ziba, who knew what it was and how to make the most of it, in whom, having been his father's servant, he might confide, and who, having a numerous family of sons and servants, had hands sufficient to be employed about it, v. 10. Thus Mephibosheth is made very easy, having a good estate without care, and is in a fair way of

being very rich, having much coming in and little occasion to spend, himself being kept at David's table. Yet he must have food to eat besides his own bread, provisions for his son and servants; and Ziba's sons and servants would come in for their share of his revenue, for which reason perhaps their number is here mentioned, *fifteen sons and twenty servants*, who would require nearly all there was; *for as goods are increased those are increased that eat them, and what good has the owner thereof save the beholding of them with his eyes?* Eccl. 5:11. *All that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth* (v. 12), that is, they all lived upon him, and made a prey of his estate, under pretence of waiting on him and doing him service. The Jews have a saying, "He that multiplies servants multiplies thieves." Ziba is now pleased, for he loves wealth, and will have abundance. "As *the king has commanded, so will thy servant do*, v. 11. Let me alone with the estate: and *as for Mephibosheth*" (they seem to be Ziba's words), "if the king please, he need not trouble the court, *he shall eat at my table*, and be as well treated *as one of the king's sons.*" But David will have him at his own table, and Mephibosheth is as well pleased with his post as Ziba with his. How unfaithful Ziba was to him we shall find afterwards, ch. 16:3. Now because David was a type of Christ, his Lord and son, his root and offspring, let his kindness to Mephibosheth serve to illustrate the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards fallen man, which yet he was under no obligation to, as David was to Jonathan. Man was convicted of rebellion against God, and, like Saul's house, under a sentence of rejection from him, was not only brought low and impoverished, but lame and impotent, made so by the fall. The Son of God enquires after this degenerate race, that enquired not after him, comes to seek and save them. To those of them that humble themselves before him, and commit themselves to him, he restores the forfeited inheritance, he entitles them to a better paradise than that which Adam lost, and takes them into communion with himself, sets them with his children at his table, and feasts them with the dainties of heaven. *Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus magnify him!*

## Chapter 10

This chapter gives us an account of a war David has with the Ammonites and the Syrians their allies, with the occasion and success of it. I. David sent a friendly embassy to Hanun king of the Ammonites (v. 1, 2). II. He, upon a base surmise that it was ill intended, abused David's ambassadors (v. 3, 4). III. David resenting it (v. 5), and the Ammonites prepared for war against him (v. 6). IV. David carried the war into their country, sent against them. Joab and Abishai, who addressed themselves to the battle with a great deal of conduct and bravery (v. 7–12). V. The Ammonites, and the Syrians their allies, were totally routed (v. 13, 14). VI. The forces of the Syrians, which rallied again, were a second time defeated (v. 15–19). Thus did David advance his own reputation for gratitude, in returning kindness, and for justice, in repaying injuries.

### Verses 1-5

Here is, I. The great respect David paid to his neighbour, the king of the Ammonites, v. 1, 2. 1. The inducement to it was some kindness he had formerly received from Nahash the deceased king. He *showed kindness to me*, says David (v. 2), and therefore (having lately had satisfaction in showing kindness to Mephibosheth for his father's sake) he resolves to show kindness to his son, and to keep up a friendly correspondence with him. Thus the pleasure of doing one kind and generous action should excite us to another. Nahash had been an enemy to Israel, a cruel enemy (1 Sa. 11:2), and yet had shown kindness to David, perhaps only in contradiction to Saul, who was unkind to him: however, if David receives kindness, he is not nice in examining the grounds and principles of it, but resolves gratefully to return it. If a Pharisee give alms in pride, though God will not reward him, yet he that receives the alms ought to return thanks for it. God knows the heart, but we do not. 2. The particular instance of respect was sending an embassy to condole with him on his father's death, as is common among princes in alliance with each other: *David sent to comfort him*. Note, It is a comfort to children, when their parents are dead, to find that their parents' friends are theirs, and that they intend to keep up an acquaintance with them. It is a comfort to mourners to find that there are those who mourn with them, are sensible of their loss and share with them in it. It is a comfort to those who are honouring the memory of their deceased relations to find there are others who likewise honour it and who had a value for those whom they valued.

II. The great affront which Hanun the king of the Ammonites put upon David in his ambassadors. 1. He hearkened to the spiteful suggestions of his princes, who insinuated that David's ambassadors, under pretence of being comforters, were sent as spies, v. 3. False men are ready to think others as false as themselves; and those that bear ill-will to their neighbours are resolved not to believe that their neighbours bear any good-will to them. They would not thus have imagined that David dissembled but that they were conscious to themselves that they could have dissembled, to serve a turn. Unfounded suspicion argues a wicked mind. Bishop Patrick's note on this is that "there is nothing so well meant but it may be ill interpreted, and is wont to be so by men who love nobody but themselves." Men of the greatest honour and virtue must not think it strange if they be thus misrepresented. *Charity thinketh no evil*. 2. Entertaining this vile suggestion, he basely abused David's ambassadors, like a man of a sordid villainous spirit, that was fitter to rake a kennel than to wear a crown. If he had any reason to suspect

that David's messengers came on a bad design, he would have done prudently enough to be upon the reserve with them, and to dismiss them as soon as he could; but it is plain he only sought an occasion to put the utmost disgrace he could upon them, out of an antipathy to their king and their country. They were themselves men of honour, and much more so as they represented the prince that sent them; they and their reputation were under the special protection of the law of nations; they put a confidence in the Ammonites, and came among them unarmed; yet Hanun used them like rogues and vagabonds, and worse, *shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the midst*, to expose them to the contempt and ridicule of his servants, that they might make sport with them and that these men might seem vile.

III. David's tender concern for his servants that were thus abused. He sent to meet them, and to let them know how much he interested himself in their quarrel and how soon he would avenge it, and directed them to stay at Jericho, a private place, where they would not have occasion to come into company, till that half of their beards which was shaved off had grown to such a length that the other half might be decently cut to it, v. 5. The Jews wore their beards long, reckoning it an honour to appear aged and grave; and therefore it was not fit that persons of their rank and figure should appear at court unlike their neighbours. Change of raiment, it is likely, they had with them, to put on, instead of that which was cut off; but the loss of their beards would not be so soon repaired; yet in time these would grow again, and all would be well. Let us learn not to lay too much to heart unjust reproaches; after awhile they will wear off of themselves, and turn only to the shame of their authors, while the injured reputation in a little time grows again, as these beards did. God will *bring forth thy righteousness as the light*, therefore *wait patiently for him*, Ps. 37:6, 7.

Some have thought that David, in the indignity he received from the king of Ammon, was but well enough served for courting and complimenting that pagan prince, whom he knew to be an inveterate enemy to Israel, and might now remember how, when he would have put out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh-Gilead, he designed that, as he did this, for a *reproach upon all Israel*, 1 Sam. 11:2. What better usage could he expect from such a spiteful family and people? Why should he covet the friendship of a people whom Israel must have so little to do with as that an Ammonite might not *enter into the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation?* Deu. 23:3.

#### **Verses 6-14**

Here we have, I. The preparation which the Ammonites made for war, v. 6. They saw they had made themselves very odious to David and obnoxious to his just displeasure. This they might easily have foreseen when they abused his ambassadors, which was no other than a challenge to war, and a bold defiance of him. Yet, it seems, they had not considered how unable they were, with their thousands, to meet his; for now they found themselves an unequal match, and were forced to hire forces of other nations into their service. Thus sinners daringly provoke God, and expose themselves to his wrath, and never consider that he is *stronger than they*, 1 Co. 10:22. The Ammonites gave the affront first, and they were the first that raised forces to justify it. Had they humbled themselves, and begged David's pardon, probably an honorary satisfaction might have atoned for the offence. But, when they were thus desperately resolved to stand by what they had done, they courted their own ruin.

II. The speedy descent which David's forces made upon them, v. 7. When David heard of their military preparations, he sent

Joab with a great army to attack them, v. 7. Those that are at war with the Son of David not only give the provocation, but begin the war; for he *waits to be gracious*, but they *strengthen themselves against him*, and therefore, *if they turn not, he will whet his sword*, Ps. 7:12. God has forces to send against those that set his wrath at defiance (Isa. 5:19), which will convince them, when it is too late, that *none ever hardened his heart against God and prospered*. It was David's prudence to carry the war into their country, and fight them at the entering in of the gate of their capital city, *Rabbah*, as some think, or *Medeba*, a city in their borders, before which they pitched to guard their coast, 1 Chr. 19:7. Such are the terrors and desolations of war that every good prince will, in love to his people, keep it as much as may be at a distance from them.

III. Preparations made on both sides for an engagement. 1. The enemy disposed themselves into two bodies, one of Ammonites, which, being their own, were posted at the gate of the city; the other of Syrians, whom they had taken into their pay, and who were therefore posted at a distance in the field, to charge the forces of Israel in the flank or rear, while the Ammonites charged them in the front, v. 8. 2. Joab, like a wise general, was soon aware of the design, and accordingly divided his forces: the choicest men he took under his own command, to fight the Syrians, whom probably he knew to be the better soldiers, and, being hired men, better versed in the arts of war, v. 9. The rest of the forces he put under the command of Abishai his brother, to engage the Ammonites, v. 10. It should seem, Joab found the enemy so well prepared to receive them that his conduct and courage were never so tried as now.

IV. Joab's speech before the battle, v. 11, 12. It is not long, but pertinent, and brave. 1. He prudently concert the matter with Abishai his brother, that the dividing of the forces might not be the weakening of them, but that, which part soever was borne hard upon, the other should come in to its assistance. He supposes the worst, that one of them should be obliged to give back; and in that case, upon a signal given, the other should send a detachment to relieve it. Note, Mutual helpfulness is brotherly duty. If occasion be, *thou shalt help me, and I will help thee*. Christ's soldiers should thus strengthen one another's hands in their spiritual warfare. The strong must succour and help the weak. Those that through grace are conquerors over temptation must counsel, and comfort, and pray for, those that are tempted. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*, Lu. 22:32. The members of the natural body help one another, 1 Co. 12:21. 2. He bravely encourages himself, and his brother, and the rest of the officers and soldiers, to do their utmost. Great dangers put an edge upon true courage. When Joab saw the front of the battle was against him, both before and behind, instead of giving orders to make an honourable retreat, he animated his men to charge so much more furiously: *Be of good courage and let us play the men*, not for pay and preferment, for honour and fame, but *for our people, and for the cities of our God*, for the public safety and welfare, in which the glory of God is so much interested. *God and our country* was the word. "Let us be valiant, from a principle of love to Israel, that are our people, descended from the same stock, for whom we are employed, and in whose peace we shall have peace; and from a principle of love to God, for they are his cities that we are fighting in the defence of." The relation which any person or thing stands in to God should endear it to us, and engage us to do our utmost in its service. 3. He piously leaves the issue with God: "When we have done our part, according to the duty of our place, *let the Lord do that which seemeth to him good*." Let nothing be wanting in us, whatever the success be; let God's work be done by us, and then God's will be done concerning us. When we

make conscience of doing our duty we may, with the greatest satisfaction, leave the event with God, not thinking that our valour binds him to prosper us, but that still he may do as he pleases, yet hoping for his salvation in his own way and time. V. The victory Joab obtained over the confederate forces of Syria and Ammon, v. 13, 14. He provided for the worst, and put the case that the Syrians and Ammonites might prove too strong for him (v. 11), but he proved too strong for them both. We do not hinder our success by preparing for disappointment. The Syrians were first routed by Joab, and then the Ammonites by Abishai; the Ammonites seem not to have fought at all, but, upon the retreat of the Syrians, to have fled into the city. It is a temptation to soldiers to fly when they have a city at their backs to fly to. It is one thing when men may either fight or fly and another thing when they must either fight or die.

### **Verses 15-19**

Here is, 1. A new attempt of the Syrians to recover their lost honour and to check the progress of David's victorious arms. The forces that were lately dispersed rallied again, and *gathered themselves together*, v. 15. Even the baffled cause will make head as long as there is any life in it; the enemies of the Son of David do so, Matt. 22:34; Rev. 19:19. These, being conscious of their insufficiency, called in the aid of their allies and dependencies on the other side of *the river* (v. 16), and, being thus recruited, they hoped to make their part good against Israel, but *they knew not the thoughts of the Lord, for he gathered them as sheaves into the floor*; see Mic. 4:11–13. 2. The defeat of this attempt by the vigilance and valour of David, who, upon notice of their design, resolved not to stay till they attacked him, but went in person at the head of his army over Jordan (v. 17), and, in a pitched battle, routed the Syrians (v. 18), slew 7000 men, who belonged to 700 chariots, and 40,000 other soldiers, horse and foot, as appears by comparing 1 Chr. 19:18. Their general was killed in the battle, and David came home in triumph, no doubt. 3. The consequence of this victory over the Syrians. (1.) David gained several tributaries, v. 19. *The kings*, or petty princes, that had been subject to Hadarezer, when they saw how powerful David was, very wisely *made peace with Israel*, whom they found they could not make war with, *and served them*, since they were able to give them protection. Thus the promise made to Abraham (Gen. 15:18), and repeated to Joshua (ch. 1:4), that the borders of Israel should extend to the river Euphrates, was performed, at length. (2.) The Ammonites lost their old allies: *The Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon*, not because they had an unrighteous cause (justifying a crime which was a breach of the law of nations), but because they found it was an unsuccessful cause. It is dangerous helping those that have God against them; for, when they fall, their helpers will fall with them.

Jesus Christ, the Son of David, sent his ambassadors, his apostles and ministers, after all his servants the prophets, to the Jewish church and nation; but they treated them shamefully, as Hanun did David's ambassadors, mocked them, abused them, slew them; and it was this that filled the measure of their iniquity, and brought upon them ruin without remedy (Mt. 21:35, 41, 22:7; compare 2 Chr. 26:16); for Christ takes the affronts and injuries done to his ministers as done to himself and will avenge them accordingly.

## Chapter 11

What David said of the mournful report of Saul's death may more fitly be applied to the sad story of this chapter, the adultery and murder David was guilty of.—"Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon." We wish we could draw a veil over it, and that it might never be known, might never be said, that David did such things as are here recorded of him. But it cannot, it must not, be concealed. The scripture is faithful in relating the faults even of those whom it most applauds, which is an instance of the sincerity of the penmen, and an evidence that it was not written to serve any party: and even such stories as these "were written for our learning," that "he that thinks he stands may take heed lest he fall," and that others' harms may be our warnings. Many, no doubt, have been emboldened to sin, and hardened in it, by this story, and to them it is a "savour of death unto death;" but many have by it been awakened to a holy jealousy over themselves, and constant watchfulness against sin, and to them it is a "savour of life unto life." Those are very great sins, and greatly aggravated, which here we find David guilty of. I. He committed adultery with Bath-sheba, the wife of Uriah (v. 1-5). II. He endeavoured to father the spurious brood upon Uriah (v. 6-13). III. When that project failed, he plotted the death of Uriah by the sword of the children of Ammon, and effected it (v. 14-25). IV. He married Bath-sheba (v. 26, 27). Is this David? Is this the man after God's own heart? How is his behaviour changed, worse than it was before Ahimelech! How has this gold become dim! Let him that readeth understand what the best of men are when God leaves them to themselves.

### Verses 1-5

Here is, I. David's glory, in pursuing the war against the Ammonites, v. 1. We cannot take that pleasure in viewing this great action which hitherto we have taken in observing David's achievements, because the beauty of it was stained and sullied by sin; otherwise we might take notice of David's wisdom and bravery in following his blow. Having routed the army of the Ammonites in the field, as soon as ever the season of the year permitted he sent more forces to waste the country and further to avenge the quarrel of his ambassadors. Rabbah, their metropolis, made a stand, and held out a great while. To this city Joab laid close siege, and it was at the time of this siege that David fell into this sin.

II. David's shame, in being himself conquered, and led captive by his own lust. The sin he was guilty of was adultery, against the letter of the seventh commandment, and (in the judgment of the patriarchal age) a heinous crime, and *an iniquity to be punished by the judges* (Job 31:11), a sin which *takes away the heart, and gets a man a wound and dishonour*, more than any other, and the *reproach of which is not wiped away*.

1. Observe the occasions which led to this sin. (1.) Neglect of his business. When he should have been abroad with his army in the field, fighting the battles of the Lord, he devolved the care upon others, and he himself *tarried still at Jerusalem*, v. 1. To the war with the Syrians David went in person, ch. 10:17. Had he been now at his post at the head of his forces, he would have been out of the way of this temptation. When we are out of the way of our duty we are in the way of temptation. (2.) Love of ease, and the indulgence of a slothful temper: *He came off his bed at evening-tide*, v. 2. There he had dozed away the afternoon in idleness, which he should have spent in some exercise for his own improvement or the good of others. He used to pray, not

only morning and evening, but at noon, in the day of his trouble: it is to be feared he had, this noon, omitted to do so. Idleness gives great advantage to the tempter. Standing waters gather filth. The bed of sloth often proves the bed of lust. (3.) A wandering eye: *He saw a woman washing herself*, probably from some ceremonial pollution, according to the law. The sin came in at the eye, as Eve's did. Perhaps he sought to see her, at least he did not practise according to his own prayer, *Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity*, and his son's caution in a like case, *Look not thou on the wine it is red*. Either he had not, like Job, *made a covenant with his eyes*, or, at this time, he had forgotten it.

2. The steps of the sin. When he saw her, lust immediately conceived, and, (1.) He enquired who she was (v. 3), perhaps intending only, if she were unmarried, to take her to wife, as he had taken several; but, if she were a wife, having no design upon her. (2.) The corrupt desire growing more violent, though he was told she was a wife, and whose wife she was, yet he sent messengers for her, and then, it may be, intended only to please himself with her company and conversation. But, (3.) When she came *he lay with her*, she too easily consenting, because he was a great man, and famed for his goodness too. Surely (thinks she) that can be no sin which such a man as David is the mover of. See how the way of sin is down-hill; when men begin to do evil they cannot soon stop themselves. *The beginning of lust, as of strife, is like the letting forth of water*; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with. The foolish fly fires her wings, and fools away her life at last, by playing about the candle.

3. The aggravations of the sin. (1.) He was now in years, fifty at least, some think more, when those lusts which are more properly youthful, one would think, should not have been violent in him, (2.) He had many wives and concubines of his own; this is insisted on, ch. 12:8. (3.) Uriah, whom he wronged, was one of his own worthies, a person of honour and virtue, one that was now abroad in his service, hazarding his life in the high places of the field for the honour and safety of him and his kingdom, where he himself should have been. (4.) Bath-sheba, whom he debauched, was a lady of good reputation, and, till she was drawn by him and his influence into this wickedness, had no doubt preserved her purity. Little did she think that ever she could have done so bad a thing as to *forsake the guide of her youth, and forget the covenant of her God*; nor perhaps could any one in the world but David have prevailed against her. The adulterer not only wrongs and ruins his own soul, but, as much as he can, another's soul too. (5.) David was a king, whom God had entrusted with the sword of justice and the execution of the law upon other criminals, particularly upon adulterers, who were, by the law, to be put to death; for him therefore to be guilty of those crimes himself was to make himself a pattern, when he should have been a terror, to evil doers. With what face could he rebuke or punish that in others which he was conscious to himself of being guilty of? See Rom. 2:22. Much more might be said to aggravate the sin; and I can think but of one excuse for it, which is that it was done but once; it was far from being his practice; it was by the surprise of a temptation that he was drawn into it. He was not one of those of whom the prophet complains that *they were as fed horses, neighing every one after his neighbour's wife* (Jer. 5:8); but this once God left him to himself, as he did Hezekiah, *that he might know what was in his heart*, 2 Chr. 32:31. Had he been told of it before, he would have said, as Hazael, *What! is thy servant a dog?* But by this instance we are taught what need we have to pray every day, *Father, in heaven, lead us not into temptation*, and to watch, that we enter not into it.

### Verses 6-13

Uriah, we may suppose, had now been absent from his wife some weeks, making the campaign in the country of the Ammonites, and not intending to return till the end of it. The situation of his wife would *bring to light the hidden works of darkness*; and when Uriah, at his return, should find how he had been abused, and by whom, it might well be expected, 1. That he would prosecute his wife, according to law, and have her stoned to death; for *jealousy is the rage of a man*, especially a man of honour, and he that is thus injured *will not spare in the day of vengeance*, Prov. 6:34. This Bath-sheba was apprehensive of when she sent to let David know she was with child, intimating that he was concerned to protect her, and, it is likely, if he had not promised her so to do (so wretchedly abusing his royal power), she would not have consented to him. Hope of impunity is a great encouragement to iniquity. 2. It might also be expected that since he could not prosecute David by law for an offence of this nature he would take his revenge another way, and raise a rebellion against him. There have been instances of kings who by provocations of this nature, given to some of their powerful subjects, have lost their crowns. To prevent this double mischief, David endeavours to father the child which should be born upon Uriah himself, and therefore sends for him home to stay a night or two with his wife. Observe,

I. How the plot was laid. Uriah must come home from the army under pretence of bringing David an account *how the war prospered*, and how they went on with the siege of Rabbah, v. 7. Thus does he pretend a more than ordinary concern for his army when that was the least thing in his thoughts; if he had not had another turn to serve, an express of much less figure than Uriah might have sufficed to bring him a report of the state of the war. David, having had as much conference with Uriah as he thought requisite to cover the design, sent him to his house, and, that he might be the more pleasant there with the wife of his youth, sent a dish of meat after him for their supper, v. 8. When that project failed the first night, and Uriah, being weary of his journey and more desirous of sleep than meat, lay all night in the guard-chamber, the next night *he made him drunk* (v. 13), or made him merry, tempted him to drink more than was fit, that he might forget his vow (v. 11), and might be disposed to go home to his own bed, to which perhaps, if David could have made him dead drunk, he would have ordered him to be carried. It is a very wicked thing, upon any design whatsoever, to make a person drunk. *Woe to him* that does so, Hab. 2:15, 16. God will put a cup of trembling into the hands of those who put into the hands of others the cup of drunkenness. Robbing a man of his reason is worse than robbing him of his money, and drawing him into sin worse than drawing him into any trouble whatsoever. Every good man, especially every magistrate, should endeavour to prevent this sin, by admonishing, restraining, and denying the glass to those whom they see falling into excess; but to further it is to do the devil's work, to officiate as factor for him.

II. How this plot was defeated by Uriah's firm resolution not to lie in his own bed. Both nights he slept with the life-guard, and *went not down to his house*, though, it is probable, his wife pressed him to do it as much as David, v. 9, 12. Now, 1. Some think he suspected what was done, being informed of his wife's attendance at court, and therefore he would not go near her. But if he had had any suspicion of that kind, surely he would have opened the letter that David sent by him to Joab. 2. Whether he suspected any thing or no, Providence put this resolution into his heart, and kept him to it, for the discovering of David's sin, and that the baffling of his design to conceal it might awaken David's conscience to confess it and repent of it. 3. The reason he

gave to David for this strange instance of self-denial and mortification was very noble, v. 11. While the army was encamped in the field, he would not lie at ease in his own house. "The ark is in a tent," whether at home, in the tent David had pitched for it, or abroad, with Joab in the camp, is not certain. "Joab, and all the mighty men of Israel, lie hard and uneasy, and much exposed to the weather and to the enemy; and shall I go and take my ease and pleasure at my own house?" No, he protests he will not do it. Now, (1.) This was in itself a generous resolution, and showed Uriah to be a man of a public spirit, bold and hardy, and mortified to the delights of sense. In times of public difficulty and danger it does not become us to repose ourselves in security, or roll ourselves in pleasure, or, with the king and Haman, to sit down to drink when the *city Shushan was perplexed*, Esth. 3:15. We should voluntarily endure hardness when the church of God is constrained to endure it. (2.) It might have been of use to awaken David's conscience, and make his heart to smite him for what he had done. [1.] That he had basely abused so brave a man as Uriah was, a man so heartily concerned for him and his kingdom, and that acted for him and it with so much vigour. [2.] That he was himself so unlike him. The consideration of the public hardships and hazards kept Uriah from lawful pleasures, yet could not keep David, though more nearly interested, from unlawful ones. Uriah's severity to himself should have shamed David for his indulgence of himself. The law was, *When the host goeth forth against the enemy then, in a special manner, keep thyself from every wicked thing*, Deu. 23:9. Uriah outdid that law, but David violated it.

#### **Verses 14-27**

When David's project of fathering the child upon Uriah himself failed, so that, in process of time, Uriah would certainly know the wrong that had been done him, to prevent the fruits of his revenge, the devil put it into David's heart to take him off, and then neither he nor Bath-sheba would be in any danger (what prosecution could there be when there was no prosecutor?), suggesting further that, when Uriah was out of the way, Bath-sheba might, if he pleased, be his own for ever. Adulteries have often occasioned murders, and one wickedness must be covered and secured with another. The beginnings of sin are therefore to be dreaded; for who knows where they will end? It is resolved in David's breast (which one would think could never possibly have harboured so vile a thought) that Uriah must die. That innocent, valiant, gallant man, who was ready to die for his prince's honour, must die by his prince's hand. David has sinned, and Bath-sheba has sinned, and both against him, and therefore he must die; David determines he must. Is this the man whose heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt? *Quantum mutatus ab illo!—But ah, how changed!* Is this he that executed judgment and justice to all his people? How can he now do so unjust a thing? See how fleshly lusts war against the soul, and what devastations they make in that war; how they blink the eyes, harden the heart, sear the conscience, and deprive men of all sense of honour and justice. *Whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding and quite loses it; he that doth it destroys his own soul*, Prov. 6:32. But, as the eye of the adulterer, so the hand of the murderer seeks concealment, Job 24:14, 15. Works of darkness hate the light. When David bravely slew Goliath it was done publicly, and he gloried in it; but, when he basely slew Uriah, it must be done clandestinely, for he is ashamed of it, and well he may. Who would do a thing that he dare not own? The devil, having as a poisonous serpent, put it into David's heart to murder Uriah, as a subtle serpent he puts it into his head how to do it. Not as Absalom slew Amnon, by commanding his servants to assassinate him, nor as Ahab slew Naboth by suborning witnesses to

accuse him, but by exposing him to the enemy, a way of doing it which, perhaps, would not seem so odious to conscience and the world, because soldiers expose themselves of course. If Uriah had not been in that dangerous post, another must; he has (as we say) a chance for his life; if he fight stoutly, he may perhaps come off; and, if he die, it is in the field of honour, where a soldier would choose to die; and yet all this will not save it from being a wilful murder, of malice prepense.

I. Orders are sent to Joab to set Uriah in the front of the hottest battle, and then to desert him, and abandon him to the enemy, v. 14, 15. This was David's project to take off Uriah, and it succeeded, as he designed. Many were the aggravations of this murder. 1. It was deliberate. He took time to consider of it; and though he had time to consider of it, for he wrote a letter about it, and though he had time to have countermanded the order afterwards before it could be put in execution, yet he persisted in it. 2. He sent the letter by Uriah himself, than which nothing could be more base and barbarous, to make him accessory to his own death. And what a paradox was it that he could bear such a malice against him in whom yet he could repose such a confidence as that he would carry letters which he must not know the purport of. 3. Advantage must be taken of Uriah's own courage and zeal for his king and country, which deserve the greatest praise and recompence, to betray him the more easily to his fate. If he had not been forward to expose himself, perhaps he was a man of such importance that Joab could not have exposed him; and that this noble fire should be designedly turned upon himself was a most detestable instance of ingratitude. 4. Many must be involved in the guilt. Joab, the general, to whom the blood of his soldiers, especially the worthies, ought to be precious, must do it; he, and all that retire from Uriah when they ought in conscience to support and second him, become guilty of his death. 5. Uriah cannot thus die alone: the party he commands is in danger of being cut off with him; and it proved so: some of the people, even the servants of David (so they are called, to aggravate David's sin in being so prodigal of their lives), fell with him, v. 17. Nay, this wilful misconduct by which Uriah must be betrayed might be of fatal consequence to the whole army, and might oblige them to raise the siege. 6. It will be the triumph and joy of the Ammonites, the sworn enemies of God and Israel; it will gratify them exceedingly. David prayed for himself, that he might not fall into the hands of man, nor flee from his enemies (ch. 24:13, 14); yet he sells his servant Uriah to the Ammonites, and not for any iniquity in his hand.

II. Joab executes these orders. In the next assault that is made upon the city Uriah has the most dangerous post assigned him, is encouraged to hope that if he be repulsed by the besieged he shall be relieved by Joab, in dependence on which he marches on with resolution, but, succours not coming on, the service proves too hot, and he is slain in it, v. 16, 17. It was strange that Joab would do such a thing merely upon a letter, without knowing the reason. But, 1. Perhaps he supposed Uriah had been guilty of some great crime, to enquire into which David had sent for him, and that, because he would not punish him openly, he took this course with him to put him to death. 2. Joab had been guilty of blood, and we may suppose it pleased him very well to see David himself falling into the same guilt, and he was willing enough to serve him in it, that he might continue to be favourable to him. It is common for those who have done ill themselves to desire to be countenanced therein by others doing ill likewise, especially by the sins of those that are eminent in the profession of religion. Or, perhaps, David knew that Joab had a pique against Uriah, and would gladly be avenged on him; otherwise Joab, when he saw cause, knew how to dispute the king's orders, as ch. 19:5; 24:3.

III. He sends an account of it to David. An express is despatched away immediately with a report of this last disgrace and loss which they had sustained, v. 18. And, to disguise the affair, 1. He supposes that David would appear to be angry at his bad conduct, would ask why they came so near the wall (v. 20), did they not know that Abimelech lost his life by doing so? v. 21. We had the story (Jdg. 9:53), which book, it is likely, was published as a part of the sacred history in Samuel's time; and (be it noted to their praise, and for imitation) even the soldiers were conversant with their bibles, and could readily quote the scripture-story, and make use of it for admonition to themselves not to run upon the same attempts which they found had been fatal. 2. He slyly orders the messenger to soothe it with telling him that Uriah the Hittite was dead also, which gave too broad an intimation to the messenger, and by him to others, that David would be secretly pleased to hear that; for murder will out. And, when men do such base things, they must expect to be bantered and upbraided with them, even by their inferiors. The messenger delivered his message agreeably to orders, v. 22–24. He makes the besieged to sally out first upon the besiegers (*they came out unto us into the field*), represents the besiegers as doing their part with great bravery (*we were upon them even to the entering of the gate—we forced them to retire into the city with precipitation*), and so concludes with a slight mention of the slaughter made among them by some shot from the wall: *Some of the king's servants are dead, and particularly Uriah the Hittite, an officer of note, stood first in the list of the slain.*

IV. David receives the account with a secret satisfaction, v. 25. Let not Joab be displeased, for David is not. He blames not his conduct, nor thinks they did wrong in approaching so near the wall; all is well now that Uriah is put out of the way. This point being gained, he can make light of the loss, and turn it off easily with an excuse: *The sword devours one as well as another*; it was a chance of war, nothing more common. He orders Joab to make the battle more strong next time, while he, by his sin, was weakening it, and provoking God to blast the undertaking.

V. He marries the widow in a little time. She submitted to the ceremony of mourning for her husband as short a time as custom would admit (v. 26), and then David took her to his house as his wife, and she bore him a son. Uriah's revenge was prevented by his death, but the birth of the child so soon after the marriage published the crime. Sin will have shame. Yet that was not the worst of it: *The thing that David had done displeased the Lord.* The whole *matter of Uriah* (as it is called, 1 Ki. 15:5), the adultery, falsehood, murder, and this marriage at last, it was all displeasing to the Lord. He had pleased himself, but displeased God. Note, God sees and hates sin in his own people. Nay, the nearer any are to God in profession the more displeasing to him their sins are; for in them there is more ingratitude, treachery, and reproach, than in the sins of others. Let none therefore encourage themselves in sin by the example of David; for those that sin as he did will fall under the displeasure of God as he did. Let us therefore stand in awe and sin not, not sin after the similitude of his transgression.

## Chapter 12

The foregoing chapter gave us the account of David's sin; this gives us the account of his repentance. Though he fell, he was not utterly cast down, but, by the grace of God, recovered himself, and found mercy with God. Here is, I. His conviction, by a message Nathan brought him from God, which was a parable that obliged him to condemn himself (v. 1-6), and the application of the parable, in which Nathan charged him with the sin (v. 7-9) and pronounced sentence upon him, (v. 10–12). II. His repentance and remission, with a proviso (v. 13, 14). III. The sickness and death of the child, and his behaviour while it was sick and when it was dead (v. 15–23), in both which David gave evidence of his repentance. IV. The birth of Solomon, and God's gracious message concerning him, in which God gave an evidence of his reconciliation to David (v. 24, 25). V. The taking of Rabbah (v. 26–31), which is mentioned as a further instance that God did not deal with David according to his sins.

### Verses 1-14

It seems to have been a great while after David had been guilty of adultery with Bath-sheba before he was brought to repentance for it. For, when Nathan was sent to him, the child was born (v. 14), so that it was about nine months that David lay under the guilt of that sin, and, for aught that appears, unrepented of. What shall we think of David's state all this while? Can we imagine that his heart never smote him for it, or that he never lamented it in secret before God? I would willingly hope that he did, and that Nathan was sent to him, immediately upon the birth of the child, when the thing by that means came to be publicly known and talked of, to draw from him an open confession of the sin, to the glory of God, the admonition of others, and that he might receive, by Nathan, absolution with certain limitations. But, during these nine months, we may well suppose his comforts and the exercises of his graces suspended, and his communion with God interrupted; during all that time, it is certain, he penned no psalms, his harp was out of tune, and his soul like a tree in winter, that has life in the root only.

Therefore, after Nathan had been with him, he prays, *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and open thou my lips*, Ps. 51:12, 15. Let us observe,

I. The messenger God sent to him. We were told by the last words of the foregoing chapter that the thing David had done displeased the Lord, upon which, one would think, it should have followed that the Lord sent enemies to invade him, terrors to take hold on him, and the messengers of death to arrest him. No, he sent a prophet to him—Nathan, his faithful friend and confidant, to instruct and counsel him, v. 1. David did not send for Nathan (though he had never had so much occasion as he had now for his confessor), but God sent Nathan to David. Note, Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it. *He went on frowardly in the way of his heart*, and if left to himself, would have wandered endlessly, but (saith God) *I have seen his ways, and will heal him*, Isa. 57:17, 18. He sends after us before we seek after him, else we should certainly be lost. Nathan was the prophet by whom God had sent him notice of his kind intentions towards him (ch. 7:4), and now, by the same hand, he sends him this message of wrath. God's word in the mouth of his ministers must be received, whether it speak terror or comfort. Nathan was obedient to the heavenly vision, and went on God's errand to David. He did not say, "David has sinned, I will not come near him." No; *count him not an enemy, but admonish him as a brother*, 2

Th. 3:15. He did not say, "David is a king, I dare not reprove him." No; if God sends him, he *sets his face like a flint*, Isa. 50:7.

II. The message Nathan delivered to him, in order to his conviction.

1. He fetched a compass with a parable, which seemed to David as a complaint made to him by Nathan against one of his subjects that had wronged his poor neighbour, in order to his redressing the injury and punishing the injurious. Nathan, it is likely, used to come to him upon such errands, which made this the less suspected. It becomes those who have interest in princes, and have free access to them, to intercede for those that are wronged, that they may have justice done them. (1.) Nathan represented to David a grievous injury which a rich man had done to an honest neighbour that was not able to contend with him: *The rich man had many flocks and herds* (v. 2); the poor man had one lamb only; so unequally is the world divided; and yet infinite wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, make the distribution, that the rich may learn charity and the poor contentment. This poor man had but one lamb, a ewe-lamb, a little ewe-lamb, having not wherewithal to buy or keep more. But it was a *cade*—lamb (as we call it); *it grew up with his children*, v. 3. He was fond of it, and it was familiar with him at all times. The rich man, having occasion for a lamb to entertain a friend with, took the poor man's lamb from him by violence and made use of that (v. 4), either out of covetousness, because he grudged to make use of his own, or rather out of luxury, because he fancied the lamb that was thus tenderly kept, and ate and drank like a child, must needs be more delicate food than any of his own and have a better relish. (2.) In this he showed him the evil of the sin he had been guilty of in defiling Bath-sheba. He had many wives and concubines, whom he kept at a distance, as rich men keep their flocks in their fields. Had he had but one, and had she been dear to him, as the ewe-lamb was to its owner, had she been dear to him *as the loving hind and the pleasant roe, her breasts would have satisfied him at all times*, and he would have looked no further, Prov. 5:19. Marriage is a remedy against fornication, but marrying many is not; for, when once the law of unity is transgressed, the indulged lust will hardly stint itself. Uriah, like the poor man, had only one wife, who was to him as his own soul, and always lay in his bosom, for he had no other, he desired no other, to lie there. The traveller or wayfaring man was, as bishop Patrick explains it from the Jewish writers, the evil imagination, disposition, or desire, which came into David's heart, which he might have satisfied with some of his own, yet nothing would serve but Uriah's darling. They observe that this evil disposition is called a traveller, for in the beginning it is only so, but, in time, it becomes a guest, and, in conclusion, is master of the house. For he that is called a traveller in the beginning of the verse is called *a man* (ish—a husband) in the close of it. Yet some observe that in David's breast lust was but as a wayfaring man that tarries only for a night; it did not constantly dwell and rule there. (3.) By this parable he drew from David a sentence against himself. For David supposing it to be a case in fact, and not doubting the truth of it when he had it from Nathan himself, gave judgment immediately against the offender, and confirmed it with an oath, v. 5, 6. [1.] That, for his injustice in taking away the lamb, he should restore four-fold, according to the law (Ex. 22:1), *four sheep for a sheep*. [2.] That for his tyranny and cruelty, and the pleasure he took in abusing a poor man, he should be put to death. If a poor man steal from a rich man, to satisfy his soul when he is hungry, he shall make restitution, though it cost him *all the substance of his house*, Prov. 6:30, 31 (and Solomon there compares the sin of adultery with that, v. 32); but if a rich man steal for stealing sake, not for want but wantonness, merely that he may be imperious and vexatious, he deserves to die for it, for to

him the making of restitution is no punishment, or next to none. If the sentence be thought too severe, it must be imputed to the present roughness of David's temper, being under guilt, and not having himself as yet received mercy.

2. He closed in with him, at length, in the application of the parable. In beginning with a parable he showed his prudence, and great need there is of prudence in giving reproofs. It is well managed if, as here, the offender can be brought ere he is aware, to convict and condemn himself. But here, in his application, he shows his faithfulness, and deals as plainly and roundly with king David himself as if he had been a common person. In plain terms, "*Thou art the man* who hast done this wrong, and a much greater, to thy neighbour; and therefore, by thy own sentence, thou deservest to die, and shalt be judged out of thy own mouth. Did he deserve to die who took his neighbour's lamb? and dost not thou who hast taken thy neighbour's wife? Though he took the lamb, he did not cause the owner thereof to lose his life, as thou hast done, and therefore much more art thou worthy to die." Now he speaks immediately from God, and in his name. He begins with, *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel*, a name sacred and venerable to David, and which commanded his attention. Nathan now speaks, not as a petitioner for a poor man, but as an ambassador from the great God, with whom is no respect of persons.

(1.) God, by Nathan, reminds David of the great things he had done and designed for him, anointing him to be king, and preserving him to the kingdom (v. 7), giving him power over the house and household of his predecessor, and of others that had been his masters, Nabal for one. He had given him the house of Israel and Judah. The wealth of the kingdom was at his service and every body was willing to oblige him. Nay, he was ready to bestow any thing upon him to make him easy: *I would have given thee such and such things*, v. 8. See how liberal God is in his gifts; we are not straitened in him. Where he has given much, yet he gives more. And God's bounty to us is a great aggravation of our discontent and desire of forbidden fruit. It is ungrateful to covet what God has prohibited, while we have liberty to pray for what God has promised, and that is enough.

(2.) He charges him with a high contempt of the divine authority, in the sins he had been guilty of: *Wherefore hast thou* (presuming upon thy royal dignity and power) *despised the commandment of the Lord?* v. 9. This is the spring and this is the malignity of sin, that it is making light of the divine law and the law-maker; as if the obligation of it were weak, the precepts of it trifling, and the threats not at all formidable. Though no man ever wrote more honourably of the law of God than David did, yet, in this instance, he is justly charged with a contempt of it. His adultery with Bath-sheba, which began the mischief, is not mentioned, perhaps because he was already convinced of that, but, [1.] The murder of Uriah is twice mentioned: *"Thou hast killed Uriah with the sword*, though not with thy sword, yet, which is equally heinous, with thy pen, by ordering him to be set in the forefront of the battle." Those that contrive wickedness and command it are as truly guilty of it as those that execute it. It is repeated with an aggravation: *Thou hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon*, those uncircumcised enemies of God and Israel. [2.] The marrying of Bath-sheba is likewise twice mentioned, because he thought there was no harm in that (v. 9): *Thou hast taken his wife to be thy wife*, and again, v. 10. To marry her whom he had before defiled, and whose husband he had slain, was an affront upon the ordinance of marriage, making that not only to palliate, but in a manner to consecrate, such villainies. In all this he *despised the word of the Lord* (so it is in the Hebrew), not only his commandment in general which forbade such things, but the particular word of promise which God had, by Nathan, sent to him some time before, that he

would build him a house. If he had had a due value and veneration for this sacred promise, he would not thus have polluted his house with lust and blood.

(3.) He threatens an entail of judgements upon his family for this sin (v. 10): "*The sword shall never depart from thy house*, not in thy time nor afterwards, but, for the most part, thou and thy posterity shall be engaged in war." Or it points at the slaughters that should be among his children, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, all falling by the sword. God had promised that his mercy should not depart from him and his house (ch. 7:15), yet here threatens that the sword should not depart. Can the mercy and the sword consist with each other? Yes, those may lie under great and long afflictions who yet shall not be excluded from the grace of the covenant. The reason given is, *Because thou hast despised me*. Note, Those who despise the word and law of God despise God himself and shall be lightly esteemed. It is particularly threatened, [1.] That his children should be his grief: *I will raise up evil against thee out of thy own house*. Sin brings trouble into a family, and one sin is often made the punishment of another. [2.] That his wives should be his shame, that by an unparalleled piece of villany they should be publicly debauched before all Israel, v. 11, 12. It is not said that this should be done by his own son, lest the accomplishment should have been hindered by the prediction being too plain; but it was done by Absalom, at the counsel of Ahithophel, ch. 16:21, 22. *He that defiled his neighbour's wife should have his own defiled*, for thus that sin used to be punished, as appears by Job's imprecation, Job 31:10, *Then let my wife grind unto another*, and that threatening, Hos. 4:14. The sin was secret, and industriously concealed, but the punishment should be open, and industriously proclaimed, to the shame of David, whose sin in the matter of Uriah, though committed many years before, would then be called to mind and commonly talked of upon that occasion. As face answers to face in a glass, so does the punishment often answer to the sin; here is *blood for blood and uncleanness for uncleanness*. And thus God would show how much he hates sin, even in his own people, and that, wherever he find it, he will not let it go unpunished.

3. David's penitent confession of his sin hereupon. He says not a word to excuse himself or extenuate his sin, but freely owns it: *I have sinned against the Lord*, v. 13. It is probable that he said more to this purport; but this is enough to show that he was truly humbled by what Nathan said, and submitted to the conviction. He owns his guilt—*I have sinned*, and aggravates it—*It was against the Lord*: on this string he harps in the psalm he penned on this occasion. Ps. 51:1, *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned*.

4. His pardon declared, upon this penitent confession, but with a proviso. When David said *I have sinned*, and Nathan perceived that he was a true penitent,

(1.) He did, in God's name, assure him that his sin was forgiven: "*The Lord also has put away thy sin out of the sight of his avenging eye; thou shalt not die*," that is, "not die eternally, nor be for ever put away from God, as thou wouldest have been if he had not put away the sin." The obligation to punishment is hereby cancelled and vacated. *He shall not come into condemnation*: that is the nature of forgiveness. "Thy iniquity shall not be thy everlasting ruin. *The sword shall not depart from thy house*, but, [1.] It shall not cut thee off, thou shalt come to thy grave in peace." David deserved to die as an adulterer and murderer, but God would not cut him off as he might justly have done. [2.] "Though thou shalt all thy days be *chastened of*

*the Lord, yet thou shalt not be condemned with the world.*" See how ready God is to forgive sin. To this instance, perhaps, David refers, Ps. 32:5, *I said, I will confess, and thou forgavest.* Let not great sinners despair of finding mercy with God if they truly repent; for who is a God like unto him, pardoning iniquity?

(2.) Yet he pronounces a sentence of death upon the child, v. 14. Behold the sovereignty of God! The guilty parent lives, and the guiltless infant dies; but all souls are his, and he may, in what way he pleases, glorify himself in his creatures. [1.] David had, by his sin, wronged God in his honour; he had *given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme.* The wicked people of that generation, the infidels, idolaters, and profane, would triumph in David's fall, and speak ill of God and of his law, when they saw one guilty of such foul enormities that professed such an honour both for him and it. "These are your professors! This is he that prays and sings psalms, and is so very devout! What good can there be in such exercises, if they will not restrain men from adultery and murder?" They would say, "Was not Saul rejected for a less matter? why then must David live and reign still?" not considering that God *sees not as man sees, but searches the heart.* To this day there are those who reproach God, and are hardened in sin, through the example of David. Now, though it is true that none have any just reason to speak ill of God, or of his word and ways, for David's sake, and it is their sin that do so, yet he shall be reckoned with that laid the stumbling-block in their way, and gave, though not cause, yet colour, for the reproach. Note, There is this great evil in the scandalous sins of those that profess religion, and relation to God, that they furnish the enemies of God and religion with matter for reproach and blasphemy, Rom. 2:24. [2.] God will therefore vindicate his honour by showing his displeasure against David for this sin, and letting the world see that though he loves David he hates his sin; and he chooses to do it by the *death of the child.* The landlord may distrain on any part of the premises where he pleases. Perhaps the diseases and deaths of infants were not so common in those days as they are now, which might make this, as an unusual thing, the more evident token of God's displeasure; according to the word he had often said, that he would *visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.*

### **Verses 15-25**

Nathan, having delivered his message, staid not at court, but went home, probably to pray for David, to whom he had been preaching. God, in making use of him as an instrument to bring David to repentance, and as the herald both of mercy and judgment, put an honour upon the ministry, *and magnified his word above all his name.* David named one of his sons by Bathsheba *Nathan*, in honour of this prophet (1 Chr. 3:5), and it was that son of whom Christ, the great prophet, lineally descended, Lu. 3:31. When Nathan retired, David, it is probable, retired likewise, and penned the 51st Psalm, in which (though he had been assured that his sin was pardoned) he prays earnestly for pardon, and greatly laments his sin; for then will true penitents be ashamed of what they have done when God is *pacified towards them*, Eze. 16:63.

Here is, I. The child's illness: *The Lord struck it, and it was very sick*, perhaps with convulsions, or some other dreadful distemper, v. 15. The diseases and death of infants that have *not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression*, especially as they are sometimes sadly circumstanced, are sensible proofs of the original sin in which they are conceived.

II. David's humiliation under this token of God's displeasure, and the intercession he made with God for the life of the child (v. 16, 17): *He fasted, and lay all night upon the earth*, and would not suffer any of his attendants either to feed him or help him

up. This was an evidence of the truth of his repentance. For, 1. Hereby it appeared that he was willing to bear the shame of his sin, to have it ever before him, and to be continually upbraided with it; for this child would be a continual memorandum of it, both to himself and others, if he lived: and therefore he was so far from desiring its death, as most in such circumstances do, that he prayed earnestly for its life. True penitents patiently *bear the reproach of their youth*, and of their youthful lusts, Jer. 31:19. 2. A very tender compassionate spirit appeared in this, and great humanity, above what is commonly found in men, especially men of war, towards little children, even their own; and this was another sign of a broken contrite spirit. Those that are penitent will be pitiful. 3. He discovered, in this, a great concern for another world, which is an evidence of repentance. Nathan had told him that certainly the child should die; yet, while it is in the reach of prayer, he earnestly intercedes with God for it, chiefly (as we may suppose) that its soul might be safe and happy in another world, and that his sin might not come against the child, and that it might not fare the worse for that in the future state. 4. He discovered, in this, a holy dread of God and of his displeasure. He deprecated the death of the child chiefly as it was a token of God's anger against him and his house, and was inflicted in performance of a threatening; therefore he prayed thus earnestly that, if it were the will of God, the child might live, because that would be to him a token of God's being reconciled to him. *Lord, chasten me not in thy hot displeasure.* Ps. 6:1.

III. The death of the child: It *died on the seventh day* (v. 18), when it was seven days old, and therefore not circumcised, which David might perhaps interpret as a further token of God's displeasure, that it died before it was brought under the seal of the covenant; yet he does not therefore doubt of its being happy for the benefits of the covenant do not depend upon the seals. David's servants, judging of him by themselves, were afraid to tell him that *the child was dead*, concluding that then he would disquiet himself most of all; so that he knew not till he asked, v. 19.

IV. David's wonderful calmness and composure of mind when he understood the child was dead. Observe,

1. What he did. (1.) He laid aside the expressions of his sorrow, washed and anointed himself, and called for clean linen, that he might decently appear before God in his house. (2.) *He went up to the tabernacle and worshipped*, like Job when he heard of the death of his children. He went to acknowledge the hand of God in the affliction, and to humble himself under it, and to submit to his holy will in it, to thank God that he himself was spared and his sin pardoned, and to pray that God would not proceed in his controversy with him, nor stir up all his wrath. *Is any afflicted? Let him pray.* Weeping must never hinder worshipping. (3.) *Then he went to his own house* and refreshed himself, as one who found benefit by his religion in the day of his affliction; for, having worshipped, *he did eat*, and his countenance was no more sad.

2. The reason he gave for what he did. His servants thought it strange that he should afflict himself so for the sickness of the child and yet take the death of it so easily, and asked him the reason of it (v. 21), in answer to which he gives this plain account of his conduct, (1.) That while the child was alive he thought it his duty to importune the divine favour towards it, v. 22. Nathan had indeed said the child should die, but, for aught that he knew, the threatening might be conditional, as that concerning Hezekiah: upon his great humiliation and earnest prayer, he that had so often *heard the voice of his weeping* might be pleased to reverse the sentence, and spare the child: *Who can tell whether God will yet be gracious to me?* God gives us

leave to be earnest with him in prayer for particular blessings, from a confidence in his power and general mercy, though we have no particular promise to build upon: we cannot be sure, yet let us pray, *for who can tell but God will be gracious to us*, in this or that particular? When our relations and friends have fallen sick, the prayer of faith has prevailed much; while there is life there is hope, and, while there is hope, there is room for prayer. (2.) That now the child was dead he thought it as much his duty to be satisfied in the divine disposal concerning it (v. 23): *Now, wherefore should I fast?* Two things checked his grief:— [1.] *I cannot bring him back again; and again, He shall not return to me.* Those that are dead are out of the reach of prayer; nor can our tears profit them. We can neither weep nor pray them back to this life. Wherefore then should we fast? *To what purpose is this waste?* Yet David fasted and wept for Jonathan when he was dead, in honour to him. [2.] *I shall go to him.* First, To him to the grave. Note, The consideration of our own death should moderate our sorrow at the death of our relations. It is the common lot; instead of mourning for their death, we should think of our own: and, whatever loss we have of them now, we shall die shortly, and go to them. Secondly, To him to heaven, to a state of blessedness, which even the Old Testament saints had some expectation of. Godly parents have great reason to hope concerning their children that die in infancy that it is well with their souls in the other world; for *the promise is to us and to our seed*, which shall be performed to those that do not put a bar in their own door, as infants do not. *Favores sunt ampliandi—Favours received should produce the hope of more.* God calls those his children that are born unto him; and, if they be his, he will save them. This may comfort us when our children are removed from us by death, they are better provided for, both in work and wealth, than they could have been in this world. We shall be with them shortly, to part no more.

V. The birth of Solomon. Though David's marrying Bath-sheba had displeased the Lord, yet he was not therefore commanded to divorce her; so far from this that God gave him that son by her on whom the covenant of royalty should be entailed. Bath-sheba, no doubt, was greatly afflicted with the sense of her sin and the tokens of God's displeasure. But, God having restored to David the joys of his salvation, he comforted her with the same comforts with which he himself was comforted of God (v. 24): *He comforted Bath-sheba.* And both he and she had reason to be comforted in the tokens of God's reconciliation to them, 1. Inasmuch as, by his providence, he gave them a son, not as the former, who was given in anger and taken away in wrath, but a child graciously given, and written among the living in Jerusalem. They called him *Solomon—peaceful*, because his birth was a token of God's being at peace with them, because of the prosperity which was entailed upon him, and because he was to be a type of Christ, the prince of peace. God had removed one son from them, but now gave them another instead of him, like *Seth instead of Abel*, Gen. 4:25. Thus God often balances the griefs of his people with comforts in the same thing wherein he hath afflicted them, setting the one over-against the other. David had very patiently submitted to the will of God in the death of the other child, and now God made up the loss of that, abundantly to his advantage, in the birth of this. The way to have our creature-comforts either continued or restored, or the loss of them made up some other way, is cheerfully to resign them to God. 2. Inasmuch as, by his grace, he particularly owned and favoured that son: *The Lord loved him* (v. 24 and 25), ordered him, by the prophet Nathan, to be called *Jedidiah—Beloved of the Lord*: though a seed of evil-doers (for such David and Bath-sheba were), yet so well ordered was the covenant, and the crown entailed by it, that it took away all attainders and corruption

of blood, signifying that those who were by nature children of wrath and disobedience should, by the covenant of grace, not only be reconciled, but made favourites. And, in this name, he typified Jesus Christ, that blessed Jedidiah, the son of God's love, concerning whom God declared again and again, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

### **Verses 26-31**

We have here an account of the conquest of Rabbah, and other cities of the Ammonites. Though this comes in here after the birth of David's child, yet it is most probable that it was effected a good while before, and soon after the death of Uriah, perhaps during the days of Bath-sheba's mourning for him. Observe, 1. That God was very gracious in giving David this great success against his enemies, notwithstanding the sin he had been guilty of just at that time when he was engaged in this war, and the wicked use he had made of the sword of the children of Ammon in the murder of Uriah. Justly might he have made that sword, thenceforward, a plague to David and his kingdom; yet he breaks it, and makes David's sword victorious, even before he repents, that this *goodness of God might lead him to repentance.* Good reason had David to own that God *dealt not with him according to his sins,* Ps. 103:10. 2. That Joab acted very honestly and honourably; for when he had taken *the city of waters,* the royal city, where the palace was, and from which the rest of the city was supplied with water (and therefore, upon the cutting off of that, would be obliged speedily to surrender), he sent to David to come in person to complete this great action, that he might have the praise of it, v. 26-28. Herein he showed himself a faithful servant, that sought his master's honour, and his own only in subordination to his, and left an example to the servants of the Lord Jesus, in every thing they do, to consult his honour. *Not unto us, but to thy name, give glory.* 3. That David was both too haughty and too severe upon this occasion, and neither so humble nor so tender as he should have been. (1.) He seems to have been too fond of the crown of the king of Ammon, v. 30. Because it was of extraordinary value, by reason of the precious stones with which it was set, David would have it set upon his head, though it would have been better to have cast it at God's feet, and at this time to have put his own mouth in the dust, under guilt. The heart that is truly humbled for sin is dead to worldly glory and looks upon it with a holy contempt. (2.) He seems to have been too harsh with his prisoners of war, v. 31. Taking the city by storm, after it had obstinately held out against a long and expensive siege, if he had put all whom he found in arms to the sword in the heat of battle, it would have been severe enough; but to kill them afterwards in cold blood, and by cruel tortures, with saws and harrows, tearing them to pieces, did not become him who, when he entered upon the government, promised to sing of mercy as well as judgment, Ps. 101:1. Had he made examples of those only who had abused his ambassadors, or advised or assisted in it, that being a violation of the law of nations, it might have been looked upon as a piece of necessary justice for terror to other nations; but to be thus severe with all the cities of the children of Ammon (that is, the garrisons or soldiers of the cities) was extremely rigorous, and a sign that David's heart was not yet made soft by repentance, else the bowels of his compassion would not have been thus shut up—a sign that he had not yet found mercy, else he would have been more ready to show mercy.

## Chapter 13

The righteous God had lately told David, by Nathan the prophet, that, to chastise him for his son in the matter of Uriah, he would "raise up evil against him out of his own house," (ch. 12:11). And here, in the very next chapter, we find the evil beginning to rise; henceforward he was followed with one trouble after another, which made the latter part of his reign less glorious and pleasant than the former part. Thus God chastened him with the rod of men, yet assured him that his "loving-kindness he would not utterly take away." Adultery and murder were David's sins, and those sins among his children (Amnon defiling his sister Tamar, and Absalom murdering his brother Amnon) were the beginnings of his punishment, and the more grievous because he had reason to fear that his bad example might help to bring them to these wickednesses. In this chapter we have, I. Amnon ravishing Tamar, assisted in his plot to do it by Jonadab his kinsman, and villainously executing it (v. 1–20). II. Absalom murdering Amnon for it (v. 21–39). Both were great griefs to David, and the more because he was unwittingly made accessory to both, by sending Tamar to Amnon and Amnon to Absalom.

### Verses 1-20

We have here a particular account of the abominable wickedness of Amnon in ravishing his sister, a subject not fit to be enlarged upon nor indeed to be mentioned without blushing, that ever any man should be so vile, especially that a son of David should be so. Amnon's character, we have reason to think, was bad in other things; if he had not forsaken God, he would never have been given up to these vile affections. Godly parents have often been afflicted with wicked children; grace does not run in the blood, but corruption does. We do not find that David's children imitated him in his devotion; but his false steps they trod in, and in those did much worse, and repented not. Parents know not how fatal the consequences may be if in any instance they give their children bad examples. Observe the steps of Amnon's sin.

I. The devil, as an unclean spirit, put it into his heart to lust after his sister Tamar. Beauty is a snare to many; it was so to her. She was fair, and therefore Amnon coveted her, v. 1. Those that are peculiarly handsome have no reason, on that account, to be proud, but great reason to stand upon their watch. Amnon's lust was, 1. Unnatural in itself, to lust after his sister, which even natural conscience startles at and cannot think of without horror. Such a spirit of contradiction there is in man's corrupt nature that still it desires forbidden fruit, and the more strongly it is forbidden the more greedily it is desired. Can he entertain the thought of betraying that virtue and honour of which, as a brother, he ought to have been the protector? But what wickedness so vile as not to find admittance into an unsanctified unguarded heart, left to itself? 2. It was very uneasy to him. He was so vexed that he could not gain an opportunity to solicit her chastity (for innocent converse with her was not denied him) that he *fell sick*, v. 2. Fleshly lusts are their own punishment, and not only *war against the soul*, but against the body too, and are the *rottenness of the bones*. See what a hard master sinners serve, and how heavy his yoke is.

II. The devil, as a subtle serpent, put it into his head how to compass this wicked design. Amnon had a friend (so he called him, but he was really an enemy to him), a kinsman, that had in him more of David's blood (for he was his nephew) than of David's spirit, for he was a subtle man, cunning to carry on any bad design, especially an intrigue of this nature, v. 3.

1. He took notice that Amnon looked ill, and, being a subtle man, concluded that he was love-sick (v. 4), and asks him, "*Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? Why dost thou pine, being the king's eldest son, and heir to the crown. Being the king's son,*" (1.) "Thou hast the pleasures of the court to divert thee; take those pleasures then, and with them drive away the sorrow, whatever it is." Content and comfort are not always to be found in royal palaces. With much more reason may we ask dejected and disconsolate saints why they, who are the children of the King of kings and heirs of the crown of life, are thus *lean from day to day*. (2.) "Thou hast the power of a prince to command what thou wantest and wishest for; use that power therefore, and gratify thyself. Pine not away for that which, lawful or unlawful, thou, being the king's son, mayest have. *Quicquid libet licet—Your will is law.*" Thus Jezebel to Ahab in a like case (1 Ki. 21:7), *Dost not thou govern Israel?* The abuse of power is the most dangerous temptation of the great.

2. Amnon having the impudence to own his wicked lust, miscalling it *love (I love Tamar)*, Jonadab put him in a way to compass his design, v. 5. Had he been what he pretended (Amnon's friend), he would have startled at the mention of such horrid wickedness, would have laid before him the evil of it, what an offence it was to God and what a wrong to his own soul to entertain such a vile thought, of what fatal consequence it would be to him to cherish and prosecute it; he would have used his subtlety to divert Amnon from it, by recommending some other person to him, whom he might lawfully marry. But he seems not at all surprised at it, objects not either the unlawfulness or the difficulty, the reproach or so much as his father's displeasure, but puts him in the way to get Tamar to his bed-side, and then he might do as he pleased. Note, The case of those is very miserable whose friends, instead of admonishing and reproofing them, flatter them and forward them in their sinful ways, and are their counsellors and contrivers to do wickedly. Amnon is already sick, but goes about; he must take upon him to be so ill (and his thin looks will give colour enough to the pretence) as not to be able to get up, and to have no appetite to any thing but just that which pleases his fancy. Dainty meat is abhorred, Job 33:20. The best dish from the king's table cannot please him; but, if he can eat any thing, it must be from his sister Tamar's fair hand. This is what he is advised to.

3. Amnon followed these directions, and thus got Tamar within his reach: *He made himself sick*, v. 6. Thus he *lieth in wait secretly, as a lion in his den, to catch the poor, and to draw them into his net*, Ps. 10:8–10. David was always fond of his children, and concerned if any thing ailed them; he no sooner hears that Amnon is sick than he comes himself to visit him. Let parents learn hence to be tender of their children and compassionate towards them. The sick child commonly *the mother* comforteth (Isa. 66:13), but let not the *father* be unconcerned. We may suppose that when David came to see his sick son he gave him good counsel to make a right use of his affliction, and prayed with him, which yet did not alter his wicked purpose. At parting, the indulgent father asks, "Is there any thing thou hast a mind to, that I can procure for thee?" "Yes, Sir," says the dissembling son, "my stomach is weak, and I know not of any thing I can eat, unless it be a cake of my sister Tamar's making, and I cannot be satisfied that it is so unless I see her make it, and it will do me the more good if I eat it at her hand." David saw no reason to suspect any mischief intended. God hid his heart from understanding in this matter. He therefore immediately orders Tamar to go and attend her sick brother, v. 7. He does it very innocently, but afterwards, no doubt, reflected upon it with great regret. Tamar as innocently goes to her brother's chamber, neither dreading any abuse (why should she from a brother, a

sick brother?) nor disdain, in obedience to her father and love to her brother (though but her half-brother), to be his nurse, v. 8, 9. Though she was a king's daughter, a great beauty (v. 1), and well dressed (v. 18), yet she did not think it below her to knead cakes and bake them, nor would she have done this now if she had not been used to it. Good house-wifery is not a thing below the greatest ladies, nor ought they to think it a disparagement to them. The virtuous woman, whose husband sits among the elders, yet *works willingly with her hands*, Prov. 31:13. Modern ages have not been destitute of such instances, nor is it so unfashionable as some would make it. Preparing for the sick should be more the care and delight of the ladies than preparing for the nice, charity more than curiosity.

4. Having got her to him, he contrives to have her alone; for *the adulterer* (much more so vile an adulterer as this) is in care that *no eye see him*, Job 24:15. The meat is ready, but he cannot eat while he is looked at by those about him; they must all be turned out, v. 9. The sick must be humoured, and think they have a privilege to command. Tamar is willing to humour him; her chaste and virtuous soul has not the least thought of that which his polluted breast is full of; and therefore she makes no scruple of being alone with him *in the inner chamber*, v. 10. And now the mask is thrown off, the meat is thrown by, and the wicked wretch calls her *sister*, and yet impudently courts her to *come and lie with him*, v. 11. It was a base affront to her virtue to think it possible to persuade her to consent to such wickedness when he knew her behaviour to be always exemplarily modest and virtuous. But it is common for those that live in uncleanness to think others such as themselves, at least tinder to their sparks.

III. The devil, as a strong tempter, deafens his ear to all the reasonings with which she resisted his assaults and would have persuaded him to desist. We may well imagine what a surprise and terror it was to the young lady to be thus attacked, how she blushed and how she trembled; yet, in this great confusion, nothing could be said more pertinently, nor with greater strength of argument, than what she said to him. 1. She calls him *brother*, reminding him of the nearness of the relation, which made it unlawful for him to marry her, much more to debauch her. It was expressly forbidden (Lev. 18:9) under a severe penalty, Lev. 20:17. Great care must be taken lest the love that should be among relations degenerate into lust. 2. She entreats him not to force her, which intimates that she would never consent to it in any degree; and what satisfaction could he take in offering violence? 3. She lays before him the great wickedness of it. It is *folly*; all sin is so, especially uncleanness. It is wickedness of the worst kind. Such abominations ought not to be committed in Israel, among the professing people of God, that have better statutes than the heathen have. We are Israelites; if we do such things, we are more inexcusable than others, and our condemnation will be more intolerable, for we *reproach the Lord*, and *that worthy name by which we are called*. 4. She represents to him the shame of it, which perhaps might influence him more than the sin of it: "For my part, *whither shall I cause my shame to go?* If it should be concealed, yet I shall blush to think of it as long as I live; and, if ever it be known, how shall I be able to look any of my friends in the face? For thy part, *thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel,*" that is, "Thou wilt be looked upon as an atrocious debauchee, the worst of men; thou wilt lose thy interest in the esteem of all that are wise and good, and so wilt be set aside as unfit to rule, though the first-born; for Israel will never submit to the government of such a fool." Prospect of shame, especially everlasting shame, should deter us from sin. 5. To divert him from his wicked purpose at this time, and (if possible) to get clear of him, she intimates to him that probably the king, rather than he should die for love of

her, would dispense with the divine law and let him marry her: not as if she thought he had such a dispensing power, or would pretend to it; but she was confident that, upon notice given to the king by himself of this wicked desire, which he would scarcely have believed from any one else, he would take an effectual course to protect her from him. But all her arts and all her arguments availed not. His proud spirit cannot bear a denial; but her comfort, and honour, and all that was dear to her, must be sacrificed to his brutish and outrageous lust, v. 14. It is to be feared that Amnon, though young, had long lived a lewd life, which his father either knew not or punished not; for a man could not, of a sudden, arrive at such a pitch of wickedness as this. But is this his love to Tamar? Is this the recompence he gives her for her readiness to attend him in his sickness? Will he deal with his sister as with a harlot? Base villain! God deliver all that are modest and virtuous from such wicked and unreasonable men.

IV. The devil, as a tormentor and betrayer, immediately turns his love of her into hatred (v. 15): *He hated her with great hatred, greatly*, so it is in the margin, and grew as outrageous in his malice as he had been in his lust.

1. He basely turned her out of doors by force; nay, as if he now disdained to touch her with his own hands, he ordered his servant to *pull her out and bolt the door after her*, v. 17. Now, (1.) The innocent injured lady had reason to resent this as a great affront, and in some respects (as she says, v. 16) worse than the former; for nothing could have been done more barbarous and ill-natured, or more disgraceful to her. Had he taken care to conceal what was done, her honour would have been lost to herself only. Had he gone down on his knees and begged her pardon, it might have been some little reparation. Had he given her time to compose herself after the horrid confusion she was put into, she might have kept her countenance when she went out, and so have kept her counsel. But to dismiss her thus hurried, thus rudely, as if she had done some wicked thing, obliged her, in her own defence, to proclaim the wrong that had been done her. (2.) We may learn from it both the malignity of sin (unbridled passions are as bad as unbridled appetites) and the mischievous consequences of sin (at last, it bites like a serpent); for here we find, [1.] That sins, sweet in the commission, afterwards become odious and painful, and the sinner's own conscience makes them so to himself. Amnon hated Tamar because she would not consent to his wickedness, and so take part of the blame upon herself, but to the last resisted it, and reasoned against it, and so threw all the blame upon him. Had he hated the sin, and loathed himself for it, we might have hoped he was penitent. *Godly sorrow worketh indignation*, 2 Co. 7:11. But to hate the person he had abused showed that his conscience was terrified, but his heart not at all humbled. See what deceitful pleasures those of the flesh are, how soon they pass away, and turn into loathing; see Eze. 23:17. [2.] That sins, secret in the commission, afterwards become open and public, and the sinners themselves often make them so. Their own tongues fall upon them. The Jewish doctors say that, upon the occasion of this wickedness of Amnon, a law was made that a young man and a young woman should never be alone together; for, said they, if the king's daughter be so used, what will become of the children of private men?

2. We must now leave the criminal to the terrors of his own guilty conscience, and enquire what becomes of the poor victim. (1.) She bitterly lamented the injury she had received, as it was a stain to her honour, though no real blemish to her virtue. She tore her fine clothes in token of her grief, and put ashes upon her head, to deform herself, loathing her own beauty and

ornaments, because they had occasioned Amnon's unlawful love; and she went on crying for another's sin, v. 19. (2.) She retired to her brother Absalom's house, because he was her own brother, and there she lived in solitude and sorrow, in token of her modesty and detestation of uncleanness. Absalom spoke kindly to her, bade her pass by the injury for the present, designing himself to revenge it, v. 20. It should seem by Absalom's question (*Has Amnon been with thee?*) that Amnon was notorious for such lewd practices, so that it was dangerous for a modest woman to be with him; this Absalom might know, and yet Tamar be wholly ignorant of it.

### **Verses 21-29**

What Solomon says of the beginning of strife is as true of the beginning of all sin, it is as the letting forth of water; when once the flood-gates are plucked up, an inundation follows; one mischief begets another, and it is hard to say what shall be in the end thereof.

I. We are here told how David resented the tidings of Amnon's sin: *He was very wroth*, v. 21. So he had reason to be, that his own son should do such a wicked thing and draw him to be accessory to it. It would be a reproach to him for not giving him a better education; it would be a blot upon his family, the ruin of his daughter, a bad example to his kingdom, and a wrong to his son's soul. But was it enough for him to be angry? He ought to have punished his son for it, and have put him to open shame; both as a father and as a king he had power to do it. But the Septuagint here adds these words: *But he saddened not the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him, because he was his first-born*. He fell into Eli's error, whose sons *made themselves vile, and he frowned not on them*. If Amnon was dear to him, his punishing him would have been so much the greater punishment to himself for his own uncleanness. But he cannot bear the shame those must submit to who correct that in others which they are conscious of in themselves, and therefore his anger must serve instead of his justice; and this hardens sinners, Eccl. 8:11.

II. How Absalom resented it. He resolves already to do the part of a judge in Israel; and, since his father will not punish Amnon, he will, from a principle, not of justice or zeal for virtue, but of revenge, because he reckons himself affronted in the abuse done to his sister. Their mother was daughter to a heathen prince (ch. 3:3), which perhaps they were upbraided with sometimes by their brethren, as children of a stranger. As such a one Absalom thought his sister was now treated; and, if Amnon thought her fit to be made his harlot, he would think him fit to be made his slave. This enraged him, and nothing less than the blood of Amnon will quench his rage. Here we have,

1. The design conceived: *Absalom hated Amnon* (v. 22), *and he that hateth his brother is a murderer* already, and, like *Cain, is of that wicked one*, 1 Jn. 3:12, 15. Absalom's hatred of his brother's crime would have been commendable, and he might justly have prosecuted him for it by a due course of law, for example to others, and the making of some compensation to his injured sister; but to hate his person, and design his death by assassination, was to put a great affront upon God, by offering to repair the breach of his seventh commandment by the violation of his sixth, as if they were not all alike sacred. *But he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill*, James 2:11.

2. The design concealed. He said nothing to Amnon of this matter, either good or bad, appeared as if he did not know it, and maintained towards him his usual civility, only waiting for a fair opportunity to do him a mischief. That malice is the worst,

(1.) Which is hidden closely, and has no vent given to it. If Absalom had reasoned the matter with Amnon, he might have convinced him of his sin and brought him to repentance; but, saying nothing, Amnon's heart was hardened, and his own more and more embittered against him; therefore rebuking our neighbour is opposed to hating him in our hearts, Lev. 19:17. Let passion have vent and it will spend itself. (2.) Which is gilded over with a show of friendship; so Absalom's was, *his words smoother than butter but war in his heart*. See Prov. 26:26. (3.) Which is harboured long. Two full years Absalom nursed this root of bitterness, v. 24. It may be, at first, he did not intend to kill his brother (for, if he had, he might have had as fair an opportunity to do it as he had at last), and only waited for an occasion to disgrace him or do him some other mischief; but in time his hatred ripened to this, that he would be no less than the death of him. If the *sun going down once upon the wrath gives such place to the devil* (as is intimated, Eph. 4:26, 27), what would the sunsets of two full years do?

3. The design laid. (1.) Absalom has a feast at his house in the country, as Nabal had, on occasion of his sheep-shearing, v. 23. Attentive as Absalom was to his person (ch. 14:26), and as high as he looked, he *knew the state of his flocks and looked well to his herds*. Those who have no other care about their estates in the country than how to spend them in the town take a ready way to see the end of them. When Absalom had sheep-shearers he would himself be with them. (2.) To this feast he invites the king his father, and all the princes of the blood (v. 24), not only that he might have this opportunity to pay his respects to them, but that he might make himself the more respected among his neighbours. Those that are akin to great folks are apt to value themselves too much on their kindred. (3.) The king would not go himself, because he would not put him to the expense of his entertainment, v. 25. It seems Absalom had an estate in his own hands, on which he lived like himself; the king had given it to him, but would have him to be a good husband of it: in both these he is an example to parents, when their children have grown up, to give them a competency to live upon, according to their rank, and then to take care that they do not live above it, especially that they be no way accessory to their doing so. It is prudent for young house-keepers to begin as they can hold out, and not to spend the wool upon the shearing of it. (4.) Absalom got leave for Amnon, and all the rest of the king's sons, to come and grace his table in the country, v. 26, 27. Absalom had so effectually concealed his enmity to Amnon that David saw no reason to suspect any design upon him in that particular invitation: "Let my brother Amnon go;" but this would make the stroke more cutting to David that he was himself drawn in to consent to that which gave the opportunity for it, as before, v. 7. It seems, David's sons, though grown up, continued to pay such a deference to their father as not to go such a small journey as this without leave. Thus ought children, even when they have become men and women, to honour their parents, consult them, and do nothing material without their consent, much less against their mind.

4. The design executed, v. 28, 29. (1.) Absalom's entertainment was very plentiful; for he resolves that they shall all be merry with wine, at least concludes that Amnon will be so, for he knew that he was apt to drink to excess. But, (2.) The orders he gave to his servants concerning Amnon, that they should mingle his blood with his wine, were very barbarous. Had he challenged him, and, in reliance upon the goodness of his cause and the justice of God, fought him himself, though that would have been bad enough, yet it would have been more honourable and excusable (our ancient law, in some cases, allowed trial by battle); but to murder him, as he did, was to copy Cain's example, only that the reason made a difference: Abel was slain for

his righteousness, Amnon for his wickedness. Observe the aggravations of this sin:—[1.] He would have Amnon slain *when his heart was merry with wine*, and he was consequently least apprehensive of danger, least able to resist it, and also least fit to go out of the world; as if his malice aimed to destroy both soul and body, not giving him time to say, *Lord, have mercy upon me*. What a dreadful surprise hath death been to many, whose hearts have been *overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness!* [2.] His servants must be employed to do it, and so involved in the guilt. He was to give the word of command—*Smite Amnon*; and then they, in obedience to him, and, upon presumption that his authority would bear them out, must *kill him*. What an impious defiance does he bid to the divine law, when, though the command of God is express, *Thou shalt not kill*, he bids them kill Amnon, with this warrant, "*Have not I commanded you?* That is enough. *Be courageous*, and fear neither God nor man." Those servants are ill taught who obey their masters in contradiction to God, and those are wicked masters who have taught them to do so. Those are too obsequious that will damn their souls to please their masters, whose big words cannot secure them from God's wrath. Masters must always command their servants as those that know they also have a Master in heaven. [3.] He did it in the presence of *all the king's sons*, of whom it is said (ch. 8:18) that they were *chief rulers*; so that it was an affront to public justice which they had the administration of, and to the king his father whom they represented, and a contempt of that sword which should have been a terror to his evil deeds, while his evil deeds, on the contrary, were a terror to those that bore it. [4.] There is reason to suspect that Absalom did this, not only to revenge his sister's quarrel, but to make way for himself to the throne, which he was ambitious of, and which he would stand fair for if Amnon the eldest son was taken off. When the word of command was given Absalom's servants failed not to execute it, being buoyed up with an opinion that their master, being now next heir to the crown (for Chileab was dead, as bishop Patrick thinks), would save them from harm. Now the threatened sword is drawn in David's house which should not depart from it. *First*, His eldest son falls by it, himself being, by his wickedness, the cause of it, and his father, by his connivance, accessory to it. *Secondly*, All his sons flee from it, and come home in terror, not knowing how far their brother Absalom's bloody design might extend. See what mischief sin makes in families.

### **Verses 30-39**

Here is, I. The fright that David was put into by a false report brought to Jerusalem that Absalom had *slain all the king's sons*, v. 30. It is common for fame to make bad worse; and the first news of such a thing as this represents it as more dreadful than afterwards it proves. Let us not therefore be afraid of evil tidings, while they want confirmation, but, when we hear the worst, hope the best, at least hope better. However, this false news gave as much affliction to David, for the present, as if it had been true; he *tore his garments, and lay on the earth*, while as yet it was only a flying story, v. 31. It was well that David had grace; he had need enough of it, for he had strong passions.

II. The rectifying of the mistake in two ways:—1. By the sly suggestions of Jonadab, David's nephew, who could tell him, *Amnon only is dead*, and not all the king's sons (v. 32, 33), and could tell him too that it was done by the appointment of Absalom, and designed from the day Amnon forced his sister Tamar. What a wicked man was he, if he knew all this or had any cause to suspect it, that he did not make David acquainted with it sooner, that means might be used to make up the quarrel,

or at least that David might not throw Amnon into the mouth of danger by letting him go to Absalom's house. If we do not our utmost to prevent mischief, we make ourselves accessory to it. *If we say, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider* whether we did or no? See Prov. 24:11, 12. It is well if Jonadab was not as guilty of Amnon's death as he was of his sin; such friends do those prove who are hearkened to as counsellors to do wickedly: he that would not be so kind as to prevent Amnon's sin would not be so kind as to prevent his ruin, when, it should seem, he might have done both. 2. By the safe return of all the king's sons except Amnon. They and their attendants were speedily discovered by the watch (v. 34, 35), and soon arrived, to show themselves alive, but to bring the certain sad news that Absalom had murdered their brother Amnon. The grief David had been in for that which was not made him the better able to bear that which was, by giving him a sensible occasion, when he was undeceived, to thank God that all his sons were not dead: yet that Amnon was dead, and slain by his own brother in such a treacherous barbarous manner, was enough to put the king and court, the king and kingdom, into real mourning. Sorrow is never more reasonable than when there is sin in the case.

III. Absalom's flight from justice: *Absalom* immediately *fled*, v. 34. He was now as much afraid of the king's sons as they were of him; they fled from his malice, he from their justice. No part of the land of Israel could shelter him. The cities of refuge gave no protection to a wilful murderer. Though David had let Amnon's incest go unpunished, Absalom could not promise himself his pardon for this murder; so express was the law in this case, and so well known David's justice, and his dread of blood-guiltiness. He therefore made the best of his way to his mother's relations, and was entertained by his grandfather *Talmai, king of Geshur* (v. 37), and there he was protected *three years* (v. 38), David not demanding him, and Talmai not thinking himself obliged to send him back unless he were demanded.

IV. David's uneasiness for his absence. He mourned for Amnon a good while (v. 37), but, he being past recall, time wore off that grief: he was *comforted concerning Amnon*. It also wore off too much his detestation of Absalom's sin; instead of loathing him as a murderer, he *longs to go forth to him*, v. 39. At first he could not find in his heart to do justice on him; now he can almost find in his heart to take him into his favour again. This was David's infirmity. Something God saw in his heart that made a difference, else we should have thought that he, as much as Eli, *honoured his sons more than God*.

## Chapter 14

How Absalom threw himself out of his royal father's protection and favour we read in the foregoing chapter, which left him an exile, outlawed, and proscribed; in this chapter we have the arts that were used to bring him and his father together again, and how, at last, it was done, which is here recorded to show the folly of David in sparing him and indulging him in his wickedness, for which he was soon after severely corrected by his unnatural rebellion. I. Joab, by bringing a feigned issue (as the lawyers speak) to be tried before him, in the case of a poor widow of Tekoah, gains from him a judgment in general, That the case might be so as that the putting of a murderer to death ought to be dispensed with (v. 1–20). II. Upon the application of this, he gains from him an order to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, while yet he was forbidden the court (v. 21–24). III. After an account of Absalom, his person, and family, we are told how at length he was introduced by Joab into the king's presence, and the king was thoroughly reconciled to him (v. 25–33).

### Verses 1-20

Here is, I. Joab's design to get Absalom recalled out of banishment, his crime pardoned, and his attainder reversed, v. 1. Joab made himself very busy in this affair. 1. As a courtier that was studious, by all ways possible, to ingratiate himself with his prince and improve his interest in his favour: He *perceived that the king's heart was towards Absalom*, and that, the heat of his displeasure being over, he still retained his old affection for him, and only wanted a friend to court him to be reconciled, and to contrive for him how he might do it without impeaching the honour of his justice. Joab, finding how David stood affected, undertook this good office. 2. As a friend to Absalom, for whom perhaps he had a particular kindness, whom at least he looked upon as the rising sun, to whom it was his interest to recommend himself. He plainly foresaw that his father would at length be reconciled to him, and therefore thought he should make both his friends if he were instrumental to bring it about. 3. As a statesman, and one concerned for the public welfare. He knew how much Absalom was the darling of the people, and, if David should die while he was in banishment, it might occasion a civil war between those that were for him and those that were against him; for it is probable that though all Israel loved his person, yet they were much divided upon his case. 4. As one who was himself a delinquent, by the murder of Abner. He was conscious to himself of the guilt of blood, and that he was himself obnoxious to public justice, and therefore whatever favour he could procure to be shown to Absalom would corroborate his reprieve.

II. His contrivance to do it by laying somewhat of a parallel case before the king, which was done so dexterously by the person he employed that the king took it for a real case, and gave judgment upon it, as he had done upon Nathan's parable; and, the judgment being in favour of the criminal, the manager might, by that, discover his sentiments so far as to venture upon the application of it, and to show that it was the case of his own family, which, it is probable, she was instructed not to proceed to if the king's judgment upon her case should be severe.

1. The person he employed is not named, but she is said to be *a woman of Tekoah*, one whom he knew to be fit for such an undertaking; and it was requisite that the scene should be laid at a distance, that David might not think it strange that he had

not heard of the case before. It is said, She was *a wise woman*, one that had a quicker wit and a readier tongue than most of her neighbours, v. 2. The truth of the story would be the less suspected when it came, as was supposed, from the person's own mouth.

2. The character she put on was that of a disconsolate widow, v. 2. Joab knew such a one would have an easy access to the king, who was always ready to comfort the mourners, especially the mourning widows, having himself mentioned it among the titles of God's honour that he is *a Judge of the widows*, Ps. 68:5. God's ear, no doubt, is more open to the cries of the afflicted, and his heart too, than that of the most merciful princes on earth can be.

3. It was a case of compassion which she had to represent to the king, and a case in which she could have no relief but from the chancery in the royal breast, the law (and consequently the judgment of all the inferior courts) being against her. She tells the king that she had buried her husband (v. 5),—that she had two sons that were the support and comfort of her widowed state,—that these two (as young men are apt to do) fell out and fought, and one of them unhappily killed the other (v. 6),—that, for her part, she was desirous to protect the manslayer (for, as Rebekah argued concerning her two sons, *Why should she be deprived of them both in one day?* Gen. 27:45), but though she, who was nearest of kin to the slain, was willing to let fall the demands of an avenger of blood, yet the other relations insisted upon it that the surviving brother should be put to death according to law, not out of any affection either to justice or to the memory of the slain brother, but that, by destroying the heir (which they had the impudence to own was the thing they aimed at), the inheritance might be theirs: and thus they would cut off, (1.) Her comfort: *"They shall quench my coal*, deprive me of the only support of my old age, and put a period to all my joy in this world, which is reduced to this one coal." (2.) Her husband's memory: "His family will be quite extinct, and they will *leave him neither name nor remainder*," v. 7.

4. The king promised her his favour and a protection for her son. Observe how she improved the king's compassionate concessions. (1.) Upon the representation of her case he promised to consider of it and to give orders about it, v. 8. This was encouraging, that he did not dismiss her petition with *"Currat lex—Let the law take its course*; blood calls for blood, and let it have what it calls for:" but he will take time to enquire whether the allegations of her petition be true. (2.) The woman was not content with this, but begged that he would immediately give judgment in her favour; and if the matter of fact were not as she represented it, and consequently a wrong judgment given upon it, let her bear the blame, and free *the king and his throne from guilt*, v. 9. Yet her saying this would not acquit the king if he should pass sentence without taking due cognizance of the case. (3.) Being thus pressed, he made a further promise that she should not be injured nor insulted by her adversaries, but he would protect her from all molestation, v. 10. Magistrates ought to be the patrons of oppressed widows. (4.) Yet this does not content her, unless she can get her son's pardon, and protection for him too. Parents are not easy, unless their children be safe, safe for both worlds: *"Let not the avenger of blood destroy my son* (v. 11), for I am undone if I lose him; as good take my life as his. *Therefore let the king remember the Lord thy God*," that is, [1.] "Let him confirm this merciful sentence with an oath, making mention of the Lord our God, by way of appeal to him, that the sentence may be indisputable and irreversible; and then I shall be easy." See Heb. 6:17, 18. [2.] "Let him consider what good reason there is for this merciful sentence, and then he himself

will be confirmed in it. *Remember* how gracious and merciful *the Lord thy God* is, how he bears long with sinners and does not deal with them according to their deserts, but is ready to forgive. *Remember* how *the Lord thy God* spared Cain, who slew his brother, and protected him from the avengers of blood, Gen. 4:15. *Remember* how *the Lord thy God* forgave thee the blood of Uriah, and let the king, that has found mercy, show mercy." Note, Nothing is more proper, nor more powerful, to engage us to every duty, especially to all acts of mercy and kindness, than to remember the Lord our God. (5.) This importunate widow, by pressing the matter thus closely, obtains at last a full pardon for her son, ratified with an oath as she desired: *As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth*, that is, "I will undertake he shall come to no damage upon this account." The Son of David has assured all that put themselves under his protection that, though they should be put to death for his sake, *not a hair of their head shall perish* (Lu. 21:16–18), though they should lose for him, they shall not lose by him. Whether David did well this to undertake the protection of a murderer, whom the cities of refuge would not protect, I cannot say. But, as the matter of fact appeared to him, there was not only great reason for compassion to the mother, but room enough for a favourable judgment concerning the son: he had slain his brother, but he *hated him not in time past*; it was upon a sudden provocation, and, for aught that appeared, it might be done in his own defence. He pleaded not this himself, but the judge must be of counsel for the prisoner; and therefore, *Let mercy at this time rejoice against judgment*.

5. The case being thus adjudged in favour of her son, it is now time to apply it to the king's son, Absalom. The mask here begins to be thrown off, and another scene opened. The king is surprised, but not at all displeased, to find his humble petitioner, of a sudden, become his reprover, his privy-counsellor, an advocate for the prince his son, and the mouth of the people, undertaking to represent to him their sentiments. She begs his pardon, and his patience, for what she had further to say (v. 12), and has leave to say it, the king being very well pleased with her wit and humour. (1.) She supposes Absalom's case to be, in effect, the same with that which she had put as her son's; and therefore, if the king would protect her son, though he had slain his brother, much more ought he to protect his own, and to *fetch home his banished*, v. 13. *Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur—Change but the name, to you the tale belongs*. She names not Absalom, nor needed she to name him. David longed so much after him, and had him so much in his thoughts, that he was soon aware whom she meant by his banished. And in those two words were two arguments which the king's tender spirit felt the force of: "He is banished, and has for three years undergone the disgrace and terror, and all the inconveniences, of banishment. *Sufficient to such a one is this punishment*. But he is *thy* banished, thy own son, a piece of thyself, thy dear son, whom thou lovest." It is true, Absalom's case differed very much from that which she had put. Absalom did not slay his brother upon a hasty passion, but maliciously, and upon an old grudge; not in the field, where there were no witnesses, but at table, before all his guests. Absalom was not an only son, as hers was; David had many more, and one lately born, more likely to be his successor than Absalom, for he was called *Jedidiah*, because God loved him. But David was himself too well affected to the cause to be critical in his remarks upon the disparity of the cases, and was more desirous than she could be to bring that favourable judgment to his own son which he had given concerning hers. (2.) She reasons upon it with the king, to persuade him to recall Absalom out of banishment, give him his pardon, and take him into his favour again. [1.] She pleads the interest which the people of Israel had in him. "What is done

against him is done *against the people of God*, who have their eye upon him as heir of the crown, at least have their eye upon the house of David in general, with which the covenant is made, and which therefore they cannot tamely see the diminution and decay of by the fall of so many of its branches in the flower of their age. Therefore *the king speaks as one that is faulty*, for he will provide that my husband's name and memory be not cut off, and yet takes no care though his own be in danger, which is of more value and importance than ten thousand of ours." [2.] She pleads man's mortality (v. 14): "*We must needs die*. Death is appointed for us; we cannot avoid the thing itself, nor defer it till another time. We are all under a fatal necessity of dying; and, when we are dead, we are past recall, as water spilt upon the ground; nay, even while we are alive, we are so, we have lost our immortality, past retrieve. Amnon must have died, some time, if Absalom had not killed him; and, if Absalom be now put to death for killing him, that will not bring him to life again." This was poor reasoning, and would serve against the punishment of any murderer: but, it should seem, Amnon was a man little regarded by the people and his death little lamented, and it was generally thought hard that so dear a life as Absalom's should go for one so little valued as Amnon's. [3.] She pleads God's mercy and his clemency towards poor guilty sinners: "*God does not take away the soul, or life, but devises means that his banished, his children that have offended him, and are obnoxious to his justice, as Absalom is to thine, be not for ever expelled from him,*" v. 14. Here are two great instances of the mercy of God to sinners, properly urged as reasons for showing mercy:—*First*, The patience he exercises towards them. His law is broken, yet he does not immediately take away the life of those that break it, does not strike sinners dead, as justly he might, in the act of sin, but bears with them, and waits to be gracious. God's vengeance had suffered Absalom to live; why then should not David's justice suffer him? *Secondly*, The provision he has made for their restoration to his favour, that though by sin they have banished themselves from him, yet they might not be expelled, or cast off, for ever. Atonement might be made for sinners by sacrifice. Lepers, and others ceremonially unclean, were banished, but provision was made for their cleansing, that, though for a time excluded, they might not be finally expelled. The state of sinners is a state of banishment from God. Poor banished sinners are likely to be for ever expelled from God if some course be not taken to prevent it. It is against the mind of God that they should be so, for he is not willing that any should perish. Infinite wisdom has devised proper means to prevent it; so that it is the sinners' own fault if they be cast off. This instance of God's good-will toward us all should incline us to be merciful and compassionate one towards another, Mt. 18:32, 33.

6. She concludes her address with high compliments to the king, and strong expressions of her assurance that he would do what was just and kind both in the one case and in the other (v. 15–17); for, as if the case had been real, still she pleads for herself and her son, yet meaning Absalom. (1.) She would not have troubled the king thus but that the people made her afraid. Understanding it of her own case, all her neighbours made her apprehensive of the ruin she and her son were upon the brink of, from the avengers of blood, the terror of which made her thus bold in her application to the king himself. Understanding it of Absalom's case, she gives the king to understand, what he did not know before, that the nation was disgusted at his severity towards Absalom to such a degree that she was really afraid it would occasion a general mutiny or insurrection, for the preventing of which great mischief she ventured to speak to the king himself. The fright she was in must excuse her rudeness.

(2.) She applied to him with a great confidence in his wisdom and clemency: "I said, *I will speak to the king myself*, and ask nobody to speak for me; for the king will hear reason, even from so mean a creature as I am, will hear the cries of the oppressed, and will not suffer the poorest of his subjects to be *destroyed out of the inheritance of God*," that is, "driven out of the land of Israel, to seek for shelter among the uncircumcised, as Absalom is, whose case is so much the worse, that, being shut out of the inheritance of God, he wants God's law and ordinances, which might help to bring him to repentance, and is in danger of being infected with the idolatry of the heathen among whom he sojourns, and of bringing home the infection." To engage the king to grant her request, she expressed a confident hope that his answer would be comfortable, and such as angels bring (as bishop Patrick explains it), who are messengers of divine mercy. What this woman says by way of compliment the prophet says by way of promise (Zec. 12:8), that, when *the weak shall be as David, the house of David shall be as the angel of the Lord*. "And, in order to this, *the Lord thy God will be with thee*, to assist thee in this and every judgment thou givest." Great expectations are great engagements, especially to persons of honour, to do their utmost not to disappoint those that depend upon them.

7. The hand of Joab is suspected by the king, and acknowledged by the woman, to be in all this, v. 18–20. (1.) The king soon suspected it. For he could not think that such a woman as this would appeal to him, in a matter of such moment, of her own accord; and he knew none so likely to set her on as Joab, who was a politic man and a friend of Absalom. (2.) The woman very honestly owned it: "*Thy servant Joab bade me*. If it be well done, let him have the thanks; if ill, let him bear the blame." Though she found it very agreeable to the king, yet she would not take the praise of it to herself, but speaks the truth as it was, and gives us an example to do likewise, and never to tell a lie for the concealing of a well-managed scheme. *Dare to be true; nothing can need a lie*.

### **Verses 21-27**

Observe here, I. Orders given for the bringing back of Absalom. The errand on which the woman came to David was so agreeable, and her management of it so very ingenious and surprising, that he was brought into a peculiarly kind humour: *Go* (says he to Joab), *bring the young man Absalom again*, v. 21. He was himself inclined to favour him, yet, for the honour of his justice, he would not do it but upon intercession made for him, which may illustrate the methods of divine grace. It is true God has thought of compassion towards poor sinners, not willing that any should perish, yet he is reconciled to them through a Mediator, who intercedes with him on their behalf, and to whom he has given these orders, *Go, bring them again. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself*, and he came to this land of our banishment to bring us to God. Joab, having received these orders, 1. Returns thanks to the king for doing him the honour to employ him in an affair so universally grateful, v. 22. Joab took it as a kindness to himself, and (some think) as an indication that he would never call him to an account for the murder he had been guilty of. But, if he meant so, he was mistaken, as we shall find, 1 Ki. 2:5, 6. 2. Delays not to execute David's orders; he brought Absalom to Jerusalem, v. 23. I see not how David can be justified in suspending the execution of the ancient law (Gen. 9:6), *Whoso sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, in which a righteous magistrate ought not to *acknowledge even his brethren, or know his own children*. God's laws were never designed to be like cobwebs, which

catch the little flies, but suffer the great ones to break through. God justly made Absalom, whom his foolish pity spared, a scourge to him. But, though he allowed him to return to his own house, he forbade him the court, and would not see him himself, v. 24. He put him under this interdict, (1.) For his own honour, that he might not seem to countenance so great a criminal, nor to forgive him too easily. (2.) For Absalom's greater humiliation. Perhaps he had heard something of his conduct when Joab went to fetch him, which gave him too much reason to think that he was not truly penitent; he therefore put him under this mark of his displeasure, that he might be awakened to a sight of his sin and to sorrow for it, and might make his peace with God, upon the first notice of which, no doubt, David would be forward to receive him again into his favour.

II. Occasion taken hence to give an account of Absalom. Nothing is said of his wisdom and piety. Though he was the son of such a devout father, we read nothing of his devotion. Parents cannot give grace to their children, though they give them ever so good an education. All that is here said of him is, 1. That he was a very handsome man; there was not his equal in all Israel for beauty, (v. 25), a poor commendation for a man that had nothing else in him valuable. Handsome are those that handsome do. Many a polluted deformed soul dwells in a fair and comely body; witness Absalom's, that was polluted with blood, and deformed with unnatural disaffection to his father and prince. In his body there was no blemish, but in his mind nothing but wounds and bruises. Perhaps his comeliness was one reason why his father was so fond of him and protected him from justice. Those have reason to fear affliction in their children who are better pleased with their beauty than with their virtue. 2. That he had a very fine head of hair. Whether it was the length, or colour, or extraordinary softness of it, something there was which made it very valuable and very much an ornament to him, v. 26. This notice is taken of his hair, not as the hair of a Nazarite (he was far from that strictness), but as the hair of a beau. He let it grow till it was a burden to him, and was heavy on him, nor would he cut it as long as ever he could bear it; as pride feels no cold, so it feels no heat, and that which feeds and gratifies it is not complained of, though very uneasy. When he did poll it at certain times, for ostentation he had it weighed, that it might be seen how much it excelled other men's, and it weighed 200 shekels, which some reckon to be three pounds and two ounces of our weight; and with the oil and powder, especially if powdered (as Josephus says the fashion then was) with gold-dust, bishop Patrick thinks it is not at all incredible that it should weigh so much. This fine hair proved his halter, ch. 18:9. 3. That his family began to be built up. It is probable that it was a good while before he had a child; and then it was that, despairing of having one, he set up that pillar which is mentioned ch. 18:18, to bear up his name; but afterwards he had three sons and one daughter, v. 27. Or perhaps these sons, while he was hatching his rebellion, were all cut off by the righteous hand of God, and thereupon he set up that monument.

### **Verses 28-33**

Three years Absalom had been an exile from his father-in-law, and now two years a prisoner at large in his own house, and, in both, better dealt with than he deserved; yet his spirit was still unhumiliated, his pride unmortified, and, instead of being thankful that his life is spared, he thinks himself sorely wronged that he is not restored to all his places at court. Had he truly repented of his sin, his distance from the gaieties of the court, and his solitude and retirement in his own house, especially being in Jerusalem the holy city, would have been very agreeable to him. If a murderer must live, yet let him be for ever a recluse. But

Absalom could not bear this just and gentle mortification. He longed to see the king's face, pretending it was because he loved him, but really because he wanted an opportunity to supplant him. He cannot do his father a mischief till he is reconciled to him; this therefore is the first branch of his plot; this snake cannot sting again till he be warmed in his father's bosom. He gained this point, not by pretended submissions and promises of reformation, but (would you think it?) by insults and injuries.

1. By his insolent carriage towards Joab, he brought him to mediate for him. Once and again he sent to Joab to come and speak with him, for he durst not go to him; but Joab would not come (v. 29), probably because Absalom had not owned the kindness he had done him in bringing him to Jerusalem so gratefully as he thought he should have done; proud men take every service done them for a debt. One would think that a person in Absalom's circumstances should have sent to Joab a kindly message, and offered him a large gratuity: courtiers expect noble presents. But, instead of this, he bids his servants set Joab's corn-fields on fire (v. 30), as spiteful a thing as he could do. Samson could not think of a greater injury to do the Philistines than this. Strange that Absalom should think, by doing Joab a mischief, to prevail with him to do him a kindness, or to recommend himself to the favour of his prince or people by showing himself so very malicious and ill-natured, and such an enemy to the public good, for the fire might spread to the corn of others. Yet by this means he brings Joab to him, v. 31. Thus God, by afflictions, brings those to him that kept at a distance from him. Absalom was obliged by the law to make restitution (Ex. 22:6), yet we do not find either that he offered it or that Joab demanded it. Joab (it might be) thought he could not justify his refusal to go and speak with him; and therefore Absalom thought he could justify his taking this way to fetch him. And now Joab (perhaps frightened at the surprising boldness and fury of Absalom, and apprehensive that he had made an interest in the people strong enough to bear him out in doing the most daring things, else he would never have done this) not only puts up with this injury, but goes on his errand to the king. See what some men can do by threats, and carrying things with a high hand.

2. By his insolent message (for I can call it no better) to the king, he recovered his place at court, to see the king's face, that is, to become a privy counsellor, Esth. 1:14. (1.) His message was haughty and imperious, and very unbecoming either a son or a subject, v. 32. He undervalued the favour that had been shown him in recalling him from banishment, and restoring him to his own house, and that in Jerusalem: *Wherefore have I come from Geshur?* He denies his own crimes, though most notorious, and will not own that there was any iniquity in him, insinuating that therefore he had been wronged in the rebuke he had been under. He defies the king's justice: "Let him kill me, if he can find in his heart," knowing he loved him too well to do it. (2.) Yet with this message he carried his point, v. 33. David's strong affection for him construed all this to be the language of a great respect to his father, and an earnest desire of his favour, when alas! it was far otherwise. See how easily wise and good men may be imposed upon by their own children that design ill, especially when they are blindly fond of them. Absalom, by the posture of his body, testified his submission to his father: *He bowed himself on his face to the ground;* and David, with a kiss, sealed his pardon. Did the bowels of a father prevail to reconcile him to an impenitent son, and shall penitent sinners question the compassion of him who is the Father of mercy? If Ephraim bemoan himself, God soon bemoans him, with all the kind expressions of a fatherly tenderness: *He is a dear son, a pleasant child,* Jer. 31:20.

## Chapter 15

Absalom's name signifies "the peace of his father," yet he proves his greatest trouble; so often are we disappointed in our expectations from the creature. The sword entailed upon David's house had hitherto been among his children, but now it begins to be drawn against himself, with this aggravation, that he may thank himself for it, for, had he done justice upon the murderer, he would have prevented the traitor. The story of Absalom's rebellion begins with this chapter, but we must go over three or four more before we see the end of it. In this chapter we have, I. The arts Absalom used to insinuate himself into the people's affections (v. 1-6). II. His open avowal of his pretensions to the crown at Hebron, whither he went under colour of a vow, and the strong party that appeared for him there (v. 7-12). III. The notice brought of this to David, and his flight from Jerusalem thereupon (v. 13-18). In his flight we are told, 1. What passed between him and Ittai (v. 19-22). 2. The concern of the country for him (v. 23). 3. His conference with Zadok (v. 24-29). 4. His tears and prayers upon this occasion (v. 30-31). 5. Matters concerted by him with Hushai (v. 32-37). Now the word of God was fulfilled, that he would "raise up evil against him out of his own house.", 12:11.

### Verses 1-6

Absalom is no sooner restored to his place at court than he aims to be in the throne. He that was unhumbled under his troubles became insufferably proud when they were over; and he cannot be content with the honour of being the king's son, and the prospect of being his successor, but he must be king now. His mother was a king's daughter; on that perhaps he valued himself, and despised his father, who was but the son of Jesse. She was the daughter of a heathen king, which made him the less concerned for the peace of Israel. David, in this unhappy issue of that marriage, smarted for his being unequally yoked with an unbeliever. When Absalom was restored to the king's favour, if he had had any sense of gratitude, he would have studied how to oblige his father, and make him easy; but, on the contrary, he meditates how to undermine him, by stealing the hearts of the people from him. Two things recommend a man to popular esteem—greatness and goodness.

I. Absalom looks great, v. 1. He had learned of the king of Geshur (what was not allowed to the kings of Israel) to multiply horses, which made him look desirable, while his father, on his mule, looked despicable. The people desired a king like the nations; and such a one Absalom will be, appearing in pomp and magnificence, above what had been seen in Jerusalem. Samuel had foretold that this would be *the manner of the king*: He shall *have chariots and horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots* (1 Sa. 8:11); and this is Absalom's manner. Fifty footmen (in rich liveries we may suppose) running before him, to give notice of his approach, would highly gratify his pride and the people's foolish fancy. David thinks that this parade is designed only to grace his court, and connives at it. Those parents know not what they do who indulge a proud humour in their children; for I have seen more young people ruined by pride than by any one lust whatsoever.

II. Absalom will seem very good too, but with a very bad design. Had he proved himself a good son and a good subject, and set himself to serve his father's interest, he would have done his present duty, and shown himself worthy of future honours, after his father's death. Those that know how to obey well know how to rule. But to show how good a judge and how good a

king he will be is but to deceive himself and others. Those are good indeed that are good in their own place, not that pretend how good they would be in other people's places. But this is all the goodness we find in Absalom.

1. He wishes that he were a judge in Israel, v. 4. He had all the pomp and all the pleasure he could wish, lived as great and in as much ease as any man could; yet this will not content him, unless he have power too: *O that I were a judge in Israel!* He that should himself have been judged to death for murder has the impudence to aim at being a judge of others. We read not of Absalom's wisdom, virtue, or learning in the laws, nor had he given any proofs of his love to justice, but the contrary; yet he wishes he were judge. Note, Those are commonly most ambitious of preferment that are least fit for it; the best qualified are the most modest and self-diffident, while it is no better than the spirit of an Absalom that says, *O that I were a judge in Israel!*

2. He takes a very bad course for the accomplishing of his wish. Had he humbly petitioned his father to employ him in the administration of justice, and studied to qualify himself for it (according to the rule, Ex. 18:21), no doubt he would have been sure of the next judge's place that fell; but this is too mean a post for his proud spirit. It is below him to be subordinate, though to the king his father; he must be supreme or nothing. He wants to be such a judge that every man who has any cause shall come to him: in all causes, and over all persons, he must preside, little thinking what a fatigue this would be to have every man come to him. Moses himself could not bear it. Those know not what power is that grasp at so much, so very much. To gain the power he aims at, he endeavours to instil into the people's minds,

(1.) A bad opinion of the present administration, as if the affairs of the kingdom were altogether neglected, and no care taken about them. He got round him all he could that had business at the council-board, enquired what their business was; and, [1.] Upon a slight and general enquiry into their cause, he pronounced it good: *Thy matters are right.* A fit man indeed to be a judge, who would give judgment upon hearing one side only! For he has a bad cause indeed that cannot put a good colour upon it, when he himself has the telling of the story. But, [2.] He told them that it was to no purpose to appeal to the throne: *"There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.* The king is himself old, and past business, or so taken up with his devotions that he never minds business; his sons are so addicted to their pleasures that, though they have the name of chief rulers, they take no care of the affairs committed to them." He further seems to insinuate what a great want there was of him while he was banished and confined, and how much the public suffered by his exile; what his father said truly in Saul's reign (Ps. 75:3) he says falsely: *The land and all the inhabitants of it are dissolved,* all will go to wreck and ruin, unless *I bear up the pillars of it.* Every appellant shall be made to believe that he will never have justice done him, unless Absalom be viceroy or lord-justice. It is the way of turbulent, factious, aspiring men, to reproach the government they are under. *Presumptuous are they, self-willed, and not afraid to speak evil of dignities,* 2 Pt. 2:10. Even David himself, the best of kings, and his administration, could not escape the worst of censures. Those that aim to usurp cry out of grievances, and pretend to design nothing but the redress of them: as Absalom here.

(2.) A good opinion of his own fitness to rule. That the people might say, "O that Absalom were a judge!" (and they are apt enough to desire changes), he recommends himself to them, [1.] As very diligent. He rose up early, and appeared in public before the rest of the king's sons were stirring, and he stood beside the way of the gate, where the courts of judgment sat, as

one mightily concerned to see justice done and public business despatched. [2.] As very inquisitive and prying, and desirous to be acquainted with every one's case. He would know of what city every one was that came for judgment, that he might inform himself concerning every part of the kingdom and the state of it, v. 2. [3.] As very familiar and humble. If any Israelite offered to do obeisance to him he took him and embraced him as a friend. No man's conduct could be more condescending, while his heart was as proud as Lucifer's. Ambitious projects are often carried on by *a show of humility*, Col. 2:23. He knew what a grace it puts upon greatness to be affable and courteous, and how much it wins upon common people: had he been sincere in it, it would have been his praise; but to fawn upon the people that he might betray them was abominable hypocrisy. *He croucheth, and humbleth himself, to draw them into his net*, Ps. 10:9, 10.

### Verses 7-12

We have here the breaking out of Absalom's rebellion, which he had long been contriving. It is said to be *after forty years*, v. 7. But whence it is to be dated we are not told; not from David's beginning his reign, for then it would fall in the last year of his life, which is not probable; but either from his first anointing by Samuel seven years before, or rather (I think) from the people's desiring a king, and the first change of the government into a monarchy, which might be about ten years before David began to reign; it is fitly dated thence, to show that the same restless spirit was still working, and still they were given to change: as fond now of a new man as then of a new model. So it fell about the thirtieth year of David's reign. Absalom's plot being now ripe for execution,

I. The place he chose for the rendezvous of his party was Hebron, the place where he was born and where his father began his reign and continued it several years, which would give some advantage to his pretensions. Every one knew Hebron to be a royal city; and it lay in the heart of Judah's lot, in which tribe, probably, he thought his interest strong.

II. The pretence he had both to go thither and to invite his friends to him there was to offer a sacrifice to God, in performance of a vow he had made during his banishment, v. 7, 8. We have cause enough to suspect that he had not made any such vow; it does not appear that he was so religiously inclined. But he that stuck not at murder and treason would not make conscience of a lie to serve his purpose. If he said he had made such a vow, nobody could disprove him. Under this pretence, 1. He got leave of his father to go to Hebron. David would be well pleased to hear that his son, in his exile, was so desirous to return to Jerusalem, not only his father's city, but the city of the living God,—that he looked up to God, to bring him back,—that he had vowed, if he were brought back, to serve the Lord, whose service he had hitherto neglected,—and that now, being brought back, he remembered his vow, and resolved to perform it. If he think fit to do it in Hebron, rather than in Sion or Gibeon, the good king is so well pleased with the thing itself that he will not object against his choice of the place. See how willing tender parents are to believe the best concerning their children, and, upon the least indication of good, to hope, even concerning those that have been untoward, that they will repent and reform. But how easy is it for children to take advantage of their good parents' credulity, and to impose upon them with the show of religion, while still they are what they were! David was overjoyed to hear that Absalom inclined to *serve the Lord*, and therefore readily gave him leave to go to Hebron, and to go thither with solemnity. 2. He got a good number of sober substantial citizens to go along with him, v. 11. There went 200 men,

probably of the principal men of Jerusalem, whom he invited to join with him in his feast upon his sacrifice; and they went in their simplicity, not in the least suspecting that Absalom had any bad design in this journey. He knew that it was to no purpose to tempt them into his plot: they were inviolably firm to David. But he drew them in to accompany him, that the common people might think that they were in his interest, and that David was deserted by some of his best friends. Note, It is no new thing for very good men, and very good things, to be made use of by designing men to put a colour upon bad practices. When religion is made a stalking-horse, and sacrifice a shoeing-horn, to sedition and usurpation it is not to be wondered at if some that were well affected to religion, as these followers of Absalom here, are imposed upon by the fallacy, and drawn in to give countenance to that, with their names, which in their heart they abhor, not having known the depths of Satan.

III. The project he laid was to get himself proclaimed king throughout all the tribes of Israel upon a signal given, v. 10. Spies were sent abroad, to be ready in every country to receive the notice with satisfaction and acclamations of joy, and to make the people believe that the news was both very true and very good, and that they were all concerned to take up arms for their new king. Upon the sudden spreading of this proclamation, "*Absalom reigns in Hebron,*" some would conclude that David was dead, others that he had resigned: and thus those that were in the secret would draw in many to appear for Absalom, and to come into his assistance, who, if they had rightly understood the matter, would have abhorred the thought of it, but, being drawn in, would adhere to him. See what artifices ambitious men use for the compassing of their ends; and in matters of state, as well as in matters of religion, let us not be forward to believe every spirit, but try the spirits.

IV. The person he especially courted and relied upon in this affair was Ahithophel, a politic thinking man, and one that had a clear head and a great compass of thought, that had been David's counsellor, his guide and his acquaintance (Ps. 55:13), his *familiar friend, in whom he trusted, who did eat of his bread*, Ps. 41:9. But, upon some disgust of David's against him, or his against David, he was banished, or retired from public business, and lived privately in the country. How should a man of such good principles as David, and a man of such corrupt principles as Ahithophel, long agree? A fitter tool Absalom could not find in all the kingdom than one that was so great a statesman, and yet was disaffected to the present ministry. While Absalom was offering his sacrifices, in performance of his pretended vow, he sent for this man. So much was his heart on the projects of his ambition that he could not stay to make an end of his devotion, which showed what his eye was upon in all, and that it was but for a pretence that he made long offerings.

V. The party that joined with him proved at last very considerable. The people increased continually with Absalom, which made the conspiracy strong and formidable. Every one whom he had complimented and caressed (pronouncing his matters right and good, especially if afterwards the cause went against him) not only came himself, but made all the interest he could for him, so that he wanted not for numbers. The majority is no certain rule to judge of equity by. *All the world wondered after the beast*. Whether Absalom formed this design merely in the height of his ambition and fondness to rule, or whether there was not in it also malice against his father and revenge for his banishment and confinement, though this punishment was so much less than he deserved, does not appear. But, generally, that which aims at the crown aims at the head that wears it.

**Verses 13-23**

Here is, I. The notice brought to David of Absalom's rebellion, v. 13. The matter was bad enough, and yet it seems to have been made worse to him (as such things commonly are) than really it was; for he was told that *the hearts of the men of Israel* (that is, the generality of them, at least the leading men) were *after Absalom*. But David was the more apt to believe it because now he could call to mind the arts that Absalom had used to inveigle them, and perhaps reflected upon it with regret that he had not done more to counterwork him, and secure his own interest, which he had been too confident of. Note, It is the wisdom of princes to make sure of their subjects; for, if they have them, they have their purses, and arms, and all, at their service.

II. The alarm this gave to David, and the resolutions he came to thereupon. We may well imagine him in a manner thunderstruck, when he heard that the son he loved so dearly, and had been so indulgent to, was so unnaturally and ungratefully in arms against him. Well might he say with Caesar, *Kai sy teknon—What, thou my son?* Let not parents raise their hopes too high from their children, lest they be disappointed. David did not call a council, but, consulting only with God and his own heart, determined immediately to quit Jerusalem, v. 14. He took up this strange resolve, so disagreeable to his character as a man of courage, either, 1. As a penitent, submitting to the rod, and lying down under God's correcting hand. Conscience now reminded him of his sin in the matter of Uriah, and the sentence he was under for it, which was that *evil should arise against him out of his own house*. "Now," thinks he, "the word of God begins to be fulfilled, and it is not for me to contend with it or fight against it; God is righteous and I submit." Before unrighteous Absalom he could justify himself and stand it out; but before the righteous God he must condemn himself and yield to his judgments. Thus he *accepts the punishment of his iniquity*. Or, 2. As a politician. Jerusalem was a great city, but not tenable; it should seem, by David's prayer (Ps. 51:18), that the walls of it were not built up, much less was it regularly fortified. It was too large to be garrisoned by so small a force as David had now with him, He had reason to fear that the generality of the inhabitants were too well affected to Absalom to be true to him. Should he fortify himself here, he might lose the country, in which, especially among those that lay furthest from Absalom's tampering, he hoped to have the most friends. And he had such a kindness for Jerusalem that he was loth to make it the seat of war, and expose it to the calamities of a siege; he will rather quit it tamely to the rebels. Note, Good men, when they suffer themselves, care not how few are involved with them in suffering.

III. His hasty flight from Jerusalem. His servants agreed to the measures he took, faithfully adhered to him (v. 15), and assured him of their inviolable allegiance, whereupon, 1. He went out of Jerusalem himself on foot, while his son Absalom had chariots and horses. It is not always the best man, nor the best cause, that makes the best figure. See here, not only the servant, but the traitor, on horseback, while the prince, the rightful prince, *walks as a servant upon the earth*, Eccl. 10:7. Thus he chose to do, to abase himself so much the more under God's hand, and in condescension to his friends and followers, with whom he would walk, in token that he would live and die with them. 2. He took his household with him, his wives and children, that he might protect them in this day of danger, and that they might be a comfort to him in this day of grief. Masters of families, in their greatest frights, must not neglect their households. *Ten women, that were concubines, he left behind, to keep the house*, thinking that the weakness of their sex would secure them from murder, and their age and relation to him would secure them from rape; but God overruled this for the fulfilling of his word. 3. He took his life-guard with him, or band of pensioners, the

Cherethites and Pelethites, who were under the command of Benaiah, and the Gittites, who were under the command of Ittai, v. 18. These Gittites seem to have been, by birth, Philistines of Gath, who came, a regiment of them, 600 in all, to enter themselves in David's service, having known him at Gath, and being greatly in love with him for his virtue and piety, and having embraced the Jews' religion. David made them of his *garde du corps*—*his body-guard*, and they adhered to him in his distress. The Son of David *found not such great faith in Israel* as in a Roman centurion and a woman of Canaan. 4. As many as would, of the people of Jerusalem, he took with him, and made a halt at some distance from the city, to draw them up, v. 17. He compelled none. Those whose hearts were with Absalom, to Absalom let them go, and so shall their doom be: they will soon have enough of him. Christ enlists none but volunteers.

IV. His discourse with Ittai the Gittite, who commanded the Philistine-proselytes.

1. David dissuaded him from going along with him, v. 19, 20. Though he and his men might be greatly serviceable to him yet, (1.) He would try whether he was hearty for him, and not inclined to Absalom. He therefore bids him return to his post in Jerusalem, and serve the new king. If he was no more than a soldier of fortune (as we say), he would be for that side which would pay and prefer him best; and to that side let him go. (2.) If he was faithful to David, yet David would not have him exposed to the fatigues and perils he now counted upon. David's tender spirit cannot bear to think that a stranger and an exile, a proselyte and a new convert, who ought, by all means possible, to be encouraged and made easy, should, at his first coming, meet with such hard usage: "*Should I make thee go up and down with us?* No, return with thy brethren." Generous souls are more concerned at the share others have in their troubles than at their own. Ittai shall therefore be dismissed with a blessing: *Mercy and truth be with thee*, that is, God's mercy and truth, mercy according to promise, the promise made to those who renounce other gods and put themselves under the wings of the divine Majesty. This is a very proper pious farewell, when we part with a friend, "*Mercy and truth be with thee*, and then thou art safe, and mayest be easy, wherever thou art." David's dependence was upon the mercy and truth of God for comfort and happiness, both for himself and his friends; see Ps. 61:7.

2. Ittai bravely resolved not to leave him, v. 21. Where David is, *whether in life or death*, safe or in peril, there will this faithful friend of his be; and he confirms this resolution with an oath, that he might not be tempted to break it. Such a value has he for David, not for the sake of his wealth and greatness (for then he would have deserted him now that he saw him thus reduced), but for the sake of his wisdom and goodness, which were still the same, that, whatever comes of it, he will never leave him. Note, That is a friend indeed who loves at all times, and will adhere to us in adversity. Thus should we cleave to the Son of David with full purpose of heart that *neither life nor death shall separate us from his love*.

V. The common people's sympathy with David in his affliction. When he and his attendants *passed over the brook Kidron* (the very same brook that Christ passed over when he entered upon his sufferings, Jn. 18:1), *towards the way of the wilderness*, which lay between Jerusalem and Jericho, *all the country wept with a loud voice*, v. 23. Cause enough there was for weeping,

1. To see a prince thus reduced, one that had lived so great forced from his palace and in fear of his life, with a small retinue seeking shelter in a desert, to see the city of David, which he himself won, built, and fortified, made an unsafe abode for David himself. It would move the compassion even of strangers to see a man fallen thus low from such a height, and this by the

wickedness of his own son; a piteous case it was. Parents that are abused and ruined by their own children merit the tender sympathy of their friends as much as any of the sons or daughters of affliction. Especially, 2. To see their own prince thus wronged, who had been so great a blessing to their land, and had not done any thing to forfeit the affections of his people; to see him in this distress, and themselves unable to help him, might well draw floods of tears from their eyes.

### Verses 24-30

Here we have, I. The fidelity of the priests and Levites and their firm adherence to David and his interest. They knew David's great affection to them and their office, notwithstanding his failings. The method Absalom took to gain people's affections made no impression upon them; he had little religion in him, and therefore they steadily adhered to David. Zadok and Abiathar, and all the Levites, if he go, will accompany him, and take the ark with them, that, by it, they may ask counsel of God for him, v. 24. Note, Those that are friends to the ark in their prosperity will find it a friend to them in their adversity. Formerly David would not rest till he had found a resting-place for the ark; and now, if the priests may have their mind, the ark shall not rest till David return to his rest.

II. David's dismissal of them back into the city, v. 25, 26. Abiathar was high priest (1 Ki. 2:35), but Zadok was his assistant, and attended the ark most closely, while Abiathar was active in public business, v. 24. Therefore David directs his speech to Zadok, and an excellent speech it is, and shows him to be in a very good frame under his affliction, and that still he holds fast his integrity. 1. He is very solicitous for the safety of the ark: "By all means *carry the ark back into the city*, let not that be unsettled and exposed with me, lodge that again in the tent pitched for it; surely Absalom, bad as he is, will do that no harm." David's heart, like Eli's trembles for the ark of God. Note, It argues a good principle to be more concerned for the church's prosperity than for our own, to *prefer Jerusalem* before our *chief joy* (Ps. 137:6), the success of the gospel, and the flourishing of the church, above our own wealth, credit, ease, and safety, even when they are most in hazard. 2. He is very desirous to return to the enjoyment of the privileges of God's house. He will reckon it the greatest instance of God's favour to him if he may but once more be brought back to see it and his habitation. This will be more his joy than to be brought back to his own palace and throne again. Note, Gracious souls measure their comforts and conveniences in this world by the opportunity they give them of communion with God. Hezekiah wished for the recovery of his health for this reason, that he might *go up to the house of the Lord*, Isa. 38:22. 3. He is very submissive to the holy will of God concerning the issue of this dark dispensation. He hopes the best (v. 25), and hopes for it from the favour of God, which he looks upon to be the fountain of all good: "If God favour me so far, I shall be settled again as formerly." But he provides for the worst: "If he deny me this favour—if he thus say, *I have no delight in thee*—I know I deserve the continuance of his displeasure; his holy will be done." See him here patiently awaiting the event: "*Behold, here am I*, as a servant expecting orders;" and see him willing to commit himself to God concerning it: "*Let him do to me as seemeth good to him*. I have nothing to object. All is well that God does." Observe with what satisfaction and holy complacency he speaks of the divine disposal: not only, "He can do what he will," subscribing to his power (Job 9:12), or, "He has a right to do what he will," subscribing to his sovereignty (Job 33:13), or, "He will do what he will," subscribing to his unchangeableness (Job 23:13, 15), but, "*Let him to what he will*," subscribing to his wisdom and

goodness. Note, It is our interest, as well as duty, cheerfully to acquiesce in the will of God, whatever befalls us. That we may not complain of what is, let us see God's hand in all events; and, that we may not be afraid of what shall be, let us see all events in God's hand.

III. The confidence David put in the priests that they would serve his interest to the utmost of their power in his absence. He calls Zadok a *seer* (v. 27), that is, a wise man, a man that can see into business and discern time and judgment: "Thou hast thy *eyes in thy head* (Eccl. 2:14), and therefore art capable of doing me service, especially by sending me intelligence of the enemy's motions and resolutions." One friend that is a seer, in such an exigency as this, was worth twenty that were not so quick-sighted. For the settling of a private correspondence with the priests in his absence, he appoints, 1. Whom they should send to him—their two sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, whose coat, it might be hoped, would be their protection, and of whose prudence and faithfulness he had probably had experience. 2. Whither they should send. He would encamp *in the plain of the wilderness* till he heard from them (v. 28), and then would move according to the information and advice they should send him. Hereupon they returned to the city, to await the event. It was a pity that any disturbance should be given to a state so happy as this was, when the prince and the priests had such an entire affection for the confidence in each other.

IV. The melancholy posture that David and his men put themselves into, when, at the beginning of their march, they went up the *mount of Olives*, v. 30.

1. David himself, as a deep mourner, covered his head and face for shame and blushing, went bare-foot, as a prisoner or a slave, for mortification, and went weeping. Did it become a man of his reputation for courage and greatness of spirit thus to cry like a child, only for fear of an enemy at a distance, against whom he might easily have made head, and perhaps with one bold stroke have routed him? Yes, it did not ill become him, considering how much there was in this trouble, (1.) Of the unkindness of his son. He could not but weep to think that one who came out of his bowels, and had so often lain in his arms, should thus lift up the heel against him. God himself is said to be grieved with the rebellions of his own children (Ps. 95:10) and even *broken with their whorish heart*, Eze. 6:9. (2.) There was much of the displeasure of his God in it. This infused the wormwood and gall into the *affliction and misery*, Lam. 3:19. His sin was *ever before him* (Ps. 51:3), but never so plain nor ever appearing so black as now. He never wept thus when Saul hunted him: but a wounded conscience makes troubles lie heavily, Ps. 38:4.

2. When David wept all his company wept likewise, being much affected with his grief and willing to share in it. It is our duty to *weep with those that weep*, especially our superiors, and those that are better than we; for, *if this be done in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?* We must weep with those that weep for sin. When Hezekiah humbled himself for his sin all Jerusalem joined with him, 2 Chr. 32:26. To prevent suffering with sinners, let us sorrow with them.

### **Verses 31-37**

Nothing, it seems, appeared to David more threatening in Absalom's plot than that Ahithophel was in it; for one good head, in such a design, is worth a thousand good hands. Absalom was himself no politician, but he had got one entirely in his interest that was, and would be the more dangerous because he had been all along acquainted with David's counsels and affairs; if therefore he can be baffled, Absalom is as good as routed and the head of the conspiracy cut off. This David endeavours to do.

I. By prayer. When he heard that Ahithophel was in the plot he lifted up his heart to God in this short prayer: *Lord, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*, v. 31. He had not opportunity for a long prayer, but he was not one of those that thought he should be heard for his much speaking. It was a fervent prayer: "*Lord, I pray thee, do this.*" God is well pleased with the importunity of those that come to him with their petitions. David is particular in this prayer; he names the person whose counsels he prays against. God gives us leave, in prayer, to be humbly and reverently free with him, and to mention the particular care, and fear, and grief, that lies heavily upon us. David prayed not against Ahithophel's person, but against his counsel, that God would *turn it into foolishness*, that, though he was a wise man, he might at this time give foolish counsel, or, if he gave wise counsel, that it might be rejected as foolish, or, if it were followed, that by some providence or other it might be defeated, and not attain the end. David prayed this in a firm belief that God has all hearts in his hand, and tongues too, that, when he pleases, he can *take away the understanding of the aged and make the judges fools*, (Job 12:17; Isa. 3:2, 3), and in hope that God would own and plead his just and injured cause. Note, We may pray in faith, and should pray with fervency, that God will turn that counsel into foolishness which is taken against his people.

II. By policy. We must second our prayer with our endeavours, else we tempt God. It is good service to countermine the policy of the church's enemies. When David came to the top of the mount, he *worshipped God*, v. 32. Note, Weeping must not hinder worshipping, but quicken it rather. Now he penned the third Psalm, as appears by the title; and some think that his singing this was the worship he now paid to God. Just now Providence brought Hushai to him. While he was yet speaking, God heard, and sent him the person that should be instrumental to befool Ahithophel. He came to condole with David on his present trouble, with his coat rent and earth upon his head; but David, having a great deal of confidence in his conduct and faithfulness, resolved to employ him as a spy upon Absalom. He would not take him with him (v. 33), for he had now more need of soldiers than counsellors, but sent him back to Jerusalem, to wait for Absalom's arrival, as a deserter from David, and to offer him his service, v. 34. Thus he might insinuate himself into his counsels, and defeat Ahithophel, either by dissuading Absalom from following his advice or by discovering it to David, that he might know where to stand upon his guard. How this gross dissimulation, which David put Hushai upon, can be justified, as a stratagem in war, I do not see. The best that can be made of it is that Absalom, if he rebel against his father, must stand upon his guard against all mankind, and, if he will be deceived, let him be deceived. David recommended Hushai to Zadok and Abiathar, as persons proper to be consulted with (v. 35), and to their two sons, as trusty men to be sent on errands to David, v. 36. Hushai, thus instructed, came to Jerusalem (v. 37), whither also Absalom soon after came with his forces. How soon do royal palaces and royal cities change their masters! But we look for a kingdom which cannot be thus shaken and in the possession of which we cannot be disturbed.

## Chapter 16

In the close of the foregoing chapter we left David flying from Jerusalem, and Absalom entering into it; in this chapter, I. We are to follow David in his melancholy flight; and there we find him, 1. Cheated by Ziba (v. 1-4). 2. Cursed by Shimei, which he bears with wonderful patience (v. 5-14). II. We are to meet Absalom in his triumphant entry; and there we find him, 1. Cheated by Hushai (v. 15-19). 2. Counselling by Ahithophel to go in unto his father's concubines (v. 20-23).

### Verses 1-4

We read before how kind David was to Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, how he prudently entrusted his servant Ziba with the management of his estate, while he generously entertained him at his own table, ch. 9:10. This matter was well settled; but, it seems, Ziba is not content to be manager, he longs to be master, of Mephibosheth's estate. Now, he thinks, is his time to make himself so; if he can procure a grant of it from the crown, whether David or Absalom get the better it is all one to him, he hopes he shall secure his prey, which he promises himself by fishing in troubled waters. In order hereunto, 1. He made David a handsome present of provisions, which was the more welcome because it came seasonably (v. 1), and with this he designed to incline him to himself; for *a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men*, Prov. 18:16. Nay, *Whithersoever it turneth, it prospereth*, Prov. 17:8. David inferred from this that Ziba was a very discreet and generous man, and well affected to him, when, in all, he designed nothing but to make his own market and to get Mephibosheth's estate settled upon himself. Shall the prospect of advantage in this world make men generous to the rich? and shall not the belief of an abundant recompence in the resurrection of the just make us charitable to the poor? Lu. 14:14. Ziba was very considerate in the present he brought to David; it was what would do him some good in his present distress, v. 2. Observe, The wine was intended for those that were faint, not for the king's own drinking, or the courtiers; it seems, they did not commonly use it, but it was for cordials for those *that were ready to perish*, Prov. 31:6. Blessed art thou, O land! when thy princes use wine for strength, as David did, and not for drunkenness, as Absalom did, ch. 13:28. See Eccl. 10:17. Whatever Ziba intended in this present, God's providence sent it to David for his support very graciously. God makes use of bad men for good purposes to his people, and sends them meat by ravens. Having by his present insinuated himself into David's affection, and gained credit with him, the next thing he has to do for the compassing of his end is to incense him against Mephibosheth, which he does by a false accusation, representing him as ungratefully designing to raise himself by the present broils, and to recover the crown to his own head, now that David and his son were contending for it. David enquires for him as one of his family, which gives Ziba occasion to tell this false story of him, v. 3. What immense damages do masters often sustain by the lying tongues of their servants! David knew Mephibosheth not to be an ambitious man, but easy in his place, and well-affected to him and his government; nor could he be so weak as to expect with his lame legs to climb the ladder of preferment; yet David gives credit to the calumny, and, without further enquiry or consideration, convicts Mephibosheth of treason, seizes his lands as forfeited, and grants them to Ziba: *Behold, thine are all that pertained to Mephibosheth* (v. 4), a rash judgment, and which afterwards he was ashamed of, when the truth came to light, ch. 19:29. Princes cannot help it, but they will be sometimes (as our law speaks)

deceived in their grants; but they ought to use all means possible to discover the truth and to guard against malicious designing men, who would impose upon them, as Ziba did upon David. Having by his wiles gained his point, Ziba secretly laughed at the king's credulity, congratulated himself on his success, and departed, with a great compliment upon the king, that he valued his favour more than Mephibosheth's estate: "Let me *find grace in thy sight, O king!* and I have enough." Great men ought always to be jealous of flatterers, and remember that nature has given them two ears, that they may hear both sides.

#### **Verses 5-14**

We here find how David bore Shimei's curses much better than he had borne Ziba's flatteries. By the latter he was brought to pass a wrong judgment on another, by the former to pass a right judgment on himself. The world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns. Observe here,

I. How insolent and furious Shimei was, and how his malice took occasion from David's present distress to be so much the more outrageous. David, in his flight, had come to Bahurim, a city of Benjamin in or near which this Shimei lived, who, being of the house of Saul (with the fall of which all his hopes of preferment fell), had an implacable enmity to David, unjustly looking upon him as the ruin of Saul and his family only because, by the divine appointment, he succeeded Saul. While David was in prosperity and power, Shimei hated him as much as he did now, but he durst not then say anything against him. God knows what is in the hearts of those that are disaffected to him and his government, but earthly princes do not. Now he came forth, and cursed David with all the bad words and wishes he could invent, v. 5. Observe,

1. Why he took this opportunity to give vent to his malice. (1.) Because now he thought he might do it safely; yet, if David had thought proper to resent the provocation, it would have cost Shimei his life. (2.) Because now it would be most grievous to David, would add affliction to his grief, and pour vinegar into his wounds. He complains of those as most barbarous who *talk to the grief of those whom God has wounded*, Ps. 69:26. So Shimei did, loading him with curses whom no generous eye could look upon without compassion. (3.) Because now he thought that Providence justified his reproaches, and that David's present afflictions proved him to be as bad a man as he was willing to represent him. Job's friends condemned him upon this false principle. Those that are under the rebukes of a gracious God must not think it strange if these bring upon them the reproaches of evil men. If once it be said, *God hath forsaken him*, presently it follows, *Persecute and take him*, Ps. 71:11. But it is the character of a base spirit thus to trample upon those that are down, and insult over them.

2. How his malice was expressed. See, (1.) What this wretched man did: *He cast stones at David* (v. 6), as if his king had been a dog, or the worst of criminals, whom all Israel must stone with stones till he die. Perhaps he kept at such a distance that the stones he threw could not reach David, nor any of his attendants, yet he showed what he would have done if it had been in his power. *He cast dust* (v. 13), which, probably, would blow into his own eyes, like the curses he threw, which, being causeless, would return upon his own head. Thus, while his malice made him odious, the impotency of it made him ridiculous and contemptible. Those that fight against God cannot hurt him, though they hate him. *If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him?* Job 35:6. It was an aggravation of his wickedness that David was attended with his mighty men on his right hand and on his left, so that he was not in so forlorn a condition as he thought (*persecuted but not forsaken*), and that he continued to do it,

and did it the more passionately, for David's bearing it patiently. (2.) What he said. With the stones he shot his arrows, even bitter words (v. 7, 8), in contempt of that law, *Thou shalt not curse the gods*, Ex. 22:28. David was a man of honour and conscience, and in great reputation for every thing that was just and good; what could this foul mouth say against him? Why, truly, what was done long since to the house of Saul was the only thing which he could recollect, and with this he upbraided David because it was the thing that he himself was a loser by. See how apt we are to judge of men and their character by what they are to us, and to conclude that those are certainly evil men that have ever so justly been, or that we ever so unjustly think have been, instruments of evil to us. So partial are we to ourselves that no rule can be more fallacious than this. No man could be more innocent of the blood of the house of Saul than David was. Once and again he spared Saul's life, while Saul sought his. When Saul and his sons were slain by the Philistines, David and his men were many miles off; and, when they heard it, they lamented it. From the murder of Abner and Ish-bosheth he had sufficiently cleared himself; and yet all *the blood of the house of Saul* must be laid at his door. Innocency is no fence against malice and falsehood; nor are we to think it strange if we be charged with that from which we have been most careful to keep ourselves. It is well for us that men are not to be our judges, but he whose judgment is according to truth. The blood of the house of Saul is here most unjustly charged upon David, [1.] As that which gave him his character, and denominated him a bloody man and a man of Belial, v. 7. And, if a man of blood, no doubt a man of Belial, that is, a child of the devil, who is called *Belial* (2 Co. 6:15), and who was a murderer from the beginning. Bloody men are the worst of men. [2.] As that which brought the present trouble upon him: "Now that thou art dethroned, and driven out to the wilderness, *the Lord has returned upon thee the blood of the house of Saul.*" See how forward malicious men are to press God's judgments into the service of their own passion and revenge. If any who have, as they think, wronged them, should come into trouble, the injury done to them must be made the cause of the trouble. But we must take heed lest we wrong God by making his providence thus to patronise our foolish and unjust resentments. As the *wrath of man works not the righteousness of God*, so the righteousness of God serves not the wrath of man. [3.] As that which would now be his utter ruin; for he endeavours to make him despair of ever recovering his throne again. Now they said, *There is no help for him in God* (Ps. 3:2), *the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom* (not Mephibosheth—the house of Saul never dreamed of making *him* king, as Ziba suggested), *and thou art taken in thy mischief*, that is, "the mischief that will be thy destruction, and all because thou art a bloody man." Thus Shimei cursed.

II. See how patient and submissive David was under this abuse. The sons of Zeruah, Abishai particularly, were forward to maintain David's honour with their swords; they resented the affront keenly, as well they might: *Why should this dead dog* be suffered to *curse the king?* v. 9. If David will but give them leave, they will put these lying cursing lips to silence, and take off his head; for his throwing stones at the king was an overt act, which abundantly proved that he compassed and imagined his death. But the king would by no means suffer it: *What have I to do with you? So let him curse.* Thus Christ rebuked the disciples, who, in zeal for his honour, would have commanded fire from heaven on the town that affronted him, Lu. 9:55. Let us see with what considerations David quieted himself. 1. The chief thing that silenced him was that he had deserved this affliction. This is not mentioned indeed; for a man may truly repent, and yet needs not, upon all occasions, proclaim his

penitent reflections. Shimei unjustly upbraided him with the blood of Saul: from *that* his conscience acquitted him, but, at the same time, it charged him with the blood of Uriah. "The reproach is too true" (thinks David), "though false as he means it." Note, A humble tender spirit will turn reproaches into reproofs, and so get good by them, instead of being provoked by them. 2. He observes the hand of God in it: *The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David* (v. 10), and again, *So let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him*, v. 11. As it was Shimei's sin, it was not from God, but from the devil and his own wicked heart, nor did God's hand in it excuse or extenuate it, much less justify it, any more than it did the sin of those who put Christ to death, Acts 2:23, 4:28. But, as it was David's affliction, it was from the Lord, one of the evils which he raised up against him. David looked above the instrument of his trouble to the supreme director, as Job, when the plunderers had stripped him, acknowledged, *The Lord hath taken away*. Nothing more proper to quiet a gracious soul under affliction than an eye to the hand of God in it. *I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it*. The scourge of the tongue is God's rod. 3. He quiets himself under the less affliction with the consideration of the greater (v. 11): *My son seeks my life, much more may this Benjamite*. Note, Tribulation works patience in those that are sanctified. The more we bear the better able we should be to bear still more; what tries our patience should improve it. The more we are inured to trouble the less we should be surprised at it, and not think it strange. Marvel not that enemies are injurious, when even friends are unkind; nor that friends are unkind, when even children are undutiful. 4. He comforts himself with hopes that God would, in some way or other, bring good to him out of his affliction, would balance the trouble itself, and recompense his patience under it: *"The Lord will requite me good for his cursing*. If God bid Shimei grieve me, it is that he himself may the more sensibly comfort me; surely he has mercy in store for me, which he is preparing me for by this trial." We may depend upon God as our pay-master, not only for our services, but for our sufferings. *Let them curse, but bless thou*. David, at length, is housed at Bahurim (v. 14), where he meets with refreshment, and is hidden from this strife of tongues.

### **Verses 15-23**

Absalom had notice sent him speedily by some of his friends at Jerusalem that David had withdrawn, and with what a small retinue he had gone; so that the coasts were clear, Absalom might take possession of Jerusalem when he pleased. The gates were open, and there was none to oppose him. Accordingly he came without delay (v. 15), extremely elevated, no doubt, with this success at first, and that that in which, when he formed his design, he probably apprehended the greatest difficulty, was so easily and effectually done. Now that he is master of Jerusalem he concludes all his own, the country will follow of course. God suffers wicked men to prosper awhile in their wicked plots, even beyond their expectation, that their disappointment may be the more grievous and disgraceful. The most celebrated politicians of that age were Ahithophel and Hushai. The former Absalom brings with him to Jerusalem (v. 15), the other meets him there (v. 16), so that he cannot but think himself sure of success, when he has both these to be his counsellors; on them he relies, and consults not the ark, though he has that with him. But miserable counsellors were they both; for,

I. Hushai would never counsel him to do wisely. He was really his enemy, and designed to betray him, while he pretended to be in his interest; so that Absalom could not have a more dangerous man about him. 1. Hushai complimented him upon his

accession to the throne, as if he had been abundantly satisfied in this title, and well pleased that he had come to the possession, v. 16. What arts of dissimulation are those tempted to use who govern themselves by fleshly wisdom! and how happy are those who have not known these depths of Satan, but have their conversation in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity! 2. Absalom was surprised to find *him* for him who was known to be David's intimate friend and confidant. He asks him, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend?* (v. 17), pleasing himself with this thought, that all would be his, since Hushai was. He doubts not of his sincerity, but easily believes what he wishes to be true, that David's best friends are so in love with himself as to take the first opportunity to declare for him, *though the pride of his heart deceived him*, Obad. 3. Hushai confirmed him in the belief that he was hearty for him. For, though David is his friend, yet he is for the king in *possession*, v. 18. Whom the people choose, and Providence smiles upon, he will be faithful to; and he is for the king in *succession* (v. 19), the rising sun. It was true, he loved his father; but he had had his day, and it was over; and why should he not love his successor as well? Thus he pretended to give reasons for a resolution he abhorred the thought of.

II. Ahithophel counselled him to do wickedly, and so did as effectually betray him as he did who was designedly false to him; for those that advise men to sin certainly advise them to their hurt; and that government which is founded in sin is founded in the sand.

1. It seems, Ahithophel was noted as a deep politician; his counsel was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God, v. 23. Such reputation was he in for subtlety and sagacity in public affairs, such reaches had he beyond other privy-counselors, such reasons would he give for his advice, and such success generally his projects had, that all people, good and bad, both David and Absalom, had a profound regard for his sentiments, too much by far, when they regarded him *as an oracle of God*; shall the prudence of any mortal compare with him who only is wise? Let us observe from this account of Ahithophel's fame for policy, (1.) That many excel in worldly wisdom who are utterly destitute of heavenly grace, because those who set up for oracles themselves are apt to despise the oracles of God. *God has chosen the foolish things of the world*; and the greatest statesmen are seldom the greatest saints. (2.) That frequently the greatest politicians act most foolishly for themselves. Ahithophel was cried up for an oracle, and yet very unwisely took part with Absalom, who was not only a usurper, but a rash youth, never likely to come to good, whose fall, and the fall of all that adhered to him, any one, with the tenth part of the policy that Ahithophel pretended to, might foresee. Well, after all, honesty is the best policy, and will be found so in the long run.

But,

2. His policy in this case defeated its own aim. Observe,

(1.) The wicked counsel Ahithophel gave to Absalom. Finding that David had left his concubines to keep the house, he advised him to *lie with them* (v. 21), a very wicked thing. The divine law had made it a capital crime, Lev. 20:11. The apostle speaks of it as a piece of villainy *not so much as named among the Gentiles*, 1 Co. 5:1. Reuben lost his birthright for it. But Ahithophel advised Absalom to it as a public thing, because it would give assurance to all Israel, [1.] That he was in good earnest in his pretensions. No doubt he resolved to make himself master of all that belonged to his predecessor when he began with his concubines. [2.] That he was resolved never to make peace with his father upon any terms; for by this he would render himself

so odious to his father that he would never be reconciled to him, which perhaps the people were jealous of and that they must be sacrificed to the reconciliation. Having drawn the sword, he did, by this provocation, throw away the scabbard, which would strengthen the hands of his party and keep them firmly to him. This was Ahithophel's cursed policy, which bespoke him rather *an oracle of devil than of God*.

(2.) Absalom's compliance with this counsel. It entirely suited his lewd and wicked mind, and he delayed not to put it in execution, v. 22. When an unnatural rebellion was the opera, what fitter prologue could there be to it than such unnatural lust? Thus was his wickedness all of a piece, and such as a conscience not quite seared could not entertain the thoughts of without the utmost horror. Nay, the client outdoes what his counsel advises. Ahithophel advised him to do it, that all Israel shall *see* it. A tent is accordingly spread on the top of the house for the purpose; so impudently does he declare his sin as Sodom. Yet, in this, the word of God was fulfilled in the letter of it: God had threatened, by Nathan, that, for defiling Bath-sheba, David should have his own wives publicly debauched (ch. 12:11, 12), and some think that Ahithophel, in advising it, designed to be revenged on David for the injury done to Bath-sheba, who was his grand-daughter: for she was the daughter of Eliam (ch. 11:3), who was the son of Ahithophel, ch. 23:34. Job speaks of this as the just punishment of adultery (*Let my wife grind to another*, Job 31:9, 10), and the prophet, Hos. 4:13, 14. What to think of these concubines, who submitted to this wickedness, I know not; but how unrighteous soever Absalom and they were, we must say, *The Lord is righteous*: nor shall any word of his fall to the ground.

## Chapter 17

The contest between David and Absalom is now hastening towards a crisis. It must be determined by the sword, and preparation is made accordingly in this chapter. I. Absalom calls a council of war, in which Ahithophel urges despatch (v. 1-4), but Hushai recommends deliberation (v. 5-13); and Hushai's counsel is agreed to (v. 14), for vexation at which Ahithophel hangs himself (v. 23). II. Secret intelligence is sent to David (but with much difficulty) of their proceedings (v. 15-21). III. David marches to the other side Jordan (v. 22-24), and there his camp is victualled by some of his friends in that country (v. 27-29). IV. Absalom and his forces march after him into the land of Gilead on the other side Jordan (v. 25, 26). There we shall, in the next chapter, find the cause decided by a battle: hitherto, every thing has looked black upon poor David, but now the day of his deliverance begins to dawn.

### Verses 1-14

Absalom is now in peaceable possession of Jerusalem; the palace-royal is his own, as are *the thrones of judgment, even the thrones of the house of David*. His good father reigned in Hebron, and only over the tribe of Judah, above seven years, and was not hasty to destroy his rival; his government was built upon a divine promise, the performance of which he was sure of in due time, and therefore he waited patiently in the mean time. But the young man, Absalom, not only hastens from Hebron to Jerusalem, but is impatient there till he has destroyed his father, cannot be content with his throne till he has his life; for his government is founded in iniquity, and therefore feels itself tottering and thinks itself obliged to do every thing with violence. That so profligate a wretch as Absalom should aim at the life of so good a father is not so strange (there are here and there monsters in nature); but that the body of the people of Israel, to whom David had been so great a blessing in all respects, should join with him in his attempt, is very amazing. But their fathers often mutinied against Moses. The best of parents, and the best of princes will not think it strange if they be made uneasy by those who should be their support and joy, when they consider what sons and what subjects David himself had.

David and all that adhered to him must be cut off. This was resolved, for aught that appears, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*. None durst mention his personal merits, and the great services done to his country, in opposition to this resolve, nor so much as ask, "*Why, what evil has he done to forfeit his crown, much less his head?*" None durst propose that his banishment should suffice, for the present, nor that agents should be sent to treat with him to resign the crown, which, having so tamely quitted the city, they might think he would easily be persuaded to do. It was not long since that Absalom himself fled for a crime, and David contented himself with his being an exile, though he deserved death, nay, he mourned and longed for him; but so perfectly void of all natural affection is this ungrateful Absalom that he eagerly thirsts after his own father's blood. It is past dispute that David must be destroyed; all the question is how he may be destroyed.

I. Ahithophel advises that he be pursued immediately, this very night, with a flying army (which he himself undertakes the command of), that the king only be smitten and his forces dispersed, and then the people that were now for him would fall in with Absalom of course, and there would not be such a long war as had been between the house of Saul and David: *The man*

*whom thou seekest is as if all returned*, v. 1-3. By this it appears that Absalom had declared his design to be upon David's life, and Ahithophel concurs with him in it. *Smite the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*, and be an easy prey to the wolf. Thus he contrives to include the war in a little compass, by fighting neither with small nor great but the king of Israel only, and to conclude it in a little time, by falling upon him immediately. Nothing could be more fatal to David than the taking of these measures. It was too true that he was weary and weak-handed, that a little thing would make him afraid, else he would not have fled from his house upon the first alarm of Absalom's rebellion; it was probable enough that upon a fierce attack, especially in the night, the small force he had would be put into confusion and disorder, and it would be an easy thing to *smite the king only*, and then the business would be done, the whole nation would be reduced, of course, and *all the people*, says he, *shall be in peace*. See how a general ruin is called by usurpers a *general peace*; but thus the devil's palace is in peace, while he, as a strong man armed, keeps it. Compare with this the plot of Caiaphas (that second Ahithophel) against the Son of David, to crush his interest by destroying him. Let that *one man die for the people*, Jn. 11:50. *Kill the heir, and the inheritance shall be ours*, Mt. 21:38. But the counsel of them both was turned into foolishness. Yet the children of light may, in their generation, learn wisdom from the children of this world. What our hand finds to do let us do quickly, and with all our might. It is prudence to be vigorous and expeditious, and not to lose time, particularly in our spiritual warfare. If Satan flee from us, let us follow our blow. Those that have quarrelled with crowned heads have generally observed the decorum of declaring only against their evil counsellors, and calling them to an account (*The king himself can do no wrong*, it is they that do it); but Absalom's bare-faced villany strikes at the king directly, nay, at the king only; for (would you think it?) this saying, *I will smite the king only*, pleased Absalom well (v. 4), nor had he so much sense of humor and virtue left him to pretend to startle at it or even to be reluctant in this barbarous and monstrous resolution. What good can stand before the heat of a furious ambition?

II. Hushai advises that they be not too hasty in pursuing David, but take time to draw up all their force against him, and to overpower him with numbers, as Ahithophel had advised to take him by surprise. Now Hushai, in giving this counsel, really intended to serve David and his interest, that he might have time to send him notice of his proceedings, and that David might gain time to gather an army and to remove into those countries beyond Jordan, in which, lying more remote, Absalom had probably least interest. Nothing would be of greater advantage to David in this juncture than time to turn himself in; that he may have this, Hushai counsels Absalom to do nothing rashly, but to proceed with caution and secure his success by securing his strength. Now,

1. Absalom gave Hushai a fair invitation to advise him. All the elders of Israel approved of Ahithophel's counsel, yet God overruled the heart of Absalom not to proceed upon it, till he had consulted Hushai (v. 5): *Let us hear what he saith*. Herein he thought he did wisely (two heads are better than one), but God taketh the wise in their own craftiness. See Mr. Poole's note on this.

2. Hushai gave very plausible reasons for what he said.

(1.) He argued against Ahithophel's counsel, and undertook to show the danger of following his advice. It is with modesty, and all possible deference to Ahithophel's settled reputation, that he begs leave to differ from him, v. 7. He acknowledges that the

counsel of Ahithophel is usually the best, and such as may be relied on; but, with submission to that noble peer, he is of opinion that his counsel is not good at this time, and that it is by no means safe to venture so great a cause as that in which they are now engaged upon so small a number, and such a hasty sally, as Ahithophel advises, remembering the defeat of Israel before Ai, Jos. 7:4. It has often proved of bad consequence to despise an enemy. See how plausibly Hushai reasoned. [1.] He insisted much upon it that David was a great soldier, a man of great conduct, courage, and experience; all knew and owned this, even Absalom himself: "*Thy father is a man of war* (v. 8), *a mighty man* (v. 10), and not so weary and weak-handed as Ahithophel imagines. His retiring from Jerusalem must be imputed, not to his cowardice, but his prudence." [2.] His attendants, though few, were mighty men (v. 8), valiant men (v. 10), men of celebrated bravery and versed in all the arts of war. Ahithophel, who perhaps had worn the gown more than the sword, would find himself an unequal match for them. *One of them would chase a thousand*. [3.] They were all exasperated against Absalom, who was the author of all this mischief, were chafed in their minds, and would fight with the utmost fury; so that, what with their courage, and what with their rage, there would be no standing before them, especially for such raw soldiers as Absalom's generally were. Thus did he represent them as formidable as Ahithophel had made them despicable. [4.] He suggested that probably David and some of his men would lie in ambush, in some pit, or other close place, and fall upon Absalom's soldiers before they were aware the terror of which would put them to flight; and the defeat, though but of a small party, would dispirit all the rest, especially their own consciences at the same time accusing them of treason against one that, they were sure, was not only God's anointed, *but a man after his own heart*, v. 9. "It will soon be given out that there is a slaughter among Absalom's men, and then they will all make the best of their way, and the heart of Ahithophel himself, though now it seems like the heart of a lion, will utterly melt. In short, he will not find it so easy a matter to deal with David and his men as he thinks it is; and, if he be foiled, we shall all be routed." (2.) He offered his own advice, and gave his reasons; and, [1.] He counselled that which he knew would gratify Absalom's proud vain-glorious humour, though it would not be really serviceable to his interest. *First*, He advised that all Israel should be gathered together, that is, the militia of all the tribes. His taking it for granted that they are all for him, and giving him an opportunity to see them all together under his command, would gratify him as much as any thing. *Secondly*, He advises that Absalom go to battle in his own person, as if he looked upon him to be a better soldier than Ahithophel, more fit to give command and have the honour of the victory, insinuating that Ahithophel had put a slight upon him in offering to go without him. See how easy it is to betray proud men, by applauding them, and feeding their pride. [2.] He counselled that which seemed to secure the success, at last, infallibly, without running any hazard. For, if they could raise such vast numbers as they promised themselves, wherever they found David they could not fail to crush him. *First*, If in the field, they should fall upon him, as the dew that covers the face of the ground, and cut off all his men with him, v. 12. Perhaps Absalom was better pleased with the design of cutting off all the men that were with him, having a particular antipathy to some of David's friends, than with Ahithophel's project of smiting the king only. Thus Hushai gained his point by humouring his revenge, as well as his pride. *Secondly*, If in a city, they need not fear conquering him, for they should have hands enough, if occasion were, to draw the city itself into its river with ropes, v. 13. This strange suggestion, how impracticable soever, being new, served for an

amusement, and recommended itself by pleasing the fancy, for they would all smile at the humour of it.

(3.) By all these arts, Hushai gained not only Absalom's approbation of his advice, but the unanimous concurrence of this great counsel of war; they all agreed that the counsel of Hushai was better than the counsel of Ahithophel, v. 14. See here, [1.] How much the policy of man can do; If Hushai had not been there, Ahithophel's counsel would certainly have prevailed; and, though all had given their opinion, nothing could be really more for Absalom's interest than that which he advised; yet Hushai, with his management, brings them all over to his side, and none of them are aware that he says all this in favour of David and his interest, but all say as he says. See how the unthinking are imposed upon by the designing part of mankind; what tools, what fools, great men make of one another by their intrigues; and what tricks there are often in courts and councils, which those are happiest that are least conversant with. [2.] See how much more the providence of God can do. Hushai managed the plot with dexterity, yet the success is ascribed to God, and his agency on the minds of those concerned: *The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel*. Be it observed, to the comfort of all that fear God, he turns all men's hearts as the rivers of water, though *they know not the thoughts of the Lord*. *He stands in the congregation of the mighty*, has an overruling hand in all counsels and a negative voice in all resolves, and laughs at men's projects against his anointed.

#### **Verses 15-21**

We must now leave David's enemies pleasing themselves with the thoughts of a sure victory by following Hushai's counsel, and sending a summons, no doubt, to all the tribes of Israel, to come to the general rendezvous at a place appointed, pursuant to that counsel; and we next find David's friends consulting how to get him notice of all this, that he might steer his course accordingly. Hushai tells the priests what had passed in council, v. 15. But, it should seem, he was not sure but that yet Ahithophel's counsel might be followed, and was therefore jealous lest, if he made not the best of his way, the king would be *swallowed up, and all the people that were with him*, v. 16. Perhaps, as he was called in to give advice (v. 5), so he was dismissed before they came to that resolve (v. 14) in favour of his advice, or he feared they might afterwards change their mind. However, it was good to provide against the worst, and therefore to hasten those valuable lives out of the reach of these destroyers. Such strict guards did Absalom set upon all the avenues to Jerusalem that they had much ado to get this necessary intelligence to David. 1. The young priests that were to be the messengers were forced to retire secretly out of the city, by *En-rogel*, which signifies, as some say, *the fountain of a spy*. Surely it went ill with Jerusalem when two such faithful priests as they were might not be seen to come into the city. 2. Instructions were sent to them by a poor simple young woman, who probably went to that well under pretence of fetching water, v. 17. If she carried the message by word of mouth, there was danger of her making some mistake or blunder in it; but Providence can make an ignorant girl a trusty messenger, and serve its wise counsels by the foolish things of the world. 3. Yet, by the vigilance of Absalom's spies, they were discovered, and information was brought to Absalom of their motions: *A lad saw them and told him*, v. 18. 4. They, being aware that they were discovered, sheltered themselves in a friend's house in Bahurim, where David had refreshed himself but just before, ch. 16:14. There they were happily hidden in a well, which now, in summer time, perhaps was dry, v. 18. The woman of the house very ingeniously covered the mouth of the well with a cloth, on which she spread corn to dry, so that the pursuers were not aware

that there was a well; else they would have searched it, v. 19. Thus far the woman did well; but we know not how to justify her further concealing them with a lie, v. 20. We must not do evil that good may come of it. However, hereby the messengers were protected, and the pursuers were defeated and returned to Absalom without their prey. It was well that Absalom did not hereupon fall upon their two fathers, Zadok and Abiathar, as Saul on Ahimelech for his kindness to David: but God restrained him. Being thus preserved, they brought their intelligence very faithfully to David (v. 21), with this advice of his friends, that he should not delay to pass over Jordan, near to which, it seems, he now was. There, as some think, he penned the 42nd and 43rd Psalms, looking back upon *Jerusalem from the land of Jordan*, Ps. 42:6.

### **Verses 22-29**

Here is, I. The transporting of David and his forces over Jordan, pursuant to the advice he had received from his friends at Jerusalem, v. 22. He, and all that were with him, went over in the night, whether in ferryboats, which probably always plied there, or through the fords, does not appear. But special notice is taken of this, that there lacked not one of them: none deserted him, though his distress was great, none staid behind sick or weary, nor were any lost or cast away in passing the river. Herein some make him a type of the Messiah, who said, in a difficult day, *Of all that thou hast given me have I lost none*. Having got over Jordan, he marched many miles forward to Mahanaim, a Levites' city in the tribe of Gad, in the utmost border of that tribe, and not far from Rabbah, the chief city of the Ammonites. This city, which Ishbosheth had made his royal city (ch. 2:8), David now made his head-quarters, v. 24. And now he had time to raise an army wherewith to oppose the rebels and give them a warm reception.

II. The death of Ahithophel, v. 23. He died by his own hands, *felo de se—a suicide*. He hanged himself for vexation that his counsel was not followed; for thereby, 1. He thought himself slighted, and an intolerable slur cast upon his reputation for wisdom. His judgment always used to sway at the counsel-board, but now another's opinion is thought wiser and better than his. His proud heart cannot bear the affront; it rises and swells, and the more he thinks of it the more violent his resentments grow, till they bring him at last to this desperate resolve not to live to see another preferred before him. All men think him a wise man, but he thinks himself the only wise man; and therefore to be avenged upon mankind for not thinking so too, he will die, that wisdom may die with him. The world is not worthy of such an oracle as he is, and therefore he will make them know the want of him. See what real enemies those are to themselves that think too well of themselves, and what mischiefs those run upon that are impatient of contempt. That will break a proud man's heart that will not break a humble man's sleep. 2. He thought himself endangered and his life exposed. He concluded that, because his counsel was not followed, Absalom's cause would certainly miscarry, and then, whoever would find David's mercy, he concluded that he, who was the greatest criminal, and had particularly advised him to lie with his father's concubines, must be sacrificed to justice. To prevent therefore the shame and terror of a public and solemn execution, he does justice upon himself, and, after his reputation for wisdom, by this last act puts a far greater disgrace upon himself than Absalom's privy-council had put upon him, and answers his name *Ahithophel*, which signifies, *the brother of a fool*. Nothing indicates so much folly as self-murder. Observe, How deliberately he did it, and of malice prepense against himself; not in a heat, but he went home to his city, to his house, to do it; and, which

is strange, took time to consider of it, and yet did it. And, to prove himself *compos mentis—in his senses*, when he did it, he first put his household in order, made his will as a man of sane memory and understanding, settled his estate, balanced his accounts; yet he that had sense and prudence enough to do this had not consideration enough to revoke the sentence his pride and passion had passed upon his own neck, nor so much as to suspend the execution of it till he saw the event of Absalom's rebellion. Now herein we may see, (1.) Contempt poured upon the wisdom of man. He that was more renowned for policy than any man played the fool with himself more abundantly. *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, when he sees him that was so great an oracle dying *as a fool dies*. (2.) Honour done to the justice of God. When the wicked are thus *snared in the work of their own hands, and sunk in a pit of their own digging, the Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth*, and we must say, *Higgaion, Selah*; it is a thing to be marked and meditated upon, Ps. 7:15, 16. (3.) Prayer answered, and an honest cause served even by its enemies. Now, as David had prayed, Ahithophel's counsel was *turned into foolishness to himself*. Dr. Lightfoot supposes that David penned the 55th Psalm upon occasion of Ahithophel's being in the plot against him, and that he is the man complained of (v. 13) that had been *his equal, his guide, and his acquaintance*; and, if so, this was an immediate answer to his prayer there (v. 15): *Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quickly into hell*. Ahithophel's death was an advantage to David's interest; for had he digested that affront (as those must resolve often to do that will live in this world), and continued his post at Absalom's elbow, he might have given him counsel afterwards that might have been of pernicious consequence to David. It is well that that breath is stopped and that head laid from which nothing could be expected but mischief. It seems, it was not then usual to disgrace the dead bodies of self-murderers, for Ahithophel was *buried*, we may suppose honourably buried, *in the sepulchre of his father*, though he deserved no better than the *burial of an ass*. See Eccl. 8:10.

III. Absalom's pursuit of his father. He had now got all the men of Israel with him, as Hushai advised, and he himself, at the head of them, *passed over Jordan*, v. 24. Not content that he had driven his good father to the utmost corner of his kingdom, he resolved to chase him out of the world. He *pitched in the land of Gilead* with all his forces, ready to give David battle, v. 26. Absalom made one Amasa his general (v. 25), whose father was by birth Jether, an Ishmaelite (1 Chr. 2:17), but by religion Ithra (as he is here called), an Israelite; probably he was not only proselyted, but, having married a near relation of David's, was, by some act of the state, naturalized, and is therefore called an Israelite. His wife, Amasa's mother, was Abigail, David's sister, whose other sister, Zeruiah, was Joab's mother (1 Chr. 2:16), so that Amasa was in the same relation to David that Joab was. In honour to his family, even while he was in arms against his father, Absalom made him commander-in-chief of all his forces. Jesse is here called *Nahash*, for many had two names; or perhaps this was his wife's name.

IV. The friends David met with in this distant country. Even Shobi, a younger brother of the royal family of the Ammonites, was kind to him, v. 27. It is probable that he had detested the indignity which his brother Hanun had done to David's ambassadors, and for that had received favours from David, which he now returned. Those that think their prosperity most confirmed know not but, some time or other, they may stand in need of the kindness of those that now lie at their mercy, and may be glad to be beholden to them, which is a reason why we should, as we have opportunity, *do good to all men, for he that*

*watereth shall be watered also himself*, when there is occasion. Machir, the son of Ammiel, was he that maintained Mephibosheth (ch. 9:4), till David eased him of that charge, and is now repaid for it by that generous man, who, it seems, was the common patron of distressed princes. Barzillai we shall hear of again. These, compassionating David and his men, now that they were weary with a long march, brought him furniture for his house, *beds and basins*, and provision for his table, *wheat and barley*, etc., v. 28, 29. He did not put them under contribution, did not compel them to supply him, much less plunder them; but in token of their dutiful affection to him, and their sincere concern for him in his present straits, of their own good will they brought in plenty of all that which he had occasion for. Let us learn hence to be generous and open-handed, according as our ability is, to all in distress, especially great men, to whom it is most grievous, and good men, who deserve better treatment; and see how God sometimes makes up to his people that comfort from strangers which they are disappointed of in their own families.

## Chapter 18

This chapter puts a period to Absalom's rebellion and life, and so makes way for David to his throne again, whither the next chapter brings him back in peace and triumph. We have here, I. David's preparations to engage the rebels (v. 1-5). II. The total defeat of Absalom's party and their dispersion (v. 6-8). III. The death of Absalom, and his burial (v. 9-18). IV. The bringing of the tidings to David, who tarried at Mahanaim (v. 19-32). V. His bitter lamentation for Absalom (v. 33).

### Verses 1-8

Which way David raised an army here, and what reinforcements were sent him, we are not told; many, it is likely, from all the coasts of Israel, at least from the neighbouring tribes, came in to his assistance, so that, by degrees, he was able to make head against Absalom, as Ahithophel foresaw. Now here we have,

I. His army numbered and marshalled, v. 1, 2. He had, no doubt, committed his cause to God by prayer, for that was his relief in all his afflictions; and then he took an account of his forces. Josephus says they were, in all, but about 4000. These he divided into regiments and companies, to each of which he appointed proper officers, and then disposed them, as is usual, into the right wing, the left wing, and the centre, two of which he committed to his two old experienced generals, Joab and Abishai, and the third to his new friend Ittai. Good order and good conduct may sometimes be as serviceable in an army as great numbers. Wisdom teaches us to make the best of the strength we have, and let it reach to the utmost.

II. Himself over-persuaded not to go in person to the battle. He was Absalom's false friend that persuaded him to go, and served his pride more than his prudence; David's true friends would not let him go, remembering what they had been told of Ahithophel's design to *smite the king only*. David showed his affection to them by being willing to venture with them (v. 2), and they showed theirs to him by opposing it. We must never reckon it an affront to be gain-said for our good, and by those that therein consult our interest. 1. They would by no means have him to expose himself, for (say they) *thou art worth 10,000 of us*. Thus ought princes to be valued by their subjects, who, for their safety, must be willing to expose themselves. 2. They would not so far gratify the enemy, who would rejoice more in his fall than in the defeat of the whole army. 3. He might be more serviceable to them by tarrying in the city, with a reserve of his forces there, whence he might send them recruits. That may be a post of real service which yet is not a post of danger. The king acquiesced in their reasons, and changed his purpose (v. 4): *What seemeth to you best I will do*. It is no piece of wisdom to be stiff in our resolutions, but to be willing to hear reason, even from our inferiors, and to be overruled by their advice when it appears to be for our own good. Whether the people's prudence had an eye to it or no, God's providence wisely ordered it, that David should not be in the field of battle; for then his tenderness would certainly have interposed to save the life of Absalom, whom God had determined to destroy.

III. The charge he gave concerning Absalom, v. 5. When the army was drawn out, rank and file, Josephus says, he encouraged them, and prayed for them, but withal bade them all take heed of doing Absalom any hurt. How does he render good for evil! Absalom would have David only smitten. David would have Absalom only spared. What foils are these to each other! Never was unnatural hatred to a father more strong than in Absalom; nor was ever natural affection to a child more strong than in

David. Each did his utmost, and showed what man is capable of doing, how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children; as if it were designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God and God's mercy towards man, of which it is hard to say which is more amazing. "*Deal gently,*" says David, "by all means, *with the young man, even with Absalom, for my sake;* he is a young man, rash and heady, and his age must excuse him; he is mine, whom I love; if you love me, be not severe with him." This charge supposes David's strong expectation of success. Having a good cause and a good God, he doubts not but Absalom would lie at their mercy, and therefore bids them deal gently with him, spare his life and reserve him for his judgment.

Bishop Hall thus descants on this: "What means this ill-placed love? This unjust mercy? Deal gently with a traitor? Of all traitors, with a son? Of all sons, with an Absalom? That graceless darling of so good a father? And all this, for thy sake, whose crown, whose blood, he hunts after? For whose sake must he be pursued, if forborne for thine? Must the cause of the quarrel be the motive of mercy? Even in the holiest parents, nature may be guilty of an injurious tenderness, of a bloody indulgence. But was not this done in type of that immeasurable mercy of the true King and Redeemer of Israel, who prayed for his persecutors, for his murderers, *Father, forgive them? Deal gently with them for my sake.*" When God sends and affliction to correct his children, it is with this charge, "Deal gently with them for my sake;" for he knows our frame.

IV. A complete victory gained over Absalom's forces. The battle was fought *in the wood of Ephraim* (v. 6), so called from some memorable action of the Ephraimites there, though it lay in the tribe of Gad. David thought fit to meet the enemy with his forces at some distance, before they came up to Mahanaim, lest he should bring that city into trouble which had so kindly sheltered him. The cause shall be decided by a pitched battle. Josephus represents the fight as very obstinate, but the rebels were at length totally routed and 20,000 of them slain, v. 7. Now they smarted justly for their treason against their lawful prince, their uneasiness under so good a government, and their base ingratitude to so good a governor; and they found what it was to take up arms for a usurper, who with his kisses and caresses had wheedled them into their own ruin. Now where are the rewards, the preferments, the golden days, they promised themselves from him? Now they see what it is to take counsel *against the Lord and his anointed,* and to think of *breaking his bands asunder.* And that they might see that God fought against them, 1. They are conquered by a few, an army, in all probability, much inferior to theirs in number. 2. By that flight with which they hoped to save themselves they destroyed themselves. *The wood,* which they sought to for shelter, *devoured more than the sword,* that they might see how, when they thought themselves safe from David's men, and said, *Surely the bitterness of death is past,* yet the justice of God pursued them and suffered them not to live. What refuge can rebels find from divine vengeance? The pits and bogs, the stumps and thickets, and, as the Chaldee paraphrase understands it, the wild beasts of the wood, were probably the death of multitudes of the dispersed distracted Israelites, besides the 20,000 that were slain with the sword. God herein fought for David, and yet fought against him; for all these that were slain were his own subjects, and the common interest of his kingdom was weakened by the slaughter. The Romans allowed no triumph for a victory in a civil war.

#### **Verses 9-18**

Here is Absalom quite at a loss, at his wit's end first, and then at his life's end. He that began the fight, big with the expectation

of triumphing over David himself, with whom, if he had had him in his power, he would not have dealt gently, is now in the greatest consternation, when he *meets the servants of David*, v. 9. Though they were forbidden to meddle with him, he durst not look them in the face; but, finding they were near him, he clapped spurs to his mule and made the best of his way, through thick and thin, and so rode headlong upon his own destruction. Thus *he that fleeth from the fear shall fall into the pit, and he that getteth up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare*, Jer. 48:44. David is inclined to spare him, but divine justice passes sentence upon him as a traitor, and sees it executed—that he hang by the neck, be caught alive, be embowelled, and his body dispose of disgracefully.

I. He is hanged by the neck. Riding furiously, neck or nothing, *under the thick boughs of a great oak* which hung low and had never been cropped, either the twisted branches, or some one forked bough of the oak, caught hold of his head, either by his neck, or, as some think, by his long hair, which had been so much his pride, and was now justly made a halter for him, and there he hung, so astonished that he could not use his hands to help himself or so entangled that his hands could not help him, but the more he struggled the more he was embarrassed. This set him up for a fair mark to the servants of David, and he had the terror and shame of seeing himself thus exposed, while he could do nothing for his own relief, neither fight nor fly. Observe concerning this, 1. That his *mule went away from under him*, as if glad to get clear of such a burden, and resign it to the ignominious tree. Thus the whole creation groans under the burden of man's corruption, but shall shortly be delivered from its load, Rom. 8:21, 22. 2. That he hung *between heaven and earth*, as unworthy of either, as abandoned of both; earth would not keep him, heaven would not take him, hell therefore opens her mouth to receive him. 3. That this was a very surprising unusual thing. It was fit that it should be so, his crime being so monstrous: if, in his flight, his mule had thrown him, and left him half-dead upon the ground, till the servants of David had come up and dispatched him, the same thing would have been done as effectually; but that would have been too common a fate for so uncommon a criminal. God will here, as in the case of those other rebels, Dathan and Abiram, *create a new thing*, that it may be understood how much *this man has provoked the Lord*, Num. 16:29, 30. Absalom is here hung up, *in terrorem—to frighten* children from disobedience *to their parents*. See Prov. 30:17.

II. He is caught alive by one of the servants of David, who goes directly and tells Joab in what posture he found that archrebel, v. 10. Thus was he set up for a spectacle, as well as a mark, that the righteous might see him and *laugh at him* (ps. 52:6), while he had this further vexation in his breast, that of all the friends he had courted and confided in, and thought he had sure in his interest, though he hung long enough to have been relieved, yet he had none at hand to disentangle him. Joab chides the man for not dispatching him (v. 11), telling him, if he had given that bold stroke, he would have rewarded him with ten half-crowns and a girdle, that is, a captain's commission, which perhaps was signified by the delivery of a belt or girdle; see Isa. 22:21. But the man, though zealous enough against Absalom, justified himself in not doing it: "Dispatch him!" says he, "not for all the world: it would have cost my head: and thou thyself wast witness to the king's charge concerning him (v. 12), and, for all thy talk, wouldst have been my prosecutor if I had done it," v. 13. Those that love the treason hate the traitor. Joab could not deny this, nor blame the man for his caution, and therefore makes him no answer, but breaks off the discourse, under colour of haste

(v. 14): *I may not tarry thus with thee*. Superiors should consider a reproof before they give it, lest they be ashamed of it afterwards, and find themselves unable to make it good.

III. He is (as I may say) embowelled and quartered, as traitors are, so pitifully mangled is he as he hangs there, and receives his death in such a manner as to see all its terrors and feel all its pain. 1. Joab throws three darts into his body, which put him, no doubt, to exquisite torment, while he is yet *alive in the midst of the oak*, v. 14. I know not whether Joab can be justified in this direct disobedience to the command of his sovereign; was this to *deal gently with the young man*? Would David have suffered him to do it if he had been upon the spot? Yet this may be said for him, that, while he broke the order of a too indulgent father, he did real service both to his king and country, and would have endangered welfare of both if he had not done it. *Salus populi suprema lex—The safety of the people is the supreme law*. 2. Joab's young men, ten of them, smite him, before he is dispatched, v. 15. They surrounded him, made a ring about him in triumph, and then *smote him and slew him*. So *let all their enemies perish, O Lord!* Joab hereupon sounds a retreat, v. 16. The danger is over, now that Absalom is slain; the people will soon return to their allegiance to David, and therefore no more blood shall be spilt; no prisoners are taken, to be tried as traitors and made examples; let every man return to his tent; they are all the king's subjects, all his good subjects again.

IV. His body is disposed of disgracefully (v. 17, 18): They *cast it into a great pit in the wood*; they would not bring it to his father (for that circumstance would but have added to his grief), nor would they preserve it to be buried, according to his order, but threw it into the next pit with indignation. Now where is the beauty he had been so proud of and for which he had been so much admired? Where are his aspiring projects, and the castles he had built in the air? His thoughts perish, and he with them. And, to signify how heavy *his iniquity lay upon his bones*, as the prophet speaks (Eze. 32:27), they raised a *great heap of stones upon him*, to be a monument of his villany, and to signify that he ought to have been stoned as a rebellious son, Deu. 21:21. Travelers say that the place is taken note of to this day, and that it is common for passengers to throw a stone to this heap, with words to this purport: *Cursed be the memory of rebellious Absalom, and cursed for ever be all wicked children that rise up in rebellion against their parents*. To aggravate the ignominy of Absalom's burial, the historian takes notice of a pillar he had erected in the valley of Kidron, near Jerusalem, to be a monument for himself, and keep his name in remembrance (v. 18), at the foot of which, it is probable, he designed to be buried. What foolish insignificant projects do proud men fill their heads with! And what care do many people take about the disposal of their bodies, when they are dead, that have no care at all what shall become of their precious souls! Absalom had three sons (ch. 14:27), but, it seems, now he had none; God had taken them away by death; and justly is a rebellious son written childless. To make up the want, he erects this pillar for a memorial; yet in this also Providence crosses him, and a rude heap of stones shall be his monument, instead of this marble pillar. Thus *those that exalt themselves shall be abased*. His care was to have his name kept in remembrance, and it is so, to his everlasting dishonour. He could not be content in the obscurity of the rest of David's sons, of whom nothing is recorded but their names, but would be famous, and is therefore justly made for ever infamous. The pillar shall bear his name, but not to his credit; it was designed for Absalom's glory, but proved Absalom's folly.

**Verses 19-33**

Absalom's business is done; and we are now told,

I. How David was informed of it. He staid behind at the city of Mahanaim, some miles from the wood where the battle was, and in the utmost border of the land. Absalom's scattered forces all made homeward toward Jordan, which was the contrary way from Mahanaim, so that his watchmen could not perceive how the battle went, till an express came on purpose to bring advice of the issue, which the king sat in the gate expecting to hear, v. 24.

1. Cushie was the man Joab ordered to carry the tidings (v. 21), an *Ethiopian*, so his name signifies, and some think that he was so by birth, a black that waited on Joab, probably one of the ten that had helped to dispatch Absalom (v. 15) as some think, though it was dangerous for one of those to bring the news to David, lest his fate should be the same with theirs that reported to him Saul's death, and Ish-bosheth's.

2. Ahimaaz, the young priest (one of those who brought David intelligence of Absalom's motions, ch. 17:17), was very forward to be the messenger of these tidings, so transported was he with joy that this cloud was blown over; let him go and tell the king that *the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies*, v. 19. This he desired, not so much in hope of a reward (he was above that) as that he might have the pleasure and satisfaction of bringing the king, whom he loved, this good news. Joab knew David better than Ahimaaz did, and that the tidings of Absalom's death, which must conclude the story, would spoil the acceptableness of all the rest; and he loves Ahimaaz too well to let him be the messenger of those tidings (v. 20); they are fitter to be brought by a footman than by a priest. However, when Cushie was gone, Ahimaaz begged hard for leave to run after him, and with great importunity obtained it, v. 22, 23. One would wonder why he should be so fond of this office, when another was employed in it. (1.) Perhaps it was to show his swiftness; observing how heavily Cushie ran, and that he took the worse way, though the nearest, he had a mind to show how fast he could run, and that he could go the furthest way about and yet beat Cushie. No great praise for a priest to be swift of foot, yet perhaps Ahimaaz was proud of it. (2.) Perhaps it was in prudence and tenderness to the king that he desired it. He knew he could get before Cushie, and therefore was willing to prepare the king, by a vague and general report, for the plain truth which Cushie was ordered to tell him. If bad news must come, it is best that it come gradually, and will be the better borne.

3. They are both discovered by the watchman on the gate of Mahanaim, Ahimaaz first (v. 24), for, though Cushie had the lead, Ahimaaz soon outran him; but presently after Cushie appeared, v. 26. (1.) When the king hears of one running alone he concludes he is an express (v. 25): *If he be alone, there are tidings in his mouth*; for if they had been beaten, and were flying back from the enemy, there would have been many. (2.) When he hears it is Ahimaaz he concludes he brings good news, v. 27. Ahimaaz, it seems, was so famous for running that he was known by it at a distance, and so eminently good that it is taken for granted, if he be the messenger, the news must needs be good: *He is a good man*, zealously affected to the king's interest, and would not bring bad news. It is pity but the good tidings of the gospel should always be brought by good men; and how welcome should the messengers be to us for their message sake!

4. Ahimaaz is very forward to proclaim the victory (v. 28), cries at a distance, "Peace, there is peace;" peace after war, which is doubly welcome. *"All is well, my lord O king! the danger is over, and we may return, when the king pleases, to Jerusalem."*

And, when he comes near, he tells him the news more particularly. "They are all cut off *that lifted up their hands against the king;*" and, as became a priest, while he gives the king the joy of it, he gives God the glory of it, the God of peace and war, the God of salvation and victory: "*Blessed be the Lord thy God, that has done this for thee, as thy God, pursuant to the promises made to uphold thy throne,*" ch, 7:16. When he said this, *he fell down upon his face*, not only in reverence to the king, but in humble adoration of God, whose name he praised for this success. By directing David thus to give God thanks for his victory, he prepared him for the approaching news of its alloy. The more our hearts are fixed and enlarged in thanksgiving to God for our mercies the better disposed we shall be to bear with patience the afflictions mixed with them. Poor David is so much a father that he forgets he is a king, and therefore cannot rejoice in the news of a victory, till he know whether the *young man Absalom be safe*, for whom his heart seems to tremble, almost as Eli's, in a similar case, for the ark of God. Ahimaaz soon discerned, what Joab intimated to him, that the death of the king's son would make the tidings of the day very unwelcome, and therefore in his report left that matter doubtful; and, though he gave occasion to suspect how it was, yet, that the thunderclap might not come too suddenly upon the poor perplexed king, he refers him to the next messenger, whom they saw coming, for a more particular account of it. "When Joab sent the king's servant (namely, *Cushi*) and *me thy servant*, to bring the news, *I saw a great tumult*, occasioned by something extraordinary, as you will hear by and by; but I have nothing to say about it. I have delivered that which was my message. Cushi is better able to inform you than I am. I will not be the messenger of evil tidings; nor will I pretend to know that which I cannot give a perfect account of." He is therefore told to stand by till Cushi come (v. 30), and now, we may suppose, he gives the king a more particular account of the victory, which was the thing he came to bring the news of.

5. Cushi, the slow post, proves the sure one, and besides the confirmation of the news of the victory which Ahimaaz had brought—*The Lord has avenged thee of all those that rose up against thee* (v. 31)—he satisfied the king's enquiry concerning Absalom, v. 32. *Is he safe?* says David. "Yes," says Cushi, "he is safe in his grave;" but he tells the news so discreetly that, how unwelcome soever the message is, the messenger can have no blame. He did not tell him plainly that Absalom was hanged, and run through and buried under a heap of stones; but only that his fate was what he desired might be the fate of all that were traitors against the king, his crown and dignity: "*The enemies of my lord the king, whoever they are, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is; I need wish them no worse.*"

II. How David received the intelligence. He forgets all the joy of his deliverance, and is quite overwhelmed with the sorrowful tidings of Absalom's death, v. 33. As soon as he perceived by Cushi's reply that Absalom was dead, he asked no more questions, but fell into a passion of weeping, retired from company, and abandoned himself to sorrow; as he was going up to his chamber he was overheard to say "*O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! alas for thee! I lament thee. How hast thou fallen! Would God I had died for thee, and that thou hadst remained alive this day*" (so the Chaldee adds) "*O Absalom! my son, my son!*" I wish I could see reason to think that this arose from a concern about Absalom's everlasting state, and that the reason why he wished he had *died for him* was because he had good hopes of his own salvation, and of Absalom's repentance if he had lived. It rather seems to have been spoken inconsiderately, and in a passion, and it was his infirmity. He is to be blamed, 1.

For showing so great a fondness for a graceless son only because he was handsome and witty, while he was justly abandoned both of God and man. 2. For quarrelling, not only with divine providence, in the disposals of which he ought silently to have acquiesced, but with divine justice, the judgments of which he ought to have adored and subscribed to. See how Bildad argues (Job 8:3, 4), *If thy children have sinned against him, and he have cast them away in their transgression, thou shouldst submit, for doth God pervert judgment?* See Lev. 10:3. 3. For opposing the justice of the nation, which, as king, he was entrusted with the administration of, and which, with other public interests, he ought to have preferred before nay natural affection. 4. For despising the mercy of his deliverance, and the deliverance of his family and kingdom, from Absalom's wicked designs, as if this were no mercy, nor worth giving thanks for, because it cost the life of Absalom. 5. For indulging in a strong passion, and speaking unadvisedly with his lips. He now forgot his own reasonings upon the death of another child (*Can I bring him back again?*) and his own resolution to *keep his mouth as with a bridle* when *his heart was hot within him*, as well as his own practice at other times, when he *quieted himself as a child that was weaned from his mother*. The best men are not always in an equally good frame. What we over-loved we are apt to over-grieve for: in each affection, therefore, it is wisdom to have rule over our own spirits and to keep a strict guard upon ourselves when that is removed from us which was very dear to us. Losers think they may have leave to speak; but little said is soon amended. The penitent patient sufferer *sitteth alone and keepeth silence* (Lam. 3:28), or rather, with *Job*, says, *Blessed be the name of the Lord*.

## Chapter 19

We left David's army in triumph and yet David himself in tears: now here we have, I. His return to himself, by the persuasion of Joab (v. 1-8). II. His return to his kingdom from his present banishment. 1. The men of Israel were forward of themselves to bring him back (v. 9, 10). 2. The men of Judah were dealt with by David's agents to do it (v. 11-14) and did it (v. 15). III. At the king's coming over Jordan, Shimei's treason is pardoned (v. 16-23), Mephibosheth's failure is excused (v. 24-30), and Barzillai's kindness is thankfully owned, and recompensed to his son (v. 31-39). IV. The men of Israel quarrelled with the men of Judah, for not calling them to the ceremony of the king's restoration, which occasioned a new rebellion, an account of which we have in the next chapter (v. 40-43).

### Verses 1-8

Soon after the messengers had brought the news of the defeat and death of Absalom to the court of Mahanaim, Joab and his victorious army followed, to grace the king's triumphs and receive his further orders. Now here we are told, I. What a damp and disappointment it was to them to find the king in tears for Absalom's death, which they construed as a token of displeasure against them for what they had done, whereas they expected him to have met them with joy and thanks for their good services: *It was told Joab*, v. 1 The report of it ran through the army (v. 2), *how the king was grieved for his son*. The people will take particular notice what their princes say and do. The more eyes we have upon us, and the greater our influence is, the more need we have to speak and act wisely and to govern our passions strictly. When they came to the city they found the king in close mourning, v. 4. He covered his face, and would not so much as look up, nor take any notice of the generals when they attended him. It could not but surprise them to find, 1. How the king proclaimed his passion, of which he ought to have been ashamed, and which he would have striven to smother and conceal if he had consulted either his reputation for courage, which was lessened by his mean submission to the tyranny of so absurd a passion, or his interest in the people, which would be prejudiced by his discountenancing what was done in zeal for his honour and the public safety. Yet see how he avows his grief: *He cries with a loud voice, O my son Absalom!* "My servants have all come home safe, but where is my son? He is dead; and, dying in sin, I fear he is lost for ever. I cannot now say, *I shall go to him*, for my soul shall not be gathered with such sinners; what shall be done for thee, *O Absalom! my son, my son!*" 2. How he prolonged his passion, even till the army had come up to him, which must be some time after he received the first intelligence. If he had contented himself with giving vent to his passion for an hour or two when he first heard the news, it would have been excusable, but to continue it thus for so bad a son as Absalom, like Jacob for so good a son as Joseph, with a resolution to go to the grave mourning and to stain his triumphs with his tears, was very unwise and very unworthy. Now see how ill this was taken by the people. They were loth to blame the king, for *whatever he did used to please them* (ch. 3:36), but they took it as a great mortification to them. *Their victory was turned into mourning*, v. 2. *They stole into the city as men ashamed*, v. 3. In compliment to their sovereign, they would not rejoice in that which they perceived so afflictive to him, and yet they could not but be uneasy that they were thus obliged to conceal their joy. Superiors ought not to put such hardships as these on their inferiors.

II. How plainly and vehemently Joab reproved David for this indiscreet management of himself in this critical juncture. David never more needed the hearts of his subjects than now, nor was ever more concerned to secure his interest in their affections; and therefore whatever tended to disoblige them now was the most impolitic thing he could do, and the greatest wrong imaginable to his friends that adhered to him. Joab therefore censures him, v. 5-7. He speaks a great deal of reason, but not with the respect and deference which he owed to his prince. *Is it fit to say to a king, Thou art wicked?* A plain case may be fairly pleaded with those that are above us, and they may be reproved for what they do amiss, but it must not be done with rudeness and insolence. David did indeed need to be roused and alarmed; and Joab thought it no time to dally with him. If superiors do that which is foolish, they must neither think it strange nor take it ill if their inferiors tell them of it, perhaps too bluntly. 1. Joab magnifies the services of David's soldiers: *"This day they have saved thy life, and therefore deserve to be taken notice of, and have reason to resent it if they be not."* It is implied that Absalom, whom he honoured with his tears, sought his ruin and the ruin of his family, while those whom by his tears he puts a slight upon were such as preserved from ruin him and all that was dear to him. Great mischiefs have arisen to princes from the contempt of great merits. 2. He aggravates the discouragement David had given them: *"Thou hast shamed their faces; for, while they have shown such a value for thy life, thou hast shown no value for theirs, but preferrest a spoiled wicked youth, a false traitor to his king and country, whom we are happily rid of, before all thy wise counsellors, brave commanders, and loyal subjects. What can be more absurd than to love thy enemies and hate thy friends?"* 3. He advises him to present himself immediately at the head of his troops, to smile upon them, welcome them home, congratulate their success, and return them thanks for their services. Even those that may be commanded yet expect to be thanked when they do well, and ought to be. 4. He threatens him with another rebellion if he would not do this, intimating that rather than serve so ungrateful a prince he himself would head a revolt from him, and then (so confident is Joab of his own interest in the people) *"there will not tarry with thee one man. If I go, they will go. Thou hast now nothing to mourn for: but, if thou persist, I will give thee something to mourn for (as Josephus expresses it) with a true and more bitter mourning."*

III. How prudently and mildly David took the reproof and counsel given him, v. 8. He shook off his grief, anointed his head, and washed his face, that he might not appear unto men to mourn, and then made his appearance in public in the gate, which was as the guild-hall of the city. Hither the people flocked to him to congratulate his and their safety, and all was well. Note, When we are convinced of a fault, we must amend, though we are told of it by our inferiors, and indecently, or in heat and passion.

#### **Verses 9-15**

It is strange that David did not immediately upon the defeat and dispersion of Absalom's forces march with all expedition back to Jerusalem, to regain the possession of his capital city, while the rebels were in confusion and before they could rally again. What occasion was there to bring him back? Could not he himself go back with the victorious army he had with him in Gilead? He could, no doubt; but, 1. He would go back as a prince, with the consent and unanimous approbation of the people, and not as a conqueror forcing his way: he would restore their liberties, and not take occasion to seize them, or encroach upon them. 2.

He would go back in peace and safety, and be sure that he should meet with no difficulty or opposition in his return, and therefore would be satisfied that the people were well-affected to have him before he would stir. 3. He would go back in honour, and like himself, and therefore would go back, not at the head of his forces, but in the arms of his subjects; for the prince that has wisdom and goodness enough to make himself his people's darling, without doubt, looks greater and makes a much better figure than the prince that has strength enough to make himself his people's terror. It is resolved therefore that David must be brought back to Jerusalem his own city, and his own house there, with some ceremony, and here we have that matter concerted.

I. The men of Israel (that is, the ten tribes) were the first that talked of it, v. 9, 10. The people were at strife about it; it was the great subject of discourse and dispute throughout all the country. Some perhaps opposed it: "Let him either come back himself or stay where he is;" others appeared zealous for it, and reasoned as follows here, to further the design, 1. That David had formerly helped them, had fought their battles, subdued their enemies, and done them much service, and therefore it was a shame that he should continue banished from their country who had been so great a benefactor to it. Note, Good services done to the public, though they may be forgotten for a while, yet will be remembered again when men come to their right minds. 2. That Absalom had now disappointed them. "We were foolishly sick of the cedar, and chose the branch to reign over us; but we have had enough of him: he is consumed, and we narrowly escaped being consumed with him. Let us therefore return to our allegiance, and think of bringing the king back." Perhaps this was all the strife among them, not a dispute whether the king should be brought back or no (all agreed it was to be done), but whose fault it was that it was not done. As is usual in such cases, every one justified himself and blamed his neighbour. The people laid the fault on the elders, and the elders on the people, and one tribe upon another. Mutual excitements to the doing of a good work are laudable, but not mutual accusations for the not doing of it; for usually when public services are neglected all sides must share in the blame; every one might do more than he does, in the reformation of manners, the healing of divisions, and the like.

II. The men of Judah, by David's contrivance, were the first that did it. It is strange that they, being David's own tribe, were not so forward as the rest. David had intelligence of the good disposition of all the rest towards him, but nothing from Judah, though he had always been particularly careful of them. But we do not always find the most kindness from those from whom we have most reason to expect it. Yet David would not return till he knew the sense of his own tribe. *Judah was his lawgiver*, Ps. 60:7. That his way home might be the more clear, 1. He employed Zadok and Abiathar, the two chief priests, to treat with the elders of Judah, and to excite them to give the king an invitation back to his house, even to his house, which was the glory of their tribe, v. 11, 12. No men more proper to negotiate this affair than the two priests, who were firm to David's interest, were prudent men, and had great influence with the people. Perhaps the men of Judah were remiss and careless, and did it not, because nobody put them on to do it, and then it was proper to stir them up to it. Many will follow in a good work who will not lead: it is a pity that they should continue idle for want of being spoken to. Or perhaps they were so sensible of the greatness of the provocation they had given to David, by joining with Absalom, that they were afraid to bring him back, despairing of his favour; he therefore warrants his agents to assure them of it, with this reason: "*You are my brethren, my bone and my flesh*, and

therefore I cannot be severe with you." The Son of David has been pleased to call us *brethren, his bone and his flesh*, which encourages us to hope that we shall find favour with him. Or perhaps they were willing to see what the rest of the tribes would do before they stirred, with which they are here upbraided: "The speech of all Israel has come to the king to invite him back, and shall Judah be the last, that should have been the first? Where is now the celebrated bravery of that royal tribe? Where is its loyalty?" Note, We should be stirred up to that which is great and good by the examples both of our ancestors and of our neighbours, and by the consideration of our rank. Let not the first in dignity be last in duty. 2. He particularly courted into his interest Amasa, who had been Absalom's general, but was his own nephew as well as Joab, v. 13. He owns him for his kinsman, and promises him that, if he will appear for him now, he will make him captain-general of all his forces in the room of Joab, will not only pardon him (which, it may be, Amasa questioned), but prefer him. Sometimes there is nothing lost in purchasing the friendship of one that has been an enemy. Amasa's interest might do David good service at this juncture. But, if David did wisely for himself in designating Amasa for this post (Joab having now grown intolerably haughty), he did not do kindly by Amasa in letting his design be known, for it occasioned his death by Joab's hand, ch. 20:10. 3. The point was hereby gained. He bowed the heart of the men of Judah to pass a vote, *nemine contradicente—unanimously*, for the recall of the king, v. 14. God's providence, by the priests' persuasions and Amasa's interest, brought them to this resolve. David stirred not till he received this invitation, and then he came as far back as Jordan, at which river they were to meet him, v. 15. Our Lord Jesus will rule in those that invite him to the throne in their hearts and not till he be invited. He first bows the heart and makes it willing in the day of his power, and then *rules in the midst of his enemies*, Ps. 110:2, 3.

### **Verses 16-23**

Perhaps Jordan was never passed with so much solemnity, nor with so many remarkable occurrences, as it was now, since Israel passed it under Joshua. David, in his afflictive flight, remembered God particularly *from the land of Jordan* (Ps. 42:6), and now that land, more than any other, was graced with the glories of his return. David's soldiers furnished themselves with accommodations for their passage over this river, but, for his own family, *a ferry-boat* was sent on purpose, v. 18. *A fleet of boats*, say some; *a bridge of boats was made*, say others; the best convenience they had to serve him with. Two remarkable persons met him on the banks of Jordan, both of whom had abused him wretchedly when he was in his flight.

I. Ziba, who had abused him with his fair tongue, and by accusing his master, had obtained from the king a grant of his estate, ch. 16:4. A greater abuse he could not have done him, than, by imposing upon his credulity, to draw him in to do a thing so unkind to the son of his friend Jonathan. He comes now, with a retinue of sons and servants, to meet the king (v. 17), that he may obtain the king's favour, and so come off the better when Mephibosheth shall shortly undeceive him, and clear himself, v. 26.

II. Shimei, who had abused him with his foul tongue, railed at him, and cursed him, ch. 16:5. If David had been defeated, no doubt he would have continued to trample upon him, and have gloried in what he had done; but now that he sees him coming home in triumph, and returning to his throne, he thinks it his interest to make his peace with him. Those who now slight and abuse the Son of David would be glad to make their peace too when he shall come in his glory; but it will be too late. Shimei,

to recommend himself to the king, 1. Came with good company, with the men of Judah, as one in their interest. 2. He brought a regiment of the men of Benjamin with him, 1000, of which perhaps he was chiliarch, or commander-in-chief, offering his own and their service to the king; or perhaps they were volunteers, whom by his interest he had got together to meet the king, which was the more obliging because of all the tribes of Israel there were none, except these and Judah, that appeared to pay him this respect. 3. What he did he hastened to do; he lost no time. *Agree with thy adversary quickly, while thou art in the way.* Here is, (1.) The criminal's submission (v. 18–20): *He fell down before the king*, as a penitent, as a supplicant; and, that he might be thought sincere, he did it publicly before all David's servants, and his friends the men of Judah, yea, and before his own thousand. The offence was public, therefore the submission ought to be so. He owns his crime: *Thy servant doth know that I have sinned.* He aggravates it: *I did perversely.* He begs the king's pardon: *Let not the king impute iniquity to thy servant*, that is, deal with me as I deserve. He intimates that it was below the king's great and generous mind to *take it to his heart*; and pleads his early return to his allegiance, that he was *the first of all the house of Joseph* (that is, of Israel, who in the beginning of David's reign had distinguished themselves from Judah by their adherence to Ishbosheth, ch. 2:10) that came *to meet the king*. He came first, that by his example of duty the rest might be induced, and by his experience of the king's clemency the rest might be encouraged to follow. (2.) A motion made for judgment against him (v. 21): *"Shall not Shimei be put to death as a traitor? Let him, of all men, be made an example."* This motion was made by Abishai, who would have ventured his life to have been the death of Shimei when he was cursing, ch 16:9. David did not think fit to have it done then, because his judicial power was cut short; but, now that it was restored, why should not the law have its course? Abishai herein consulted what he supposed to be David's feelings more than his true interest. Princes have need to arm themselves against temptations to severity. (3.) His discharge by the king's order, v. 22, 23. He rejected Abishai's motion with displeasure: *What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?* The less we have to do with those who are of an angry revengeful spirit, and who put us upon doing what is harsh and rigorous, the better. He looks upon these prosecutors as adversaries to him, though they pretended friendship and zeal for his honour. Those who advise us to what is wrong are really *Satans*, adversaries to us. [1.] They were adversaries to his inclination, which was to clemency. He knew that he was *this day king in Israel*, restored to, and re-established in, his kingdom, and therefore his honour inclined him to forgive. It is the glory of kings to forgive those that humble and surrender themselves: *Satis est prostrasse leoni—it suffices the lion that he has laid his victim prostrate.* His joy inclined him to forgive. The pleasantness of his spirit on this great occasion forbade the entrance of any thing that was sour and peevish: joyful days should be forgiving days. Yet this was not all; his experience of God's mercy in restoring him to his kingdom, his exclusion from which he attributed to his sin, inclined him to show mercy to Shimei. Those that are forgiven must forgive. David had severely revenged the abuses done to his ambassadors by the Ammonites (ch. 12:31), but easily passes by the abuse done to himself by an Israelite. That was an affront to Israel in general, and touched the honour of his crown and kingdom; this was purely personal, and therefore (according to the usual disposition of good men) he could the more easily forgive it. [2.] They were adversaries to his interest. If he should put to death Shimei, who cursed him, those would expect the same fate who had taken up arms and actually levied war against him, which would drive them from him, while he was endeavouring to draw

them to him. Acts of severity are seldom acts of policy. *The throne is established by mercy.* Shimei, hereupon, had his pardon signed and sealed with an oath, yet being bound, no doubt, to his good behaviour, and liable to be prosecuted if he afterwards misbehaved; and thus he was reserved to be, in due time, as much a monument of the justice of the government as he was now of its clemency, and in both of its prudence.

### **Verses 24-30**

The day of David's return was a day of bringing to remembrance, a day of account, in which what had passed in his flight was called over again; among other things, after the case of Shimei, that of Mephibosheth comes to be enquired into, and he himself brings it on.

I. He went down in the crowd *to meet the king* (v. 24), and as a proof of the sincerity of his joy in the king's return, we are here told what a true mourner he was for the king's banishment. During that melancholy time, when one of the greatest glories of Israel had departed, Mephibosheth continued in a very melancholy state. He was never trimmed, nor put on clean linen, but wholly neglected himself, as one abandoned to grief for the king's affliction and the kingdom's misery. In times of public calamity we ought to abridge our enjoyments in the delights of sense, in conformity to the season. There are times when God calls to weeping and mourning, and we must comply with the call.

II. When the king came to Jerusalem (since he could not sooner have an opportunity) he made his appearance before him (v. 25); and when the king asked him why he, being one of his family, had staid behind, and not accompanied him in his exile, he opened his case fully to the king. 1. He complained of Ziba, his servant who should have been his friend, but had been in two ways his enemy; for, first, he had hindered him from going along with the king, by taking the ass himself which he was ordered to make ready for his master (v. 26), basely taking advantage of his lameness and his inability to help himself; and, secondly, he had accused him to David of a design to usurp the government, v. 27. How much mischief is it in the power of a wicked servant to do to the best master! 2. He gratefully acknowledged the king's great kindness to him when he and all his father's house lay at the king's mercy, v. 28. When he might justly have been dealt with as a rebel, he was treated as a friend, as a child: *Thou didst set thy servant among those that did eat at thy own table.* This shows that Ziba's suggestion was improbable; for could Mephibosheth be so foolish as to aim higher when he lived so easily, so happily as he did? And could he be so very disingenuous as to design any harm to David, of whose great kindness to him he was thus sensible? (3.) He referred his cause to the king's pleasure (*Do what is good in thy eyes with me and my estate*), depending on the king's wisdom, and his ability to discern between truth and falsehood (*My lord the king is as an angel from God*), and disclaiming all pretensions of his own merit: "So much kindness I have received above what I deserved, and *what right have I to cry any more unto the king?* Why should I trouble the king with my complaints when I have already been so troublesome to him? Why should I think any thing hard that is put upon me when I hitherto been so kindly treated?" We were all *as dead men before God*; yet he has not only spared us, *but taken us to sit at his table.* How little reason then have we to complain of any trouble we are in, and how much reason to take all well that God does!

III. David hereupon recalls the sequestration of Mephibosheth's estate; being deceived in his grant, he revokes it, and confirms

his former settlement of it: "*I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land* (v. 29), that is, Let it be as I first ordered it (ch. 9:10); the property shall still be vested in thee, but Ziba shall have occupancy: he shall till the land, paying thee a rent." Thus Mephibosheth is where he was; no harm is done, only Ziba goes away unpunished for his false and malicious information against his master. David either feared him too much, or loved him too well, to do justice upon him according to that law, Deu. 19:18, 19; and he was now in the humour of forgiving and resolved to make every body easy.

IV. Mephibosheth drowns all he cares about his estate in his joy for the king's return (v. 30): "*Yea, let him take all, the presence and favour of the king shall be to me instead of all.*" A good man can contentedly bear his own private losses and disappointments, while he see Israel in peace, and the throne of the Son of David exalted and established. Let Ziba take all, so that David may be in peace.

### **Verses 31-39**

David had already graced the triumphs of his restoration with the generous remission of the injuries that had been done to him; we have him here gracing them with a no less generous reward of the kindnesses that had been shown to him. Barzillai, the Gileadite, who had a noble seat at Rogelim, not far from Mahanaim, was the man who, of all the nobility and gentry of that country, had been most kind to David in his distress. If Absalom had prevailed, it is likely he would have suffered for his loyalty; but now he and his shall be no losers by it. Here is,

I. Barzillai's great respect to David, not only as a good man, but as his righteous sovereign: He *provided him with much sustenance*, for himself and his family, *while he lay at Mahanaim*, v. 32. God had given him a large estate, *for he was a very great man*, and, it seems, he had a large heart to do good with it: what else but that is a large estate good for? To reduced greatness generosity obliges us, and to oppressed goodness piety obliges us, to be in a particular manner kind, to the utmost of our power. Barzillai, to show that he was not weary of David, though he was so great a charge to him, attended him to Jordan, and went over with him, v. 31. Let subjects learn hence to render *tribute to whom tribute is due* and *honour to whom honour*, Rom. 13:7.

II. The kind invitation David gave to him to court (v. 33): *Come thou over with me*. He invited him, 1. That he might have the pleasure of his company and the benefit of his counsel; for we may suppose that he was very wise and good, as well as very rich, otherwise he would not have been called here *a very great man*; for it is what a man is, more than what he has, that renders him truly great. 2. That he might have an opportunity of returning his kindness: "*I will feed thee with me; thou shalt fare as sumptuously as I fare, and this at Jerusalem, the royal and holy city.*" David did not take Barzillai's kindness to him as a debt (he was not one of those arbitrary princes who think that whatever their subjects have is theirs when they please), but accepted it and rewarded it as a favour. We must always study to be grateful to our friends, especially to those who have helped us in distress.

III. Barzillai's reply to this invitation, wherein,

1. He admires the king's generosity in making him this offer, lessening his service, and magnifying the king's return for it: *Why should the king recompense it with such a reward?* v. 36. Will the master thank that servant who only does what was his duty

to do? He thought he had done himself honour enough in doing the king any service. Thus, when the saints shall be called to inherit the kingdom in consideration of what they have done for Christ in this world, they will be amazed at the disproportion between the service and the recompence. Mt. 25:37, *Lord, when saw we thee hungry, and fed thee?*

2. He declines accepting the invitation. He begs his majesty's pardon for refusing so generous an offer: he should think himself very happy in being near the king, but, (1.) He is old, and unfit to remove at all, especially to court. He is old, and unfit for the *business* of the court: "Why *should I go up with the king to Jerusalem?* I can do him no service there, in the council, the camp, the treasury, or the courts of justice; for *how long have I to live?* v. 34. Shall I think of going into business, now that I am going out of this world?" He is old and unfit for the *diversions* of the court, which will be ill-bestowed, and even thrown away, upon one that can relish them so little, v. 35. As it was in Moses's time, so it was in Barzillai's and it is not worse now, that, *if men be so strong that they come to fourscore years, their strength then is labour and sorrow*, Ps. 90:10. These were then, and are still, years of which men say they *have no pleasure in them*, Eccl. 12:1. Dainties are insipid when desire fails, and songs to the aged ear are little better than those sung to a heavy heart, very disagreeable: how should they be otherwise when the daughters of music are brought low? Let those that are old learn of Barzillai to be dead to the delights of sense; let grace second nature, and make a virtue of the necessity. Nay, Barzillai, being old, thinks he shall be *a burden to the king*, rather than any credit to him; and a good man would not go any where to be burdensome, or, if he must be so, will rather be so to his own house than to another's. (2.) He is dying, and must begin to think of his long journey, his removal out of the world, v. 37. It is good for us all, but it especially becomes old people to think and speak much of dying. "Talk of going to court!" says Barzillai; "Let me go home and *die in my own city*, the place of my father's sepulchre; let me die *by the grave of my father*, that my bones may be quietly carried to the place of their rest. The grave is ready for me, let me go and get ready for it, go and die in my nest."

3. He desires the king to be kind to his son Chimham: *Let him go over with my lord the king*, and have preferment at court. What favour is done to him Barzillai will take as done to himself. Those that are old must not grudge young people those delights which they themselves are past the enjoyment of, nor confine them to their retirements. Barzillai will go back himself, but he will not make Chimham go back with him; though he could ill spare Chimham, yet, thinking it would gratify and advance him, he is willing to do it.

IV. David's farewell to Barzillai. 1. He sends him back into his country with a kiss and a blessing (v. 39), signifying that in gratitude for his kindnesses he would love him and pray for him, and with a promise that whatever request he should at any time make to him he would be ready to oblige him (v. 38): *Whatsoever thou shalt think of*, when thou comest home, to *ask of me*, that *will I do for thee*. What is the chief excellency of power but this, that it gives men a capacity of doing the more good?

2. He takes Chimham forward with him, and leaves it to Barzillai to choose him his preferment. I will *do to him what shall seem good to thee*, v. 38. And, it should seem, Barzillai, who had experienced the innocency and safety of retirement, begged a country seat for him near Jerusalem, but not in it; for, long after, we read of a place near Beth-lehem, David's city, which is called *the habitation of Chimham*, allotted to him, probably, not out of the crown-lands or the forfeited estates, but out of

David's paternal estate.

### Verses 40-43

David came over Jordan attended and assisted only by the men of Judah; but when he had advanced as far as Gilgal, the first stage on this side Jordan, *half the people of Israel* (that is, of their elders and great men) had come to wait upon him, to kiss his hand, and congratulate him on his return, but found they came too late to witness the solemnity of his first entrance. This put them out of humour, and occasioned a quarrel between them and the men of Judah, which was a damp to the joy of the day, and the beginning of further mischief. Here is, 1. The complaint which the men of Israel brought to the king against the men of Judah (v. 41), that they had performed the ceremony of bringing the king over Jordan, and not given them notice, that they might have come to join in it. This reflected upon them, as if they were not so well affected to the king and his restoration as the men of Judah were, whereas the king himself knew that they had spoken of it before the men of Judah thought of it, v. 11. It seemed likewise as if they intended to monopolize the king's favours when he had come back, and to be looked upon as his only friends. See what mischief comes from pride and jealousy. 2. The excuse which the men of Judah made for themselves, v. 42. (1.) They plead relations to the king: "*He is near of kin to us*, and therefore in a matter of mere ceremony, as this was, we may claim precedency. It was into our country that he was to be brought, and therefore who so fit as we to bring him?" (2.) They deny the insinuated charge of self-seeking in what they had done: "*Have we eaten at all of the king's cost?* No, we have all borne our own charges. *Hath he given us any gift?* No, we have no design to engross the advantages of his return; you have come time enough to share in them." Too many that attend princes do so only for what they can get. 3. The men of Israel's vindication of their charge, v. 43. They pleaded, "*We have ten parts in the king*" (Judah having Simeon only, whose lot lay within his, to join with him), "and therefore it is a slight upon us that our advice was not asked about *bringing back the king*." See how uncertain the multitude is. They were lately striving against the king, to drive him out; now they are striving about him, which shall honour him most. A good man and a good cause will thus recover their credit and interest, though, for a time, they may seem to have lost them. See what is commonly the origin of strife, nothing so much as impatience of contempt or the least seeming slight. The men of Judah would have done better if they had taken their brethren's advice and assistance; but, since they did not, why should the men of Israel be so grievously offended? If a good work be done, and well done, let us not be displeased, nor the work disparaged, though we had no hand in it. 4. The scripture takes notice, by way of blame, which of the contending parties managed the cause with most passion: *The words of the men of Judah were fiercer than those of the men of Israel*. Though we have right and reason on our side, yet, if we express ourselves with fierceness, God takes notice of it and is much displeased with it.

## Chapter 20

How do the clouds return after the rain! No sooner is one of David's troubles over than another arises, as it were out of the ashes of the former, wherein the threatening is fulfilled, that the sword should never depart from his house. I. Before he reaches Jerusalem a new rebellion is raised by Sheba (v. 1, 2). II. His first work, when he comes to Jerusalem, is to condemn his concubines to perpetual imprisonment (v. 3). III. Amass, whom he entrusts to raise an army against Sheba, is too slow in his motions, which puts him into a fright (v. 4-6). IV. One of his generals barbarously murders the other, when they are taking the field (v. 7-13). V. Sheba is at length shut up in the city of Abel (v. 14, 15), but the citizens deliver him up to Joab, and so his rebellion is crushed (v. 16-22). The chapter concludes with a short account of David's great officers (v. 23-26).

### Verses 1-3

David, in the midst of his triumphs, has here the affliction to see his kingdom disturbed and his family disgraced.

I. His subjects revolting from him at the instigation of *a man of Belial*, whom they followed when they forsook the *man after God's own heart*. Observe, 1. That this happened immediately upon the crushing of Absalom's rebellion. We must not think it strange, while we are in this world, if the end of one trouble be the beginning of another: deep sometimes calls unto deep. 2. That the people were now just returning to their allegiance, when, of a sudden, they flew off from it. When a reconciliation is newly made, it ought to be handled with great tenderness and caution, lest the peace break again before it be settled. A broken bone, when it is set, must have time to knot. 3. That the ring-leader of this rebellion was Sheba, a Benjamite by birth (v. 1), who had his habitation in Mount Ephraim, v. 21. Shimei and he were both of Saul's tribe, and both retained the ancient grudge of that house. Against the kingdom of the Messiah there is an hereditary enmity in the serpent's seed, and a succession of attempts to overthrow it (Ps. 2:1, 2); but he that sits in heaven laughs at them all. 4. That the occasion of it was that foolish quarrel, which we read of in the close of the foregoing chapter, between the elders of Israel and the elders of Judah, about bringing the king back. It was a point of honour that was disputed between them, which had most interest in David. "We are more numerous," say the elders of Israel. "We are nearer akin to him," say the elders of Judah. Now one would think David very safe and happy when his subjects are striving which shall love him best, and be most forward to show him respect; yet even that strife proves the occasion of a rebellion. The men of Israel complained to David of the slight which the men of Judah had put upon them. If he had now countenanced their complaint, commended their zeal, and returned them thanks for it, he might have confirmed them in his interest; but he seemed partial to his own tribe: *Their words prevailed above the words of the men of Israel*; as some read the last words of the foregoing chapter. David inclined to justify them, and, when the men of Israel perceived this, they flew off with indignation. "If the king will suffer himself to be engrossed by the men of Judah, let him and them make their best of one another, and we will set up one for ourselves. We thought we had ten parts in David, but such an interest will not be allowed us; the men of Judah tell us, in effect, *we have no part in him*, and therefore we will have none, nor will we attend him any further in his return to Jerusalem, nor own him for our king." This was proclaimed by Sheba (v. 1), who probably was a man of note, and had been active in Absalom's rebellion; the disgusted Israelites took the hint, and *went up*

*from after David to follow Sheba* (v. 2), that is, the generality of them did so, only the men of Judah adhered to him. Learn hence, (1.) That it is as impolitic for princes to be partial in their attentions to their subjects as it is for parents to be so to their children; both should carry it with an even hand. (2.) Those know not what they do that make light of the affections of their inferiors, by not countenancing and accepting it. Their hatred may be feared whose love is despised. (3.) *The beginning of strife is as the letting forth of water; it is therefore wisdom to leave it off before it be meddled with*, Prov. 17:14. How great a matter doth a little of this fire kindle! (4.) The perverting of words is the subverting of peace; and much mischief is made by forcing invidious constructions upon what is said and written and drawing consequences that were never intended. The men of Judah said, *The king is near of kin to us*. "By this," say the men of Israel, "you mean that *we have no part in him*;" whereas they meant no such thing. (5.) People are very apt to run into extremes. *We have ten parts in David*, said they; and, almost in the next breath, *We have no part in him*. Today *Hosanna*, to-morrow *Crucify*.

II. His concubines imprisoned for life, and he himself under a necessity of putting them in confinement, because they had been defiled by Absalom, v. 3. David had multiplied wives, contrary to the law and they proved a grief and shame to him. Those whom he had sinfully taken pleasure in he was now, 1. Obligated, in duty, to put away, they being rendered unclean to him by the vile uncleanness his son had committed with them. Those whom he had loved must now be loathed. 2. Obligated, in prudence, to shut up in privacy, not to be seen abroad for shame, lest the sight of them should give occasion to people to speak of what Absalom had done to them, which ought not to be so much as named, 1 Co. 5:1. That that villany might be buried in obscurity. 3. Obligated, in justice to shut up in prison, to punish them for their easy submission to Absalom's lust, despairing perhaps of David's return, and giving him up for gone. Let none expect to do ill and fare well.

### **Verses 4-13**

We have here Amasa's fall just as he began to rise. He was nephew to David (ch. 17:25), had been Absalom's general and commander-in-chief of his rebellious army, but, that being routed, he came over into David's interest, upon a promise that he should be general of his forces instead of Joab. Sheba's rebellion gives David an occasion to fulfil his promise sooner than he could wish, but Joab's envy and emulation rendered its fulfillment of ill consequence both to him and David.

I. Amasa has a commission to raise forces for the suppressing of Sheba's rebellion, and is ordered to raise them with all possible expedition, v. 4. It seems, the men of Judah, though forward to attend the king's triumphs, were backward enough to fight his battles; else, when they were all in a body attending him to Jerusalem, they might immediately have pursued Sheba, and have crushed that cockatrice in the egg. But most love a loyalty, as well as a religion, that is cheap and easy. Many boast of their being akin to Christ that yet are very loth to venture for him. Amasa is sent to assemble the men of Judah within three days; but he finds them so backward and unready that he cannot do it within the time appointed (v. 5), though the promotion of Amasa, who had been their general under Absalom, was very obliging to them, and a proof of the clemency of David's government.

II. Upon Amasa's delay, Abishai, the brother of Joab, is ordered to take the guards and standing forces, and with them to pursue Sheba (v. 6, 7), for nothing could be of more dangerous consequence than to give him time. David gives these orders to

Abishai, because he resolves to mortify Joab, and degrade him, not so much, I doubt, for the blood of Abner, which he had shed basely, as for the blood of Absalom, which he had shed justly and honourably. "Now (says bishop Hall) Joab smarteth for a loyal disobedience. How slippery are the stations of earthly honours and subject to continual mutability! Happy are those who are in favour with him in whom there is no shadow of change." Joab, without orders, though in disgrace, goes along with his brother, knowing he might be serviceable to the public, or perhaps now meditating the removal of his rival.

III. Joab, near Gibeon, meets with Amasa, and barbarously murders him, v. 8–10. It should seem, the great stone in Gibeon was the place appointed for the general rendezvous. There the rivals met; and Amasa, relying upon his commission, went before, as general both of the new-raised forces which he had got together, and of the veteran troops which Abishai had brought in; but Joab there took an opportunity to kill him with his own hand; and, 1. He did it subtly, and with contrivance, and not upon a sudden provocation. He girded his coat about him, that it might not hang in his way, and girded his belt upon his coat, that his sword might be the readier to his hand; he also put his sword in a sheath too big for it, that, whenever he pleased, it might, upon a little shake, fall out, as if it fell by accident, and so he might take it into his hand, unsuspected, as if he were going to return it into the scabbard, when he designed to sheath it in the bowels of Amasa. The more there is of plot in a sin the worse it is. 2. He did it treacherously, and under pretence of friendship, that Amasa might not be upon his guard. He called him *brother*, for they were own cousins, enquired of his welfare (*Art thou in health?*) and *took him by the beard*, as one he was free with, to kiss him, while with the drawn sword in his other hand he was aiming at his heart. Was this done like a gentleman, like a soldier, like a general? No, but like a villain, like a base coward. Just thus he slew Abner, and went unpunished for it, which encouraged him to do the like again. 3. He did it impudently, not in a corner, but at the head of his troops, and in their sight, as one that was neither ashamed nor afraid to do it, that was so hardened in blood and murders that he could neither blush nor tremble. 4. He did it at one blow, gave the fatal push with a good-will, as we say, so that he needed not strike him again; with such a strong and steady hand he gave this one stroke that it was fatal. 5. He did it in contempt and defiance of David and the commission he had given to Amasa; for that commission was the only ground of his quarrel with him, so that David was struck at through the side of Amasa, and was, in effect, told to his face that Joab would be general, in spite of him. 6. He did it very unseasonably, when they were going against a common enemy and were concerned to be unanimous. This ill-timed quarrel might have scattered their forces, or engaged them one against another, and so have made them all an easy prey to Sheba. So contentedly could Joab sacrifice the interest both of king and kingdom to his personal revenge.

IV. Joab immediately resumes his general's place, and takes care to lead the army on in pursuit of Sheba, that, if possible, he might prevent any prejudice to the common cause by what he had done. 1. He leaves one of his men to make proclamation to the forces that were coming up that they were still engaged in David's cause, but under Joab's command, v. 11. He knew what an interest he had in the soldiery, and how many favoured him rather than Amasa, who had been a traitor, was now a turn-coat, and had never been successful; on this he boldly relied, and called them all to follow him. What man of Judah would not be for his old king and his old general? But one would wonder with what face a murderer could pursue a traitor; and how, under such

a heavy load of guilt, he had courage to enter upon danger. Surely his conscience was seared with a hot iron. 2. care is taken to remove the dead body out of the way, because at that they made a stand (as ch. 2:23), and to cover it with a cloth, v. 12, 13. Wicked men think themselves safe in their wickedness if they can but conceal it from the eye of the world: if it be hidden, it is with them as if it were never done. But the covering of blood with a cloth cannot stop its cry in God's ear for vengeance, or make it the less loud. However, since this was no time to arraign Joab for what he had done, and the common safety called for expedition, it was prudent to remove that which retarded the march of the army; and then they all went on after Joab, while David, who no doubt had notice soon brought him of this tragedy, could not but reflect upon it with regret that he had not formerly done justice upon Joab for the death of Abner, and that he now had exposed Amasa by preferring him. And perhaps his conscience reminded him of his employing Joab in the murder of Uriah, which had helped to harden him in cruelty.

### **Verses 14-22**

We have here the conclusion of Sheba's attempt.

I. The rebel, when he had rambled over all the tribes of Israel, and found them not so willing, upon second thoughts, to follow him, as they had been upon a sudden provocation to desert David (having only picked up a few like himself, that sided with him), at length entered Abel-Beth-maacah, a strong city in the north, in the lot of Naphtali, where we find it placed, 2 Ki.

15:29. Here he took shelter, whether by force or with consent does not appear; but his adherents were most Berites, of Beeroth in Benjamin, v. 14. One bad man will find or make more.

II. Joab drew up all his force against the city, besieged it, battered the wall, and made it almost ready for a general storm, v. 15. Justly is that place attacked with all this fury which dares harbour a traitor; nor will that heart fare better which indulges those rebellious lusts that will not have Christ to reign over them.

III. A discreet good woman of the city of Abel brings this matter, by her prudent management, to a good issue, so as to satisfy Joab and yet save the city. Here is,

1. Her treaty with Joab, and her capitulation with him, by which he is engaged to raise the siege, upon condition that Sheba be delivered up. It seems, none of all the men of Abel, none of the elders or magistrates, offered to treat with Joab, no, not when they were reduced to the last extremity. They were stupid and unconcerned for the public safety, or they stood in awe of Sheba, or they despaired of gaining any good terms with Joab, or they had not sense enough to manage the treaty. But this one woman and her wisdom saved the city. Souls know no difference of sexes. Though the man be the head, it does not therefore follow that he has the monopoly of the brains, and therefore he ought not, by any salique law, to have the monopoly of the crown. Many a masculine heart, and more than masculine, has been found in a female breast; nor is the treasure of wisdom the less valuable for being lodged in the weaker vessel. In the treaty between this nameless heroine and Joab,

(1.) She gains his audience and attention, v. 16, 17. We may suppose it was the first time he had ever treated with a woman in martial affairs.

(2.) She reasons with him on behalf of her city, and very ingeniously. [1.] That it was a city famous for wisdom (v. 18), as we translate it. She pleads that this city had been long in such reputation for prudent knowing men that it was the common referee

of the country, and all agreed to abide by the award of its elders. Their sentence was an oracle; let them be consulted and the matter is ended, all sides will acquiesce. Now shall such a city as this be laid in ashes and never treated with? [2.] That the inhabitants were generally peaceable and faithful in Israel, v. 19. She could speak, not for herself only, but for all those whose cause she pleaded, that they were not of turbulent and seditious spirits, but of known fidelity to their prince and peaceableness with their fellow-subjects; they were neither seditious nor litigious. [3.] That it was a mother in Israel, a guide and nurse to the towns and country about; and that it was a part of *the inheritance of the Lord*, a city of Israelites, not of heathen; and the destruction of it would lessen and weaken that nation which God had chosen for his heritage. [4.] That they expected him to offer them peace before he made an attack upon the, according to that known law of war, Deu. 20:10. So the margin reads (v. 18): *They plainly spoke in the beginning (of the siege), saying, Surely they will ask of Abel*, that is, "The besiegers will demand the traitor, and will ask us to surrender him; and if they do, we will soon come to an agreement, and so end the matter." Thus she tacitly upbraids Joab for not offering them peace, but hopes it is not too late to beg it.

(3.) Joab and Abel's advocate soon agree that Sheba's head shall be the ransom of the city. Joab, though in a personal quarrel he had lately swallowed up and destroyed Amasa, yet, when he acts as a general, will by no means bear the imputation of delighting in bloodshed: *"Far be it from me that I should delight to swallow up or destroy*, or design it but when it is necessary for the public safety, v. 20. The matter is not so. Our quarrel is not with your city; we would hazard our lives for its protection. Our quarrel is only with the traitor that is harboured among you; deliver him up, and we have done." A great deal of mischief would be prevented if contending parties would but understand one another. The city obstinately holds out, believing Joab aims at its ruin. Joab furiously attacks it, believing the citizens all confederates with Sheba. Whereas both were mistaken; let both sides be undeceived, and the matter is soon accommodated. The single condition of peace is the surrender of the traitor. It is so in God's dealing with the soul, when it is besieged by conviction and distress: sin is the traitor; the beloved lust is the rebel; part with that, cast away the transgression, and all shall be well. No peace on any other terms. Our wise woman immediately agrees to the proposal: *Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee presently*.

2. Her treaty with the citizens. She went to them in her wisdom (and perhaps she had as much need of it in dealing with them as in dealing with Joab) and persuaded them to cut off Sheba's head, probably by some public order of their government, and it was thrown over the wall to Joab. He knew the traitor's face, and therefore looked no further, intending not that any of his adherents should suffer. The public safety was secured, and he felt no wish to gratify the public revenge. Joab hereupon raised the siege, and marched back to Jerusalem, with the trophies rather of peace than victory.

### **Verses 23-26**

Here is an account of the state of David's court after his restoration. Joab retained the office of general, being too great to be displaced. Benaiah, as before, was captain of the guards. Here is one new office erected, which we had not (ch. 8:16–18), that of *treasurer*, or one *over the tribute*, for it was not till towards the latter end of his time that David began to raise taxes. Adoram was long in this office, but it cost him his life at last, 1 Ki. 12:18.

## Chapter 21

The date of the events of this chapter is uncertain. I incline to think that they happened as they are here placed, after Absalom's and Sheba's rebellion, and towards the latter end of David's reign. That the battles with the Philistines, mentioned here, were long after the Philistines were subdued, appears by comparing 1 Chr. 18:1 with 20:4. The numbering of the people was just before the fixing of the place of the temple (as appears 1 Chr. 22:1), and that was towards the close of David's life; and, it should seem, the people were numbered just after the three years' famine for the Gibeonites, for that which is threatened as "three" years' famine (1 Chr. 21:12) is called "seven" years (2 Sa. 24:12, 13), three more, with the year current, added to those three. We have here, I. The Gibeonites avenged, 1. By a famine in the land (v. 1). 2. By the putting of seven of Saul's posterity to death (v. 2-9), care, however, being taken of their dead bodies, and of the bones of Saul (v. 10-14). II. The giants of the Philistines slain in several battles (v. 15-22).

### Verses 1-9

Here I. We are told of the injury which Saul had, long before this, done to the Gibeonites, which we had no account of in the history of his reign, nor should we have heard of it here but that it came now to be reckoned for. The Gibeonites were of the remnant of the Amorites (v. 2), who by a stratagem had made peace with Israel, and had the public faith pledged to them by Joshua for their safety. We had the story Jos. 9, where it was agreed (v. 23) that they should have their lives secured, but be deprived of their lands and liberties, that they and theirs should be tenants in villanage to Israel. It does not appear that they had broken their part of the covenant, either by denying their service or attempting to recover their lands or liberties; nor was this pretended; but Saul, under colour of zeal for the honour of Israel, that it might not be said that they had any of the natives among them, aimed to root them out, and, in order to that, slew many of them. Thus he would seem wiser than his predecessors the judges, and more zealous for the public interest; and perhaps he designed it for an instance of his royal prerogative and the power which as king he assumed to rescind the former acts of government and to disannul the most solemn leagues. It may be, he designed, by this severity towards the Gibeonites, to atone for his clemency towards the Amalekites. Some conjecture that he sought to cut off the Gibeonites at the same time when he put away the witches (1 Sa. 28:3), or perhaps many of them were remarkably pious, and he sought to destroy them when he slew the priests their masters. That which made this an exceedingly sinful sin was that he not only shed innocent blood, but therein violated the solemn oath by which the nation was bound to protect them. See what brought ruin on Saul's house: it was a bloody house.

II. We find the nation of Israel chastised with a sore famine, long after, for this sin of Saul. Observe, 1. Even in the land of Israel, that fruitful land, and in the reign of David, that glorious reign, there was a famine, not extreme (for then notice would sooner have been taken of it and enquiry made into the cause of it), but great drought, and scarcity of provisions, the consequence of it, for three years together. If corn miss one year, commonly the next makes up the deficiency; but, if it miss three years successively, it will be a sore judgment; and the man of wisdom will by it hear God's voice crying to the country to repent of the abuse of plenty. 2. David enquired of God concerning it. Though he was himself a prophet, he must consult the

oracle, and know God's mind in his own appointed way. Note, When we are under God's judgments we ought to enquire into the grounds of the controversy. *Lord, show me wherefore thou contendest with me.* It is strange that David did not sooner consult the oracle, not till the third year; but perhaps, till then, he apprehended it not to be an extraordinary judgment for some particular sin. Even good men are often slack and remiss in doing their duty. We continue in ignorance, and under mistake, because we delay to enquire. 3. God was ready in his answer, though David was slow in his enquiries: *It is for Saul.* Note, God's judgments often look a great way back, which obliges us to do so when we are under his rebukes. It is not for us to object against the people's smarting for the sin of their king (perhaps they were aiding and abetting), nor against this generation's suffering for the sin of the last God often *visiteth the sins of the fathers upon the children, and his judgments are a great deep.* He gives not account of any of his matters. Time does not wear out the guilt of sin; nor can we build hopes of impunity upon the delay of judgments. There is no statute of limitation to be pleaded against God's demands. *Nullum tempus occurrit Deo—God may punish when he pleases.*

III. We have vengeance taken upon the house of Saul for the turning away of God's wrath from the land, which, at present, smarted for his sin.

1. David, probably by divine direction, referred it to the Gibeonites themselves to prescribe what satisfaction should be given them for the wrong that had been done them, v. 3. They had many years remained silent, had not appealed to David, nor given the kingdom any disturbance with their complaints or demands; and now, at length, God speaks for them (*I heard not, for thou wilt hear*, Ps. 38:14, 15); and they are recompensed for their patience with this honour, that they are made judges in their own case, and have a blank given them to write their demands on: *What you shall say, that will I do* (v. 4), that atonement may be made, and that *you may bless the inheritance of the Lord*, v. 3. It is sad for any family or nation to have the prayers of oppressed innocency against them, and therefore the expense of a just restitution is well bestowed for the retrieving of *the blessing of those that were ready to perish*, Job 29:13. "My servant Job, whom you have wronged, shall pray for you," says God, "and then I will be reconciled to you, and not till then." Those understand not themselves that value not the prayers of the poor and despised.

2. They desired that seven of Saul's posterity might be put to death, and David granted their demand. (1.) They required no *silver, nor gold*, v. 4. Note, Money is no satisfaction for blood, see Num. 35:31–33. It is the ancient law that blood calls for blood (Gen. 9:6); and those over-value money and under-value life, that sell the blood of their relations for corruptible things, *such as silver and gold.* The Gibeonites had now a fair opportunity to get a discharge from their servitude, in compensation for the wrong done them, according to the equity of that law (Ex. 21:26), *If a man strike out his servant's eye, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.* But they did not insist on this; though the covenant was broken on the other side, it should not be broken on theirs. They were *Nethinim*, given to God and his people Israel, and they would not seem weary of the service. (2.) They required no lives but of Saul's family. He had done them the wrong, and therefore his children must pay for it. We sue the heirs for the parents' debts. Men may not extend this principle so far as life, Deu. 24:16. *The children* in an ordinary course of law, *shall never be put to death for the parents.* But this case of the Gibeonites was altogether extraordinary. God had made himself

an immediate party to the cause and no doubt put it into the heart of the Gibeonites to make this demand, for he owned what was done (v. 14), and his judgments are not subject to the rules which men's judgments must be subject to. Let parents take heed of sin, especially the sin of cruelty and oppression, for their poor children's sake, who may be smarting for it by the just hand of God when they themselves are in their graves. Guilt and a curse are a bad entail upon a family. It should seem, Saul's posterity trod in his steps, for it is called a *bloody house*; it was the spirit of the family, and therefore they are justly reckoned with for his sin, as well as for their own. (3.) They would not impose it upon David to do this execution: *Thou shalt not for us kill any man* (v. 4), but we will do it ourselves, *we will hang them up unto the Lord* (v. 6), that if there were any hardship in it, they might bear the blame, and not David or his house. By our old law, if a murderer had judgment given against him upon an appeal, the relations that appealed had the executing of him. (4.) They did not require this out of malice against Saul or his family (had they been revengeful, they would have moved it themselves long before), but out of love to the people of Israel, whom they saw plagued for the injury done to them: *"We will hang them up unto the Lord* (v. 6), to satisfy his justice, not to gratify any revenge of our own—for the good of the public, not for our own reputation." (5.) The nomination of the persons they left to David, who took care to secure Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake, that, while he was avenging the breach of one oath, he might not himself break another (v. 7); but he delivered up two of Saul's sons whom he had by a concubine, and five of his grandsons, whom his daughter Merab bore to Adriel (1 Sa. 18:19), but his daughter Michal brought up, v. 8. Now Saul's treachery was punished, in giving Merab to Adriel, when he had promised her to David, with a design to provoke him. "It is a dangerous matter," says bishop Hall upon this, "to offer injury to any of God's faithful ones; if their meekness have easily remitted it, their God will not pass it over without a severe retribution, though it may be long first." (6.) The place, time, and manner, of their execution, all added to the solemnity of their being sacrificed to divine justice. [1.] They were hanged up, as anathemas, under a peculiar mark of God's displeasure; for the law had said, *He that is hanged is accursed of God*, Deu. 21:23; Gal. 3:13. Christ being made a curse for us, and dying to satisfy for our sins and to turn away the wrath of God, became obedient to this ignominious death. [2.] They were hanged up in Gibeah of Saul (v. 6), to show that it was for his sin that they died. They were hanged, as it were, before their own door, to expiate the guilt of the house of Saul; and thus God accomplished the ruin of that family, for the blood of the priests, and their families, which, doubtless, now came in remembrance before God, and inquisition was made for it, Ps. 9:12. Yet the blood of the *Gibeonites* only is mentioned, because that was shed in violation of a sacred oath, which, though sworn long before, though obtained by a wile, and the promise made to Canaanites, yet is thus severely reckoned for. The despising of the oath, and breaking of the covenant, will be recompensed on the head of those who thus profane God's sacred name, Eze. 17:18, 19. And thus God would show that with him rich and poor meet together. Even royal blood must go to atone for the blood of the Gibeonites, who were but the vassals for the congregation. [3.] They were put to death *in the days of harvest* (v. 9), *at the beginning of harvest* (v. 10), to show that they were thus sacrificed for the turning sway of that wrath of God which had withheld from them their harvest-mercies for some years past, and to obtain his favour in the present harvest. Thus there is no way of appeasing God's anger but by mortifying and crucifying our lusts and corruptions. In vain do we expect mercy from God, unless we do justice upon our sins. Those executions must not be complained of as

cruel which have become necessary to the public welfare. Better that seven of Saul's bloody house be hanged than that all Israel be famished.

#### **Verses 10-14**

Here we have, I. Saul's sons not only hanged, but hanged in chains, their dead bodies left hanging, and exposed, till the judgment ceased, which their death was to turn away, by the sending of rain upon the land. They died as sacrifices, and thus they were, in a manner, offered up, not consumed all at once by fire, but gradually by the air. They died as anathemas, and by this ignominious usage they were represented as execrable, because iniquity was laid upon them. When our blessed Saviour was made sin for us he was made a curse for us. But how shall we reconcile this with the law which expressly required that those who were hanged should be buried on the same day? Deu. 21:23. One of the Jewish rabbins wishes this passage of story expunged, *that the name of God might be sanctified*, which, he thinks, is dishonoured by his acceptance of that which was a violation of his law: but this was an extraordinary case, and did not fall within that law; nay, the very reason for that law is a reason for this exception. he that is thus left hanged is accursed; therefore ordinary malefactors must not be so abused; but therefore these must, because they were sacrificed, not to the justice of the nation, but for the crime of the nation (no less a crime than the violation of the public faith) and for the deliverance of the nation from no less a judgment than a general famine. Being thus made as the *off-scouring of all things*, they were made a *spectacle to the world* (1 Co. 4:9, 13), God appointing, or at least allowing it.

II. Their dead bodies watched by Rizpah, the mother of two of them, v. 10. It was a great affliction to her, now in her old age, to see her two sons, who, we may suppose, had been a comfort to her, and were likely to be the support of her declining years, cut off in this dreadful manner. None know what sorrows they are reserved for. She may not see them decently interred, but they shall be decently attended. She attempts not to violate the sentence passed upon them, that they should hang there till God sent rain; she neither steals nor forces away their dead bodies, though the divine law might have been cited to bear her out; but she patiently submits, pitches a tent of sackcloth near the gibbets, where, with her servants and friends, she protects the dead bodies from birds and beasts of prey. Thus, 1. She indulged her grief, as mourners are too apt to do, to no good purpose. When sorrow, in such cases, is in danger of growing excessive, we should rather study how to divert and pacify it than how to humour and gratify it. Why should we thus harden ourselves in sorrow? 2. She testified her love. Thus she let the world know that her sons died, not for any sin of their own, not as stubborn and rebellious sons, *whose eye had despised to obey their mother*; if that had been the case, she would have suffered the *ravens of the valley to pick it out and the young eagles to eat it*, Prov. 30:17. But they died for their father's sin and therefore her mind could not be alienated from them by their hard fate.

Though there is not remedy, but they must die, yet they shall die pitied and lamented.

III. The solemn interment of their dead bodies, with the bones of Saul and Jonathan, in the burying-place of their family. David was so far from being displeased at what Rizpah had done that he was himself stirred up by it to do honour to the house of Saul, and to these branches of it among the rest; thus it appeared that it was not out of any personal disgust to the family that he delivered them up, and that he had not desired the woeful day, but that he was obliged to do it for the public good. 1. He now

bethought himself of removing the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the place where the men of Jabesh-Gilead had decently, but privately and obscurely, interred them, *under a tree*, 1 Sa. 31:12, 13. Though the shield of Saul was vilely cast away, as if he had not been anointed with oil, yet let not royal dust be lost in the graves of the common people. Humanity obliges us to respect human bodies, especially of the great and good, in consideration both of what they have been and what they are to be. 2. With them he buried the bodies *of those that were hanged*; for, when God's anger was turned away, they were no longer to be looked upon as a curse, v. 13, 14. When *water dropped upon them out of heaven* (v. 10), that is, when God sent rain to water the earth (which perhaps was not many days after they were hung up), then they were taken down, for then it appeared *that God was entreated for the land*. When justice is done on earth vengeance from heaven ceases. Through Christ, who was hanged on a tree and so made a curse for us, to expiate our guilt (though he was himself guiltless), God is pacified, and is entreated for us: and it is said (Acts 13:29) that *when they had fulfilled all that was written of him*, in token of the completeness of the sacrifice and of God's acceptance of it, *they took him down from the tree and laid him in a sepulchre*.

### **Verses 15-22**

We have here the story of some conflicts with the Philistines, which happened, as it should seem, in the latter end of David's reign. Though he had so subdued them that they could not bring any great numbers into the field, yet as long as they had any giants among them to be their champions, they would never be quiet, but took all occasions to disturb the peace of Israel, to challenge them, or make incursions upon them.

I. David himself was engaged with one of the giants. The Philistines began the war yet again, v. 15. The enemies of God's Israel are restless in their attempts against them. David, though old, desired not a writ of ease from the public service, but he *went down* in person to fight *against the Philistines* (*Senescit, non segnescit—He grows old, but not indolent*), a sign that he fought not for his own glory (at this age he was loaded with glory, and needed no more), but for the good of his kingdom. But in this engagement we find him, 1. In distress and danger. He thought he could bear the fatigues of war as well as he had done formerly; his will was good, and he hoped he could do as at other times. But he found himself deceived; age had cut his hair, and, after a little toil, he *waxed faint*. His body could not keep pace with his mind. The champion of the Philistines was soon aware of his advantage, perceived that David's strength failed him, and, being himself strong and well-armed, *he thought to slay David*; but God was not in his thoughts, and therefore in that very day they all perished. The enemies of God's people are often very strong, very subtle, and very sure of success, like Isbi-benob, but there is no strength, nor counsel, nor confidence against the Lord. 2. Wonderfully rescued by Abishai, who came seasonably in to his relief, v. 17. Herein we must own Abishai's courage and fidelity to his prince (to save whose life he bravely ventured his own), but much more the good providence of God, which brought him in to David's succour in the moment of his extremity. Such a cause and such a champion, though distressed, shall not be deserted. When *Abishai succoured him*, gave him a cordial, it may be, to relieve his fainting spirits, or appeared as his second, *he* (namely, David, so I understand it) *smote the Philistine and killed him*; for it is said (v. 22) that David had himself a hand in slaying the giants. David fainted, but he did not flee; though his strength failed him, he bravely kept his ground, and then God sent him this help in the time of need, which, though brought him by his junior

and inferior, he thankfully accepted, and, with a little recruiting, gained his point, and came off a conqueror. Christ, in his agonies, was strengthened by an angel. In spiritual conflicts, even strong saints sometimes wax faint; then Satan attacks them furiously; but those that stand their ground and resist him shall be relieved, and made more than conquerors. 3. David's servants hereupon resolved that he should never expose himself thus any more. They had easily persuaded him not to fight against Absalom (ch. 18:3), but against the Philistines he would go, till, having had this narrow escape, it was resolved in council, and confirmed with an oath, that *the light of Israel* (its guide and glory, so David was) should never be put again into such hazard of being blown out. The lives of those who are as valuable to their country as David was ought to be preserved with a double care, both by themselves and others.

II. The rest of the giants fell by the hand of David's servants. 1. Saph was slain by Sibbechai, one of David's worthies, v. 18; 1 Chr. 11:29. 2. Another, who was brother to Goliath, was slain by Elhanan, who is mentioned ch. 23:24. 3. Another, who was of very unusual bulk, who had more fingers and toes than other people (v. 20), and such an unparalleled insolence that, though he had seen the fall of other giants, yet he defied Israel, was slain by *Jonathan the son of Shimea*. Shimea had one son named *Jonadab* (2 Sa. 13:3), whom I should have taken for the same with this Jonathan, but that the former was noted for subtlety, the latter for bravery. These giants were probably the remains of the sons of Anak, who, though long feared, fell at last. Now observe, (1.) It is folly for the strong man to *glory in his strength*. David's servants were no bigger nor stronger than other men; yet thus, by divine assistance, they mastered one giant after another. God chooses by the weak things to confound the mighty. (2.) It is common for those to go down slain to the pit who have been *the terror of the mighty in the land of the living*, Eze. 32:27. (3.) The most powerful enemies are often reserved for the last conflict. David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and here concludes it with the conquest of four. Death is a Christian's last enemy, and a son of Anak; but, through him that triumphed for us, we hope to be more than conquerors at last, even over that enemy.

## Chapter 22

This chapter is a psalm, a psalm of praise; we find it afterwards inserted among David's psalms (Ps. 18) with some little variation. We have it here as it was first composed for his own closed and his own harp; but there we have it as it was afterwards delivered to the chief musician for the service of the church, a second edition with some amendments; for, though it was calculated primarily for David's case, yet it might indifferently serve the devotion of others, in giving thanks for their deliverances; or it was intended that his people should thus join with him in his thanksgivings, because, being a public person, his deliverances were to be accounted public blessings and called for public acknowledgments. The inspired historian, having largely related David's deliverances in this and the foregoing book, and one particularly in the close of the foregoing chapter, thought fit to record this sacred poem as a memorial of all that had been before related. Some think that David penned this psalm when he was old, upon a general review of the mercies of his life and the many wonderful preservations God had blessed him with, from first to last. We should in our praises, look as far back as we can, and not suffer time to wear out the sense of God's favours. Others think that he penned it when he was young, upon occasion of some of his first deliverances, and kept it by him for his use afterwards, and that, upon every new deliverance, his practice was to sing this song. But the book of Psalms shows that he varied as there was occasion, and confined not himself to one form. Here is, I. The title of the psalm (v. 1). II. The psalm itself, in which, with a very warm devotion and very great fluency and copiousness of expression, 1. He gives glory to God. 2. He takes comfort in him; and he finds matter for both, (1.) In the experiences he had of God's former favours. (2.) In the expectations he had of his further favours. These are intermixed throughout the whole psalm.

### Verse 1

Observe here, I. That it has often been the lot of God's people to have many enemies, and to be in imminent danger of falling into their hands. David was a man after God's heart, but not after men's heart: many were those that hated him, and sought his ruin; Saul is particularly named, either, 1. As distinguished from his enemies of the heathen nations. Saul hated David, but David did not hate Saul, and therefore would not reckon him among his enemies; or, rather, 2. As the chief of his enemies, who was more malicious and powerful than any of them. Let not those whom God loves marvel if the world hate them.

II. Those that trust God in the way of duty shall find him a present help to them in their greatest dangers. David did so. God delivered him out of the hand of Saul. He takes special notice of this. Remarkable preservations should be mentioned in our praises with a particular emphasis. He delivered him also *out of the hand of all his enemies*, one after another, sometimes in one way, sometimes in another; and David, from his own experience, has assured us *that, though many are the troubles of the righteous, yet the Lord delivers them out of them all*, Ps. 34:19. We shall never be delivered from all our enemies till we get to heaven; and to that heavenly kingdom God will preserve all that are his, 2 Tim. 4:18.

III. Those that have received many signal mercies from God ought to give him the glory of them. Every new mercy in our hand should put a new song into our mouth, even praises to our God. Where there is a grateful heart, out of the abundance of that the mouth will speak. David spoke, not only to himself, for his own pleasure, not merely to those about him, for their instruction,

but *to the Lord*, for his honour, *the words of this song*. Then we sing with grace when we sing to the Lord. In distress he *cried with his voice* (Ps. 142:1), therefore with his voice he gave thanks. Thanksgiving to God is the sweetest vocal music.

IV. We ought to be speedy in our thankful returns to God: *In the day that God delivered him he sang this song*. While the mercy is fresh, and our devout affections are most excited by it, let the thank-offering be brought, that it may be kindled with the fire of those affections.

### Verses 2-51

Let us observe, in this song of praise,

I. How David adores God, and gives him the glory of his infinite perfections. There is none like him, nor any to be compared with him (v. 32): *Who is God, save the Lord?* All others that are adored as deities are counterfeits and pretenders. None is to be relied on but he. *Who is a rock, save our God?* They are dead, but *the Lord liveth*, v. 47. They disappoint their worshippers when they most need them. But *as for God his way is perfect*, v. 31. Men begin in kindness, but end not-promise, but perform not; but God will finish his work, and his word is tried, and what we may trust.

II. How he triumphs in the interest he has in this God, and his relation to him, which he lays down as the foundation of all the benefits he has received from him: *He is my God*; as such he cries to him (v. 7), and cleaves to him (v. 22); "and, if *my God*, then *my rock*" (v. 2), that is, "my strength and my power (v. 33), the rock under which I take shelter (he who is to me as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land), the rock on which I build my hope," v. 3. Whatever is my strength and support, it is *the God of my rock that makes it so*; nay, he is *the God of the rock of my salvation* (v. 47): my saving strength is in him and from him. David often hid himself in a rock (1 Sa. 24:2), but God was his chief hiding-place. "He is my fortress, in which I am safe and think myself so—*my high tower*, or stronghold, in which I am out of the reach of real evils—the *tower of salvation* (v. 51), which can never be sealed nor battered, nor undermined. Salvation itself saves me. Am I in distress? he is my deliverer—struck at, shot at? he is my shield—pursued? he is my refuge—oppressed? he is my saviour, that rescues me out of the hand of those that seek my ruin. Nay, he is the *horn of my salvation*, by which I am strongly protected, and my enemies are strongly pushed." Christ is spoken of as the *horn of salvation* in the house of David, Lu. 1:69. "Am I burdened, and ready to sink? *The Lord is my stay* (v. 19), by whom I am supported. Am I in the dark, benighted, at a loss? *Thou art my lamp, O Lord!* to show me my way, and thou wilt dispel *my darkness*," v. 29. If we sincerely take the Lord for our God, all this, and much more, he will be to us, all we need and can desire.

III. What improvement he makes of his interest in God. If he be mine, 1. *In him will I trust* (v. 3), that is, "I will resign myself to his direction, and then depend upon his power, and wisdom, and goodness, to conduct me well." 2. *On him I will call* (v. 4), *for he is worthy to be praised*. What we have found in God that is worthy to be praised should engage us to pray to him and give glory to him. 3. *To him will I give thanks* (v. 50), and that publicly. When he was among the heathen he would neither be afraid nor ashamed to own his obligations to the God of Israel.

IV. The full and large account he keeps for himself, and gives to others, of the great and kind things God had done for him. This takes up most of the song. He gives God the glory both of his deliverances and of his successes, showing both the perils

he was delivered from and the power he was advanced to.

1. He magnifies the great salvations God had wrought for him. God sometimes brings his people into very great difficulties and dangers, that he may have the honour of saving them and they the comfort of being saved by him. He owns, *Thou hast saved me from violence* (v. 3), *from my enemies* (v. 4), *from my strong enemy*, meaning Saul, who, if God had not succoured him, would have been too hard for him, v. 18. Thou hast given me *the shield of thy salvation*, v. 36. To magnify the salvation, he observes,

(1.) That the danger was very great and threatening out of which he was delivered. Men *rose up against him* (v. 40, 49) that *hated him* (v. 41), *a violent man* (v. 49) namely, Saul, who was malicious in his designs against him and vigorous in his pursuit. This is expressed figuratively, v. 5, 6. He was surrounded with death on every side, threatened to be overwhelmed, and saw no way of escape. So violently did the waves of death beat upon him, so strongly did the cords and snares of death hold him, that he could not help himself, any more than a man in the grave can. The floods of Belial, the wicked one, and his wicked instruments, made him afraid; he trembled to see not only earth, but death and hell, in arms against him.

(2.) That his deliverance was an answer to prayer, v. 7. He has here left us a good example, when we are in distress, to cry unto God with importunity, as children in a fright cry to their parents; and great encouragement to do so, in that he found God ready to answer prayer out of his temple in heaven, where he is continually served and adored.

(3.) That God appeared in a singular and extraordinary manner for him and against his enemies. The expressions are borrowed from the descent of the divine Majesty upon Mount Sinai, v. 8, 9, etc. We do not find that in any of David's battles God fought for him with thunder (as in Samuel's time), or with hail (as in Joshua's time), or with the stars in their courses (as in Deborah's time); but these lofty metaphors are used, [1.] To set forth the glory of God, which was manifested in his deliverance. God's wisdom and power, his goodness and faithfulness, his justice and holiness, and his sovereign dominion over all the creatures and all the counsels of men, which appeared in favour of David, were as clear and bright a discovery of God's glory to an eye of faith as such miraculous interpositions would have been to an eye of sense. [2.] To set forth God's displeasure against his enemies, God so espoused his cause that he showed himself an enemy to all his enemies; his anger is set forth by a *smoke out of his nostrils*, and *fire out of his mouth* (v. 9), *coals kindled* (v. 13), *arrows*, v. 15. Who knows the power and terror of his wrath? [3.] To set forth the extraordinary confusion which his enemies were put into, and the consternation that seized them; as if the earth had trembled and the *foundations of the world* had been discovered, v. 8, 16. Who can stand before God when he is angry? [4.] To show how ready God was to help him: *He rode upon a cherub and did fly*, v. 11. God hastened to his succour, and came to him with seasonable relief, though he had seemed at a distance; yet he was *a God hiding himself* (Isa. 14:15), for he made *darkness his pavilion* (v. 12), for the amazement of his enemies and the protection of his own people.

(4.) That God manifested his particular favour and kindness to him in these deliverances (v. 20): *He delivered me, because he delighted in me*. The deliverance came not from common providence, but covenant-love; he was herein treated as a favourite: so he perceived by the communications of divine grace and comfort to his soul with these deliverances, and the communion he had with God in them. Herein he was a type of Christ, whom God upheld because he *delighted in him*, Isa. 42:1, 2.

2. He magnifies the great successes God had crowned him with. He had not only preserved but prospered him. He was blessed, (1.) With liberty and enlargement. He was *brought into a large place* (v. 20), where he had room to thrive, and his *steps were enlarged under him*, so that he had room to stir (v. 37), being no longer straitened and confined. (2.) With military skill, and strength, and swiftness. Though he was bred up to the crook, he was well instructed in the arts of war and qualified for the toils and perils of it. God, having called him to fight his battles, qualified him for the service. He made him very ingenious (*He teacheth my hands to war*, v. 35. And this ingenuity was as good as strength, for it follows, "so that a bow of steel is broken by my arms," not so much by main force as by dexterity), and very vigorous and valiant. (*Thou hast girded me with strength to battle*, v. 40. He gives God the glory of all his courage and ability for service), and very expeditious: *He maketh my feet swift like hinds feet* (v. 34), which is of great advantage both in charging and retreating. (3.) With victory over his enemies, not only Saul and Absalom, but the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Syrians, and other neighbouring nations, whom he subdued and made tributaries to Israel. His wonderful victories are here described, v. 38–43. They were *speedy* victories (*I turned not again till I had consumed them*, v. 38) and *complete* victories. The enemies of Israel were *wounded, destroyed, consumed, fell under his feet*, trampled upon, and disabled to rise, and their necks lay at his mercy. They cried both to earth and heaven for help, but in vain. *There was none to save*, none that durst appear for them. God *answered them*, not for they were not on his side, nor did they cry unto him till they were brought to the last extremity. Being thus abandoned, they became an easy prey to David's righteous and victorious sword, so that he *beat them as small as the dust of the earth*, which is scattered by the wind and trodden on by every foot. (4.) With advancement to honour and power. To this he was anointed before his troubles began, and at length, *post tot discrimina rerum—after all his dangers and disasters*, he gained his point. God *made his way perfect* (v. 33), gave him success in all his undertakings, *set him upon his high places* (v. 34), denoting both safety and dignity. God's gentleness, his grace and tender mercy, *made him great* (v. 36), gave him great wealth, and great authority, and a name like that of the great men of the earth. He was *kept to be the head of the heathen* (v. 44); his signal preservations evinced that he was designed and reserved for something great—to rule over all Israel, notwithstanding the *strivings of the people*, and so that those whom *he had not known should serve him*, many of the nations that lay remote. Thus he was *lifted up on high*, as high as the throne, above those that *rose up against him*, v. 49.

V. The comfortable reflections he makes upon his own integrity, which God, by those wonderful deliverances, had graciously owned and witnessed to, v. 21–25. He means especially his integrity with reference to Saul and Ishbosheth, Absalom and Sheba, and those who either opposed his coming to the crown or endeavoured to dethrone him. They falsely accused him and misrepresented him, but he had the testimony of this conscience for him that he was not an ambitious aspiring man, a false and bloody man, as they called him,—that he had never taken any indirect unlawful courses to secure or raise himself, but in his whole conduct had kept in the way of his duty,—and that in the whole course of his conversation he had, for the main, made religion his business, so that he could take God's favours to him as the rewards of his righteousness, not of debt, but of grace. God had recompensed him, though not for his righteousness, as if that had merited any thing at the hand of God, yet according to his righteousness, which he was well pleased with, and had an eye to. His conscience witnessed for him, 1. That he had

made the word of God his rule, and had kept to it, v. 23. Wherever he was, God's judgments were before him as his guide; whithersoever he went, he took his religion along with him, and though he was forced to depart from his country, and sent, as it were, to serve other gods, yet as for God's statutes, he did not depart from them, but kept the way of the Lord and walked in it. 2. That he had carefully avoided the bye-paths of sin. He had not wickedly departed from his God. He could not say but that he had taken some false steps, but he had not deserted God, nor forsaken his way. Sins of infirmity he could not acquit himself from, but the grace of God had kept him from presumptuous sins. Though he had sometimes *weakly* departed from his God. By this it appeared that he was *upright before God, or to God* (in his sight, and with an eye to him), that he *kept himself from his own iniquity*, not only from that particular sin of killing Saul when it was in the power of his hand to do it, but, in general, he was afraid of sin and watchful against it, and made conscience of what he said and did. The matter of Uriah is an exception (1 Ki. 15:5), like that in Hezekiah's character, 2 Chr. 32:31. Note, A careful abstaining from our own iniquity is one of the best evidences of our own integrity; and the testimony of our conscience for us that we have done so will be such a rejoicing as will not only lessen the griefs of an afflicted state, but increase the comforts of a prosperous state. David reflected with more comfort upon his victories over his own iniquity than upon his conquest of Goliath and all the hosts of the uncircumcised Philistines; and the witness of his own heart to his uprightness was sweeter though more silent music than theirs that sang, *David has slain his ten thousands*. If a great man be a good man, his goodness will be much more his satisfaction than his greatness. Let favour be shown to the upright and his uprightness will sweeten it, will double it.

VI. The comfortable prospects he has of God's further favour. As he looks back, so he looks forward, with pleasure, and assures himself of the kindness God has in store for all the saints, for himself, and also for his seed.

1. For all good people, v. 26–28. As God had dealt with him according to his uprightness, so he will with all others. He takes occasion here to lay down the established rules of God's procedure with the children of men:—

(1.) That he will do good to those that are upright in their hearts. As we are found towards God, he will be found towards us. [1.] God's mercy and grace will be the joy of those that are merciful and gracious. Even the merciful need mercy; and they shall obtain it. [2.] God's uprightness, his justice and faithfulness, will be the joy of those that are upright, just, and faithful, both towards God and man. [3.] God's purity and holiness will be the joy of those that are pure and holy, who therefore give thanks at the remembrance thereof. And, if any of these good people be *afflicted people, he will save* them, either out of their afflictions or by and after them. On the other hand,

(2.) That those who turn aside to crooked ways he will *lead forth with the workers of iniquity*, as he says in another psalm. *With the froward he will wrestle*; and those with whom God wrestles are sure to be foiled. *Woe unto him that strives with his Maker!* God will walk contrary to those that walk contrary to him and be displeased with those that are displeased with him. As for the haughty, his eyes are upon them, marking them out, as it were, to be brought down; for *he resists the proud*.

2. For himself. He foresaw that his conquests and kingdom would be yet further enlarged, v. 45, 46. Even the *sons of the stranger*, that would hear the report of his victories and the tokens of God's presence with him, would be possessed with a fear of him, would be forced to submit to him, though feignedly, and would be obedient to him. The successes which he had had he

looked upon as earnest of more and means of more. Who durst oppose him by whom so many had been overcome? Thus the Son of David *goes on conquering and to conquer*, Rev. 6:2. His gospel, which has been victorious, shall be so more and more.

3. For his seed: He *showeth mercy to his Messiah* (v. 51), not only to David himself, but to that seed of his for evermore. David was himself anointed of God, not a usurper, but duly called to the government and qualified for it; therefore he doubted not but God would show mercy to him, that mercy which he had promised not to take from him nor from his posterity (ch. 7:15, 16); on that promise he depends, with an eye to Christ, who alone is his *seed for evermore*, whose throne and kingdom still continue, and will to the end, whereas the seed and lineage of David are long since extinct. See Ps. 89:28, 29. Thus all his joys and all his hopes terminate, as ours should, in the great Redeemer.

## Chapter 23

The historian is now drawing towards a conclusion of David's reign, and therefore gives us an account here, I. Of some of his last words, which he spoke by inspiration, and which seem to have reference to his seed that was to be for evermore, spoken of in the close of the foregoing chapter (v. 1-7). II. Of the great men, especially the military men, that were employed under him, the first three (v. 8-17), two of the next three (v. 18-23), and then the thirty (v. 24-39).

### Verses 1-7

We have here the last will and testament of king David, or a codicil annexed to it, after he had settled the crown upon Solomon and his treasures upon the temple which was to be built. The last words of great and good men are thought worthy to be in a special manner remarked and remembered. David would have those taken notice of, and added either to his Psalms (as they are here to that in the foregoing chapter) or to the chronicles of his reign. Those words especially in v. 5, though recorded before, we may suppose he often repeated for his own consolation, even to his last breath, and therefore they are called his *last words*. When we find death approaching we should endeavor both to honour God and to edify those about us with our last words. Let those that have had long experience of God's goodness and the pleasantness of wisdom, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of that experience and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise. We have upon record the last words of Jacob and Moses, and here of David, designed, as those, for a legacy to those that were left behind. We are here told,

I. Whose last will and testament this is. This is related either, or is usual, by the testator himself, or rather, by the historian, v.

1. He is described, 1. By the meanness of his original: He was *the son of Jesse*. It is good for those who are advanced to be corner-stones and top-stones to be reminded, and often to remind themselves, of *the rock out of which they were hewn*. 2. The height of his elevation: He was *raised up on high*, as one favoured of God, and designed for something great, raised up as a prince, to sit higher than his neighbours, and as a prophet, to see further; for, (1.) He was *the anointed of the God of Jacob*, and so was serviceable to the people of God in their civil interests, the protection of their country and the administration of justice among them. (2.) He was *the sweet psalmist of Israel*, and so was serviceable to them in their religious exercises. he penned the psalms, set the tunes, appointed both the singers and the instruments of music, by which the devotions of good people were much excited and enlarged. Note, The singing of psalms is a sweet ordinance, very agreeable to those that delight in praising God. It is reckoned among the honours to which David was raised up that he was a psalmist: in that he was as truly great as in his being *the anointed of the God of Jacob*. Note, It is true preferment to be serviceable to the church in acts of devotion and instrumental to promote the blessed work of prayer and praise. Observe, Was David a prince? He was so for Jacob. Was he a psalmist? He was so for Israel. Note, the dispensation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, and therefore, *as every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same*.

II. What the purport of it is. It is an account of his communion with God. Observe,

1. What God said to him both for his direction and for his encouragement as a king, and to be in like manner, of use to his successors. Pious persons take a pleasure in calling to mind what they have heard from God, in recollecting his word, and

revolving it in their minds. Thus what God spoke once David heard twice, yea often. See here,

(1.) Who spoke: *The Spirit of the Lord, the God of Israel, and the Rock of Israel*, which some think is an intimation of the Trinity of persons in the Godhead—the Father *the God of Israel*, the Son *the Rock of Israel*, and *the Spirit* proceeding from the Father and the Son, *who spoke by the prophets*, and particularly by David, and whose word was not only in his heart, but in his tongue for the benefit of others. David here avows his divine inspiration, that in his psalms, and in this composition, *The Spirit of God spoke by him*. He, and other holy men, spoke and *wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*. This puts an honour upon the book of Psalms, and recommends them to our use in our devotions, that they are words which the Holy Ghost teaches.

(2.) What was spoken. Here seems to be a distinction made between what the Spirit of God spoke *by* David, which includes all his psalms, and what the Rock of Israel spoke *to* David, which concerned himself and his family. Let ministers observe that those by whom God speaks to others are concerned to hear and heed what he speaks to themselves. Those whose office it is to teach others their duty must be sure to learn and do their own. Now that which is here said (v. 3, 4) may be considered, [1.] With application to David, and his royal family. And so here is, *First*, The duty of magistrates enjoined them. When a king was spoken to from God he was not to be complimented with the height of his dignity and the extent of his power, but to be told his duty. "Must is for the king," we say. Here is a *must* for the king: *He must be just, ruling in the fear of God*; and so must all inferior magistrates in their places. Let rulers remember that they rule over men—not over beasts which they may enslave and abuse at pleasure, but over reasonable creatures and of the same rank with themselves. They rule over men that have their follies and infirmities, and therefore must be borne with. They rule over men, but under God, and for him; and therefore, 1. They must be just, both to those over whom they rule, in allowing them their rights and properties, and between those over whom they rule, using their power to right the injured against the injurious; see Deu. 1:16, 17. It is not enough that they do no wrong, but they must not suffer wrong to be done. 2. They must rule in the fear of God, that is, they must themselves be possessed with a fear of God, by which they will be effectually restrained from all acts of injustice and oppression. Nehemiah was so (Neh. 5:15, *So did not I, because of the fear of God*), and Joseph, Gen. 43:18. They must also endeavor to promote the fear of God (that is, the practice of religion) among those over whom they rule. The magistrate is to be the keeper of both tables, and to protect both godliness and honesty. *Secondly*, Prosperity promised them if they do, this duty. *He that rules in the fear of God shall be as the light of the morning*, v. 4. Light is sweet and pleasant, and he that does his duty shall have the comfort of it; his rejoicing will be the testimony of his conscience. Light is bright, and a good prince is illustrious; his justice and piety will be his honour. Light is a blessing, nor are there any greater and more extensive blessings to the public than princes that *rule in the fear of God*. As *the light of the morning*, which is most welcome after the darkness of the night (so was David's government after Saul's, Ps. 75:3), which is increasing, shines more and more to the perfect day, such is the growing lustre of a good government. It is likewise compared to the tender grass, which the earth produces for the service of man; it brings with it a harvest of blessings. See Ps. 72:6, 16, which were also some of the last words of David, and seem to refer to those recorded here. [2.] With application to Christ, the Son of David, and then it must all be taken as a prophecy, and the

original will bear it: *There shall be a rule among men, or over men, that shall be just, and shall rule in the fear of God, that is, shall order the affairs of religion and divine worship according to his Father's will; and he shall be as the light to the morning, etc., for he is the light of the world, and as the tender grass, for he is the branch of the Lord, and the fruit of the earth, Isa. 11:1-5; 32:1, 2; Ps. 72:2.* God, by the Spirit, gave David the foresight of this, to comfort him under the many calamities of his family and the melancholy prospects he had of the degeneracy of his seed.

2. What comfortable use he made of this which God spoke to him, and what were his devout meditations on it, by way of reply, v. 5. It is not unlike his meditation on occasion of such a message, 2 Sa. 7:18, etc. That which goes before the Rock of Israel spoke *to* him; this the Spirit of God spoke *by* him, and it is a most excellent confession of his faith and hope in the everlasting covenant. Here is,

(1.) Trouble supposed: *Although my house be not so with God, and although he make it not to grow.* David's family was not so with God as is described (v. 3, 4), and as he could wish, not so good, not so happy; it had not been so while he lived; he foresaw it would not be so when he was gone, that his house would be neither so pious nor so prosperous as one might have expected the offspring of such a father to be. [1.] *Not so with God.* Note, We and ours are that really which we are with God. This was what David's heart was upon concerning his children, that they might be right with God, faithful to him and zealous for him. But the children of godly parents are often neither so holy nor so happy as might be expected. We must be made to know that it is corruption, not grace, that runs in the blood, that the race is not to the swift, but that God gives his Spirit as a free-agent. [2.] *Not made to grow,* in number, in power; it is God that makes families to grow or not to grow, Ps. 107:41. Good men have often the melancholy prospect of a declining family. David's house was typical of the church of Christ, which is his house, Heb. 3:3. Suppose this be not so with God as we could wish, suppose it be diminished, distressed, disgraced, and weakened, by errors and corruptions, yea, almost extinct, yet God has made a covenant with the church's head, the Son of David, that he will preserve to him a seed, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his house. This our Saviour comforted himself with in his sufferings, that the covenant with him stood firm, Isa. 53:10–12. (2.) Comfort ensured: *Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant.* Whatever trouble a child of God may have the prospect of, still he has some comfort or other to balance it with (2 Co. 4:8, 9), and there is none like this of the Psalmist, which may be understood, [1.] Of the covenant of royalty (in the type) which God made with David and his seed, touching the kingdom, Ps. 132:11, 12. But, [2.] It must look further, to the covenant of grace made with all believers, that God will be, in Christ, to them a God, which was signified by the covenant of royalty, and therefore the promises of the covenant are called *the sure mercies of David*, Isa. 55:3. It is this only that is the everlasting covenant, and it cannot be imagined that David, who, in so many of his psalms, speaks so clearly concerning Christ and the grace of the gospel, should forget it in his last words. God has made a covenant of grace with us in Jesus Christ, and we are here told, *First*, That it is an *everlasting* covenant, from everlasting in the contrivance and counsel of it, and to everlasting in the continuance and consequences of it. *Secondly*, That it is *ordered*, well ordered in all things, admirably well, to advance the glory of God and the honour of the Mediator, together with the holiness and comfort of believers. It is herein well ordered, that whatever is required in the covenant is promised, and that every transgression in the

covenant does not throw us out of covenant, and that it puts our salvation, not in our own keeping, but in the keeping of a Mediator. *Thirdly*, That it is *sure*, and *therefore* sure because well ordered; the general offer of it is sure; the promised mercies are sure on the performance of the conditions. The particular application of it to true believers is sure; it is sure to all the seed. *Fourthly*, That it is *all our salvation*. Nothing but this will save us, and this is sufficient: it is this only upon which our salvation depends. *Fifthly*, That therefore it must be *all our desire*. Let me have an interest in this covenant and the promises of it, and I have enough, I desire no more.

3. Here is the doom of the sons of Belial read, v. 6, 7. (1.) They shall be thrust away as thorns—rejected, abandoned. They are like thorns, not to be touched with hands, so passionate and furious that they cannot be managed or dealt with by a wise and faithful reproof, but must be restrained by law and the sword of justice (Ps. 32:9); and therefore, like thorns, (2.) They shall, at length, be utterly burnt with fire in the same place, Heb. 6:8. Now this is intended, [1.] As a direction to magistrates to use their power for the punishing and suppressing of wickedness. Let them *thrust away the sons of Belial*; see Ps. 101:8. Or, [2.] As a caution to magistrates, and particularly to David's sons and successors, to see that they be not themselves sons of Belial (as too many of them were), for then neither the dignity of their place nor their relation to David would secure them from being thrust away by the righteous judgments of God. Though men could not deal with them, God would. Or, [3.] As a prediction of the ruin of all the implacable enemies of Christ's kingdom. There are enemies without, that openly oppose it and fight against it, and enemies within, that secretly betray it and are false to it; both are sons of Belial, children of the wicked one, of the serpent's seed; both are as thorns, grievous and vexatious: but both shall be so thrust away as that Christ will set up his kingdom in despite of their enmity, will *go through them* (Isa. 27:4), and will, in due time, bless his church with such peace that there shall be *no pricking brier nor grieving thorn*. And those that will not repent, to give glory to God, shall, in the judgment-day (to which the Chaldee paraphrast refers this), be burnt with unquenchable fire. See Lu. 19:27.

### **Verses 8-39**

I. The catalogue which the historian has here left upon record of the great soldiers that were in David's time is intended, 1. For the honour of David, who trained them up in the arts of exercises of war, and set them an example of conduct and courage. It is the reputation as well as the advantage of a prince to be attended and served by such brave men as are here described. 2. For the honour of those worthies themselves, who were instrumental to bring David to the crown, settle and protect him in the throne, and enlarge his conquests. Note, Those that in public stations venture themselves, and lay out themselves, to serve the interests of their country, are worthy of double honour, both to be respected by those of their own age and to be remembered by posterity. 3. To excite those that come after to a generous emulation. 4. To show how much religion contributes to the inspiring of men with true courage. David, both by his psalms and by his offerings for the service of the temple, greatly promoted piety among the grandees of the kingdom (1 Chr. 29:6), and, when they became famous for piety, they became famous for bravery.

II. Now these mighty men are here divided into three ranks:—

1. The first three, who had done the greatest exploits and thereby gained the greatest reputation—Adino (v. 8), Eleazar (v. 9,

10), and Shammah, v. 11, 12. I do not remember that we read of any of these, or of their actions, any where in all the story of David but here and in the parallel place, 1 Chr. 11. Many great and remarkable events are passed by in the annals, which relate rather the blemishes than the glories of David's reign, especially after his sin in the matter Uriah; so that we may conclude his reign to have been really more illustrious than it has appeared to us while reading the records of it. The exploits of this brave triumvirate are here recorded. They signalized themselves in the wars of Israel against their enemies, especially the Philistines. (1.) Adino slew 800 at once with his spear. (2.) Eleazar defied the Philistines, as they by Goliath, had defied Israel, but with better success and greater bravery; for when the men of Israel had gone away, he not only kept his ground, but *arose, and smote the Philistines*, on whom God struck a terror equal to the courage with which this great hero was inspired. His hand was weary, and yet it clave to his sword; as long as he had any strength remaining he held his weapon and followed his blow. Thus, in the service of God, we should keep up the willingness and resolution of the spirit, notwithstanding the weakness and weariness of the flesh—faint, yet pursuing (Jdg. 8:4), the hand weary, yet not quitting the sword. Now that Eleazar had beaten the enemy, the men of Israel, who had gone away from the battle (v. 9), returned to spoil, v. 10. It is common for those who quit the field, when any thing is to be done to hasten to it when any thing is to be gotten. (3.) Shammah met with a party of the enemy, that were foraging, and routed them, v. 11, 12. But observe, both concerning this exploit and the former, it is here said, *The Lord wrought a great victory*. Note, How great soever the bravery of the instruments is, the praise of the achievement must be given to God. These fought the battles, but God wrought the victory. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength, nor in any of his military operations, but *let him that glories glory in the Lord*.

2. The next three were distinguished from, and dignified above, the thirty, but attained not to the first three, v. 23. All great men are not of the same size. Many a bright and benign star there is which is not of the first magnitude, and many a good ship not of the first rate. Of this second triumvirate two only are named, Abishai and Benaiah, whom we have often met with in the story of David, and who seem to have been not inferior in serviceableness, though they were in dignity, to the first three. Here is,

(1.) A brave action of these three in conjunction. They attended David in his troubles, when he absconded, in the cave of Adullam (v. 13), suffered with him, and therefore were afterwards preferred by him. When David and his brave men who attended him, who had acted so vigorously against the Philistines, were, by the iniquity of the times, in Saul's reign, driven to shelter themselves from his rage in caves and strong holds, no marvel that the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim, and put a garrison even in Bethlehem itself, v. 13, 14. If the church's guides are so misled as to persecute some of her best friends and champions, the common enemy will, no doubt, get advantage by it. If David had had his liberty, Bethlehem would not have been now in the Philistines' hands. But, being so, we are here told, [1.] How earnestly David longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem. Some make it a public-spirited wish, and that he meant, "O that we could drive the garrison of the Philistines out of Bethlehem, and make that beloved city of mine our own again!" the well being put for the city, as the river often signifies the country it passes through. But if he meant so, those about him did not understand him; therefore it seems rather to be an instance of his weakness. It was harvest-time; the weather was hot; he was thirsty; perhaps good water was

scarce, and therefore he earnestly wished, "O that I could but have one draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" With the water of that well he had often refreshed himself when he was a youth, and nothing now will serve him but that, though it is almost impossible to come at it. He strangely indulged a humour which he could give no reason for. Other water might quench his thirst as well, but he had a fancy for that above any. It is folly to entertain such fancies and greater folly to insist upon the gratification of them. We ought to check our appetites when they go out inordinately towards those things that really are more pleasant and grateful than other things (*Be not desirous of dainties*), much more when they are thus set upon such things as only please a humour. [2.] How bravely his three mighty men, Abishai, Benaiah, and another not named, ventured through the camp of the Philistines, upon the very mouth of danger, and fetched water from the well of Bethlehem, without David's knowledge, v. 16. When he wished for it he was far from desiring that any of his men should venture their lives for it; but those three did, to show, *First*, How much they valued their prince, and with what pleasure they could run the greatest hardships in his service. David, though anointed king, was as yet an exile, a poor prince that had no external advantages to recommend him to the affection and esteem of his attendants, nor was he in any capacity to prefer or reward them; yet those three were thus zealous for his satisfaction, firmly believing the time of recompence would come. Let us be willing to venture in the cause of Christ, even when it is a suffering cause, as those who are assured that it will prevail and that we shall not lose by it at last. Were they so forward to expose themselves upon the least hint of their prince's mind and so ambitious to please him? And shall not we covet to approve ourselves to our Lord Jesus by a ready compliance with every intimation of his will given us by his word, Spirit and providence? *Secondly*, How little they feared the Philistines. They were glad of an occasion to defy them. Whether they broke through the host clandestinely, and with such art that the Philistines did not discover them, or openly, and with such terror in their looks that the Philistines durst not oppose them, is not certain; it should seem, they forced their way, sword in hand. But see, [3.] How self-denyingly David, when he had this far-fetched dear-bought water, *poured it out before the Lord*, v. 17. *First*, Thus he would show the tender regard he had to the lives of his soldiers, and how far he was from being prodigal of their blood, Ps. 72:14. In God's sight the death of his saints is precious. *Secondly*, Thus he would testify his sorrow for speaking that foolish word which occasioned those men to put their lives in their hands. Great men should take heed what they say, lest any bad use be made of it by those about them. *Thirdly*, Thus he would prevent the like rashness in any of his men for the future. *Fourthly*, Thus he would cross his own foolish fancy, and punish himself for entertaining and indulging it, and show that he had sober thoughts to correct his rash ones, and knew how to deny himself even in that which he was most fond of. Such generous mortifications become the wise, the great, and the good. *Fifthly*, Thus he would honour God and give glory to him. The water purchased at this rate he thought too precious for his own drinking and fit only to be poured out to God as a drink-offering. If it was the blood of these men, it was God's due, for the blood was always his. *Sixthly*, Bishop Patrick speaks of some who think that David hereby showed that it was not material water he longed for, but the Messiah, who had the water of life, who, he knew, should be born at Bethlehem, which the Philistines therefore should not be able to destroy. *Seventhly*, Did David look upon that water as very precious which was got at the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed his blood? Let us not undervalue the

blood of the covenant, as those do that undervalue the blessings of the covenant.

(2.) The brave actions of two of them on other occasions. Abishai slew 300 men at once, v. 18, 19. Benaiah did many great things. [1.] He slew two Moabites that were lion-like men, so bold and strong, so fierce and furious. [2.] He slew an Egyptian, on what occasion it is not said; he was well armed but Benaiah attacked him with no other weapon than a walking staff, dexterously wrested his spear out of his hand, and slew him with it, v. 21. For these and similar exploits David preferred him to be captain of the life-guard or standing forces, v. 23.

3. Inferior to the second three, but of great note, were the thirty-one here mentioned by name, v. 24, etc. Asahel is the first, who was slain by Abner in the beginning of David's reign, but lost not his place in this catalogue. Elhanan is the next, brother to Eleazar, one of the first three, v. 9. The surnames here given them are taken, as it should seem, from the places of their birth or habitation, as many surnames with us originally were. From all parts of the nation, the most wise and valiant were picked up to serve the king. Several of those who are named we find captains of the twelve courses which David appointed, one for each month in the year, 1 Chr. 27. Those that did worthily were preferred according to their merits. One of them was the son of Ahithophel (v. 34), the son famous in the camp as the father at the council-board. But to find Uriah the Hittite bringing up the rear of these worthies, as it revives the remembrance of David's sin, so it aggravates it, that a man who deserved so well of his king and country should be so ill treated. Joab is not mentioned among all these, either, (1.) to be mentioned; the first, of the first three sat chief among the captains, but Joab was over them as general. Or, (2.) Because he was so bad that he did not deserve to be mentioned; for though he was confessedly a great soldier, and one that had so much religion in him as to dedicate of his spoils to the house of God (1 Chr. 26:28), yet he lost as much honour by slaying two of David's friends as ever he got by slaying his enemies.

Christ, the Son of David, has his worthies too, who like David's, are influenced by his example, fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom, and in his strength are more than conquerors. Christ's apostles were his immediate attendants, did and suffered great things for him, and at length came to reign with him. They are mentioned with honour in the New Testament, as these in the Old, especially, Rev. 21:14. Nay, all the good soldiers of Jesus Christ have their names better preserved than even these worthies have; for they are written in heaven. This honour have all his saints.

## Chapter 24

The last words of David, which we read in the chapter before, were admirably good, but in this chapter we read of some of his last works, which were none of the best; yet he repented, and did his first works again, and so he finished well. We have here, I. His sin, which was numbering the people in the pride of his heart (v. 1-9). II. His conviction of the sin, and repentance for it (v. 10). III. The judgment inflicted upon him for it (v. 11–15). IV. The staying of the judgment (v. 16, 17). V. The erecting of an altar in token of God's reconciliation to him and his people (v. 18–25).

### Verses 1-9

Here we have,

I. The orders which David gave to Joab to number the people of Israel and Judah, v. 1, 2. Two things here seem strange:-1. The sinfulness of this. What harm was there in it? Did not Moses twice number the people without any crime? Does not political arithmetic come in among the other policies of a prince? Should not the shepherd know the number of his sheep? Does not the Son of David know all his own by name? Might not he make good use of this calculation? What evil has he done, if he do this? *Answer*, It is certain that it was a sin, and a great sin; but where the evil of it lay is not so certain. (1.) Some think the fault was that he numbered those that were under twenty years old if they were but of stature and strength able to bear arms, and that this was the reason why this account was not enrolled, because it was illegal, 1 Chr. 27:23, 24. (2.) Others think the fault was that he did not require the half-shekel, which was to be paid for the service of the sanctuary whenever the people were numbered, as a *ransom for their souls*, Ex. 30:12. (3.) Others think that he did it with a design to impose a tribute upon them for himself, to be put into his treasury, and this by way of poll, so that when he knew their numbers he could tell what it would amount to. But nothing of this appears, nor was David ever a raiser of taxes. (4.) This was the fault, that he had no orders from God to do it, nor was there any occasion for the doing of it. It was a needless trouble both to himself and to his people. (5.) Some think that it was an affront to the ancient promise which God made to Abraham, that his seed should be innumerable as the dust of the earth; it savoured of distrust of that promise, or a design to show that it was not fulfilled in the letter of it. He would number those of whom God had said that they could not be numbered. Those know not what they do that go about to disprove the word of God. (6.) That which was the worst thing in numbering the people was that David did it in the pride of his heart, which was Hezekiah's sin in showing his treasures to the ambassadors. [1.] It was a proud conceit of his own greatness in having the command of so numerous a people, as if their increase, which was to be ascribed purely to the blessing of God, had been owing to any conduct of his own. [2.] It was a proud confidence in his own strength. By publishing among the nations the number of his people, he thought to appear the more formidable, and doubted not that, if he should have any war, he should overpower his enemies with the multitude of his forces, trusting in God only. God judges not of sin as we do. What appears to us harmless, or at least but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who sees men's principles, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth.

2. The spring from which it is here said to arise is yet more strange, v. 1. It is not strange that *the anger of the Lord should be*

*kindled against Israel.* There was cause enough for it. They were unthankful for the blessings of David's government, and strangely drawn in to take part with Absalom first and afterwards with Sheba. We have reason to think that their peace and plenty made them secure and sensual, and that God was therefore displeased with them. But that, in this displeasure, he should move David to number the people is very strange. We are sure that God is not the author of sin; he tempts no man: we are told (1 Chr. 21:1) that *Satan provoked David to number Israel.* Satan, as an enemy, suggested it for a sin, as he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. God, as righteous Judge, permitted it, with a design, from this sin of David, to take an occasion to punish Israel for other sins, for which he might justly have punished them without this. But, as before he brought a famine upon them for the sin of Saul, so now a pestilence for the sin of David, that princes may from these instances learn, when the judgments of God are abroad, to suspect that their sins are the ground of the controversy, and may therefore repent and reform themselves, which should have a great influence upon national repentance and reformation, and that people may learn to pray for those in authority, that God would keep them from sin, because, if they sin, the kingdom smarts.

II. The opposition which Joab made to these orders. Even he was aware of David's folly and vain-glory in this design. He observed that David gave no reason for it, only, *Number the people, that I may know the number of the people;* and therefore he endeavored to divert his pride, and in a much more respectful manner than he had before endeavoured to divert his passion upon the death of Absalom; then he spoke rudely and insolently (ch. 19:5-7), but now as became him: *Now the Lord thy God add unto the people a hundred fold,* v. 3. There was no occasion to tax them, nor to enlist them, nor to make any distribution of them. They were all easy and happy; and Joab wished both that their number might increase and that the king, though old, might live to see their increase, and have the satisfaction of it. "*But why doth my lord the king delight in this thing? What need is there of doing it?" Pauperis est numerare pecus—Leave it to the poor to count their flocks.* Especially why should David, who speaks so much of delighting in God and the exercises of devotion, and who, being old, one would think, should have put away childish things, take a pleasure (so he calls it modestly, but he means taking pride) in a thing of this nature? Note, Many things, not in themselves sinful, turn into sin to us by our inordinately delighting in them. Joab was aware of David's vanity herein, but he himself was not. It would be good for us to have a friend that would faithfully admonish us when we say or do any thing proud or vain-glorious, for we often do so and are not ourselves aware of it.

III. The orders executed notwithstanding. *The king's word prevailed,* v. 4. He would have it done; Joab must not gainsay it, lest he be thought to grudge his time and pains in the king's service. It is an unhappiness to great men to have those about them that will aid them and serve them in that which is evil. Joab, according to order, applied himself with some reluctance to this displeasing task, and took the captains of the host to help him. They began in the most distant places, in the east first, on the other side Jordan (v. 5), then they went towards Dan in the north (v. 6), so to Tyre on the east, and thence to Beersheba in the south, v. 7. Above nine months were spent in taking this account, a great deal of trouble and amazement were occasioned by it in the country (v. 8), and the sum total was, at length, brought to the king at Jerusalem, v. 9. Whether the numbers answered David's expectation or no we are not told, nor whether the account fed his pride or mortified it. The people were very many, but, it may be, not so many as he thought they were. They had not increased in Canaan as they had in Egypt, nor were much

more than double to what they were when they came into Canaan under Joshua, about 400 years before; yet it is an evidence that Canaan was a very fruitful land that so many thousands were maintained within so narrow a compass.

### **Verses 10-17**

We have here David repenting of the sin and yet punished for it, God repenting of the judgment and David thereby made more penitent.

I. Here is David's penitent reflection upon and confession of his sin in numbering the people. While the thing was in doing, during all those nine months, we do not find that David was sensible of his sin, for had he been so he would have countermanded the orders he had given; but, when the account was finished and laid before him, that very night his conscience was awakened, and he felt the pain of it just then when he promised himself the pleasure of it. When he was about to feast on the satisfaction of the number of his people, it was turned into the gall of asps within him; sense of the sin cast a damp upon the joy, v. 10. 1. He was convinced of his sin: *His heart smote him* before the prophet came to him (I think it should not be read *for*, v. 11, but *and, when David was up*, so it is in the original), his conscience showed him the evil of what he had done; now that appeared sin, and exceedingly sinful, which before he saw no harm in. He reflected upon it with great regret and his heart reproached him for it. Note, It is a good thing, when a man has sinned, to have a heart within him to smite him for it; it is a good sign of a principle of grace in the heart, and a good step towards repentance and reformation. 2. He confessed it to God and begged earnestly for the forgiveness of it. (1.) He owned that he had sinned, sinned greatly, though to others it might seem no sin at all, or a very little one. True penitents, whose consciences are tender and well informed, see that evil in sin which others do not see. (2.) He owned that he had *done foolishly, very foolishly*, because he had done it in the pride of his heart; and it was folly for him to be proud of the numbers of his people, when they were God's people, not his, and, as many as they were, God could soon make them fewer. (3.) He cried to God for pardon: *I beseech thee, O Lord! take away the iniquity of thy servant. If we confess our sins*, we may pray in faith that *God will forgive them*, and take away, by pardoning mercy, that iniquity which we cast away by sincere repentance.

II. The just and necessary correction which he suffered for this sin. David had been full of tossings to and fro all night under the sense of his sin, having no rest in his bones because of it, *and he arose in the morning* expecting to hear of God's displeasure against him for what he had done, or designing to speak with Gad his seer concerning it. Gad is called his *seer* because he had him always at hand to advise with in the things of God, and made use of him as his confessor and counsellor; but God prevented him, and directed the prophet Gad what to say to him (v. 11), and,

1. Three things are taken for granted, (1.) That David must be corrected for his fault. It is too great a crime, and reflects too much dishonour upon God, to go unpunished, even in David himself. Of the seven things that God hates, pride is the first, Prov. 6:17. Note, Those who truly repent of their sins, and have them pardoned are yet often made to smart for them in this world. (2.) The punishment must answer to the sin. He was proud of the judgment he must be chastised with for this sin must be such as will make them fewer. Note, What we make the matter of our pride it is just with God to take from us, or embitter to us, and, some way or other, to make the matter of our punishment. (3.) It must be such a punishment as the people must have a

large share in, *for God's anger was kindled against Israel*, v. 1. Though it was David's sin that immediately opened the sluice, the sins of the people all contributed to the deluge.

2. As to the punishment that must be inflicted,

(1.) David is told to choose what rod he will be beaten with, v. 12, 13. His heavenly Father must correct him, but, to show that he does not do it willingly, he gives David leave to make choice whether it shall be by war, famine, or pestilence, three sore judgments, which greatly weaken and diminish a people. God, by putting him thus to his choice, designed, [1.] To humble him the more for his sin, which we would see to be exceedingly sinful when he came to consider each of these judgments as exceedingly dreadful. Or, [2.] To upbraid him with the proud conceit he had of his own sovereignty over Israel. He that is so great a prince begins to think he may have what he will. "Come then," says God, "which wilt thou have of these three things?" Compare Jer. 34:17, *I proclaim a liberty for you*, but it is such a liberty as this of David's *to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine*; and Jer. 15:2, *Such as are for death to death*. Or [3.] To give him some encouragement under the correction, letting him know that God did not cast him out of communion with himself, but that still his secret was with him, and in afflicting him he considered his frame and what he could best bear. Or [4.] That he might the more patiently bear the rod when it was a rod of his own choosing. The prophet bids him advise with himself, and then tell him what answer he should *return to him that sent him*. Note, Ministers are sent of God to us, and they must give an account of the success of their embassy. It concerns us therefore to consider what answer they shall return from us, that they may give up their account of us with joy.

(2.) He objects only against the judgments of the sword, and, for the other two, he refers the matter to God, but intimates his choice of the pestilence rather (v. 14): *I am in a great strait*; and well he might be *when fear, and the pit, and the snare, were before him*, and if he escape one, he must inevitably fall into the other, Jer. 48:43, 44. Note, Sin brings men into straits; wise and good men often distress themselves by their own folly. [1.] He begs that he may *not fall into the hand of man*. "Whatever comes, *let us not flee three months before our enemies*;" this would sully all the glory of David's triumphs and give occasion to the enemies of God and Israel to *behave themselves proudly*. See Deu. 32:26, 27. "Their tender mercies are cruel; and in three months they will do that damage to the nation which many years will not repair." But, [2.] He casts himself upon God: *Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord, for his mercies are great*. Men are *God's hand* (so they are called, Ps. 17:14, the sword of his sending), yet there are some judgments which come more immediately from his hand than others, as famine and pestilence, and David refers it to God which of these shall be the scourge, and God chooses the shortest, that he may the sooner testify his being reconciled. But some think that David, by these words, intimates his choice of the pestilence. The land had not yet recovered the famine under which it smarted three years upon the Gibeonites' account, and therefore, "Let us not be corrected with that rod, for that also will be the triumph of our neighbours," hence we read of *the reproach of famine* (Eze. 36:30); "but if Israel must be diminished, let it be by the pestilence, for that is *falling into the hands of the Lord*," who usually inflicted that judgment by the hand of his own immediate servants, the angels, as in the death of the first-born of Egypt. That is a judgment to which David himself, and his own family, lie as open as the meanest subject, but not so either to famine or sword, and therefore David, tenderly conscious of his guilt, chooses that. Sword and famine will devour one as well as another, but, it may

be thought, the destroying angel will draw his sword against those who are known to God to be most guilty. This will be of the shortest continuance, and he dreads the thought of lying long under the tokens of God's displeasure. *It is a dreadful thing*, the apostle says, *to fall into the hands of the living God* (Heb. 10:31), a fearful thing indeed for sinners that have, by their impenitency, shut themselves out from all hope of his mercy. But David, a penitent, dares cast himself into God's hand, knowing he shall find that *his mercies are great*. Good men, even when they are under God's frowns, yet will entertain no other than good thoughts of him. *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*.

(3.) A pestilence is accordingly sent (v. 15), which, for the extent of it, spread from Dan to Beersheba, from one end of the kingdom to the other, which showed it to come immediately from God's hand and not from any natural causes. David has his choice; he suffers by miracle, and not by ordinary means. For the continuance of it, it lasted from morning (this very morning on which it was put to David's choice) to the time appointed that is, to the third day (so Mr. Poole), or only to the evening of the first day, the time appointed for the evening sacrifice, so bishop Patrick and others, who reckon that the pestilence lasted but nine hours, and that, in compassion to David, God shortened the time he had first mentioned. The execution the pestilence did was very severe. *There died 70,000 men*, that were all well, and sick, and dead, in a few hours. What a great cry, may we suppose, was there now throughout all the land of Israel, as there was in Egypt when the first-born were slain! but that was at midnight, this in the daytime, Ps. 91:6. See the power of the angels, when God gives them commission, either to save or to destroy. Joab is nine months in passing with his pen, the angel but nine hours in passing with his sword, through all the coasts and corners of the land of Israel. See how easily God can bring down the proudest sinners, and how much we owe daily to the divine patience. David's adultery is punished, for the present, only with the death of one infant, his pride with the death of all those thousands, so much does God hate pride. The number slain amounted to almost half a decimation, 70,000 being about one in twenty. Now, we may suppose, David's flesh *trembled for fear of God and he was afraid of his judgments*, Ps. 119:120.

III. God's gracious relaxation of the judgment, when it began to be inflicted upon Jerusalem (v. 16): *The angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem*, as if he intended to do greater execution there than any where else, even *to destroy it*. The country had drunk of the bitter cup, but Jerusalem must drink the dregs. It should seem that was last numbered, and therefore was reserved to be last plagued; perhaps there was more wickedness, especially more pride (and that was the sin now chastised), in Jerusalem than elsewhere, therefore the hand of the destroyer is stretched out upon that; but then *the Lord repented him of the evil*, changed not his mind, but his way; and said to the destroying angel, *It is enough; stay now thy hand, and let mercy rejoice against judgment*. Jerusalem shall be spared for the ark's sake, for it is the place God hath chosen to put his name there. See here how ready God is to forgive and how little pleasure he takes in punishing; and let it encourage us to meet him by repentance in the way of his judgments. This was on Mount Moriah. Dr. Lightfoot observes that in the very place where Abraham, by a countermand from heaven, was stayed from slaying his son, this angel, by a like countermand, was stayed from destroying Jerusalem. It is for the sake of the great sacrifice that our forfeited lives are preserved from the destroying angel.

IV. David's renewed repentance for his sin upon this occasion, v. 17. He saw the angel (God opening his eyes for that purpose), saw his sword stretched out to destroy, a flaming sword, saw him ready to sheath it upon the orders given him to stay

proceedings; seeing all this, he spoke, not to the angel (he knew better than to address himself to the servant in the presence of the Master, or to give that honour to the creature which is the Creator's due), but *to the Lord, and said, Lo, I have sinned*. Note, True penitents, the more they perceive of God's sparing pardoning mercy the more humbled they are for sin and the more resolved against it. They shall be ashamed *when I am pacified towards them*, Eze. 16:63. Observe, 1. How he criminales himself, as if he could never speak ill enough of his own fault: *"I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; mine is the crime, and therefore on me be the cross. Let thy hand be against me, and my father's house. I am the sinner, let me be the sufferer;"* so willing was he to accept the punishment of his iniquity, though he was worth 10,000 of them. 2. How he intercedes for the people, whose bitter lamentations made his heart to ache, and his ears to tingle: *These sheep, what have they done? Done! Why they had done much amiss; it was their sin that provoked God to leave David to himself to do as he did; yet, as becomes a penitent, he is severe upon his own faults, while he extenuates theirs. Most people, when God's judgments are abroad, charge others with being the cause of them, and care not who falls by them, so they can escape. But David's penitent and public spirit was otherwise affected. Let this remind us of the grace of our Lord Jesus, who gave himself for our sins and was willing that God's hand should be against him, that we might escape. The shepherd was smitten that the sheep might be spared.*

### **Verses 18-25**

Here is, I. A command sent to David to erect an altar in the place where he saw the angel, v. 18. This was to intimate to David, 1. That, upon his repeated submission and humiliation, God was now thoroughly reconciled to him; *for, if the Lord had been pleased to kill him, he would not have accepted an offering*, and therefore would not have ordered him to *build an altar*. God's encouraging us to offer to him spiritual sacrifices is a comfortable evidence of his reconciling us to himself. 2. That peace is made between God and sinners by sacrifice, and not otherwise, even by Christ the great propitiation, of whom all the legal sacrifices were types. It is for his sake that the destroying angel is told to stay his hand. 3. That when God's judgments are graciously stayed we ought to acknowledge it with thankfulness to his praise. This altar was to be for thank-offerings. See Isa. 12:1.

II. The purchase which David made of the ground in order hereunto. It seems the owner was a Jebusite, Araunah by name, proselyted no doubt to the Jewish religion, though by birth a Gentile, and therefore allowed, not only to dwell among the Israelites, but to have a possession of his own in a city, Lev. 25:29, 30. The piece of ground was a threshing-floor, a mean place, *yet thus dignified*—a place of labour, *therefore thus dignified*. Now,

1. David went in person to the owner, to treat with him. See his justice, that he would not so much as use this place in the present exigence, though the proprietor was an alien, though he himself was a king, and though he had express orders from God to rear an altar there, till he had bought it and paid for it. God *hates robbery for burnt-offering*. See his humility, how far he was from taking state; though a king, he was now a penitent, and therefore, in token of his self-abasement, he neither sent for Araunah to come to him nor sent another to deal with him, but went himself (v. 19), and, though it looked like a diminution of himself, he lost no honour by it. Araunah, when he saw him, went and *bowed himself to the ground before him* v. 20. Great men will never be the less respected for their humility, but the more.

2. Araunah, when he understood his business (v. 21), generously offered him, not only the ground to build his altar on, but *oxen for sacrifices*, and other things that might be of use to him in the service (v. 22), and all this *gratis*, and a good prayer into the bargain: *The Lord thy God accept thee!* This he did, (1.) Because he had a generous spirit with a great estate. *He gave as a king* (v. 23); though an ordinary subject, he had the spirit of a prince. In the Hebrew it is, *He gave, even the king to the king*, whence it is supposed that Araunah had been king of the Jebusites in that place, or was descended from their royal family, though now a tributary to David. (2.) Because he highly esteemed David, though his conqueror, upon the score of his personal merits, and never thought he could do too much to oblige him. (3.) Because he had an affection for Israel, and earnestly desired that *the plague might be stayed*; and the honour of its being stayed at *his threshing-floor*, he would account a valuable consideration for all he now tendered to David. 3. David resolved to pay the full value of it, and did so, v. 24. Here were two generous souls well met. Araunah is very willing to give; but David is determined to buy, and for a good reason: he will not offer that to God which costs him nothing. He would not take advantage of the pious Jebusite's generosity. He thanked him, no doubt, for his kind offer, but paid him *fifty shekels of silver* for the floor and the oxen for the present service, and afterwards 600 shekels of gold for the ground adjoining, to build the temple on. Note, Those know not what religion is whose chief care it is to make it cheap and easy to themselves, and who are best pleased with that which costs them least pains or money. What have we our substance for but to honour God with it? and how can it be better bestowed?

III. The building of the altar, and the offering of the proper sacrifices upon it (v. 25), burnt-offerings to the glory of God's justice in the execution that had been done, and peace-offerings to the glory of his mercy in the seasonable staying of the process. Hereupon God showed (it is supposed by fire from heaven consuming the sacrifices) that *he was entreated for the land*, and that it was in mercy that the plague was removed and in token of God's being reconciled both to prince and people. Christ is our altar, our sacrifice; in him alone we may expect to find favour with God, to escape his wrath, and the sword, the flaming sword, of the cherubim who *keep the way of the tree of life*.