**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**2 SAMUEL-001. THE BRIGHT DAWN OF A REIGN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He said, Unto Hebron. 2. So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail, Nabal's wife, the Carmelite. 3. And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. 4. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul. 5. And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. 6. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing. 7. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them. 8. But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishb-osheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; 9. And he made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. 10. Ish-bosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. 11. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months."*

*2 Samuel 2:1-11*

The last stage of David's wanderings had brought him to Ziklag, a Philistine city. There he had been for over a year, during which he had won the regard of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. He had, at Achish's request, accompanied him with his contingent, in the invasion of Israel, which crushed Saul's house at Gilboa; but jealousy on the part of the other Philistine leaders had obliged his patron to send him back to Ziklag. He found it a heap of ashes. An Amalekite raid had carried off all the women and children, and his soldiers were on the point of mutiny. His fortunes seemed desperate, but his courage and faith were high, and he paused not a moment for useless sorrow, but swept after the robbers, swooped down on them like a bolt out of the blue, and scattered them, recovering the captives and spoil. He went back to the ruins which had been Ziklag, and three days after heard of Saul's death.

The lowest point of his fortunes suddenly turned into the highest, for now the path to the throne was open. But the tidings did not move him to joy. His first thought was not for himself, but for Saul and Jonathan, whose old love to him shone out again, glorified by their deaths. Swift vengeance from his hand struck Saul's slayer; the lovely elegy on the great king and his son eased his heart. Then he turned to front his new circumstances, and this passage shows how a God-fearing man will meet the summons to dignity which is duty. It sets forth David's conduct in three aspects-his assumption of his kingdom, his loving regard for Saul's memory, and his demeanour in the face of rebellion.

**I.** David was now about thirty years old, and had had his character tested and matured by his hard experiences. He learned in suffering what he taught in song. Exile, poverty, and danger are harsh but effectual teachers, if accepted by a devout spirit, and fronted with brave effort. The fugitive's cave was a good preparation for the king's palace. The throne to which he was called was no soft seat for repose. The Philistine invasion had torn away all the northern territory. He took the helm in a tempest. What was he to do? Ziklag was untenable; where was he to take his men? He could not stop in the Philistine territory, and he saw no way clear.

God's servants generally find that their promotion means harder duties and multiplied perplexities. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. David did what we shall do, if we are wise--he asked God to guide him. How that guidance was asked and given we are not here told; but the analogy of 1 Samuel 30:7-8, suggests that it was by the Urim and Thummim, interpreted by the high-priest. The form of inquiry seems to have been that a course of action, suggested by the inquirer, was decided for him by a Yes or a No. So that there was the exercise of common-sense and judgment in formulating the proposed course, as well as that of God's direction in determining it.

That is how we still get divine direction. Bring your own wits to bear on your action, and then do not obstinately stick to what seems right to you, but ask God to negative it if it is wrong, and to confirm you in it if it is right. If we humbly ask Him, Am I to go, or not to go? we shall not be left unanswered. We note the contrast between David's submission to God's guidance and Saul's self-willed taking his own way, in spite of Samuel. He began right, and, in the main, he continued as he began. Self-will is sin and ruin. Submission is joy, and peace, and success. God's kings are viceroys. They have to rule themselves and the world, but they have to be ruled by His will. If they faithfully continue as His servants, they are masters of all besides.

Hebron was a good capital for the new king, for it was a defensible position, in the centre of his own tribe, and sacred by association with the patriarchs. Established there, David was recognised as king by his fellow-tribesmen, and by them only. No doubt, tribal jealousy was partly the cause of this limited recognition, but probably the confusion incident to the Philistine victory contributed to it. The result was that, though David's designation by Samuel to the kingship was universally known, and his candidature had been popular, he had seven years of precarious sway over this mere fraction of the nation. We read of no impatience on his part. He let events shape themselves, or, rather, he let God shape events.

Passiveness is not always indolence. There are two ways of compassing our desires. One is that which David himself tells us is the young lions way, of struggling and fighting, and that often ends in lacking and suffering hunger; the other is that of waiting on the Lord, and that always ends in not lacking any good. If we are sure that God has promised us anything, and if He does not seem to have yet opened the way to obtaining it, our strength is to sit still. If He has given us Hebron, we can be patient till He please to give us Jerusalem.

**II.** Another side of David's character comes beautifully out in his treatment of the men of Jabesh-gilead. That town owed much to Saul (1 Samuel xi.), and its gratitude lasted, and dared much for him. It was a brave dash that they made across Jordan to carry off Saul's corpse from its ignominious exposure; for it both defied the Philistines, and might be construed as hostile to David. But his heart was too true to ancient friendship to do anything but glow with admiring sympathy at that exhibition of affectionate remembrance. Reconciling death had swept away all memories of Saul's insane jealousy, and he owned a brother in every one who showed kindness to the unfortunate king.

If the Jabesh-Gileadites are a pattern of long-memoried gratitude, David's commendation of them is a model of love which survives injuries, and of forgivingness which forgets them. It was as politic as it was generous. Nothing could have been better calculated to attach Saul's most devoted partisans to him than showing that he honoured their faithful attachment to Saul, and nothing could have more clearly defined his own position during his wanderings as being no rebel. The dictates of true policy and those of devout generosity always coincide. It is ever a blunder to be unforgiving, and mercifulness is always expedient.

But David did not hide his claim to the allegiance of these true hearts. He called on them to transfer their loyalty to himself, and he asserted, not his anointing by Samuel, but his recognition by Judah, the premier tribe, as the motive. No doubt the divine appointment is implied, as it was generally known, but Judah's action is put forward as showing the beginning of the realisation of the divine designation. The men of Jabesh needed to be valiant if they were to acknowledge him; for it was a far cry to Hebron, and the forces of the rival son of Saul were overrunning the northern districts.

We have to take our sides in the age-long and worldwide warfare between God's King and the pretenders to His throne, and it often wants much courage to do so when surrounded by antagonists. It seems a long way off to the true monarch, and Abner's army is a very solid reality, and very near. But it is safest to take the side of the distant, rightful king.

**III.** David's bearing in the face of opposition and rebellion comes out in verses 8-11. Abner, Saul's cousin, who had been in high position when the stripling from Bethlehem fought Goliath, was not capable of the self-effacement involved in acquiescing in David's accession, though he knew that the Lord had sworn to David. So he set up a King Do-nothing in the person of a weak lad, the only survivor of Saul's sons. A strange state of mind that, which struggles against a recognised divine appointment!

But is it only Abner who knew that he was trying to thwart God's will? Thousands of us are doing the same, and the attempt answers as well as it did in his case.

The puppet king is named Ishbosheth in the lesson, but 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39 show that his real name was Esh-baal. The former word means The man of shame; the latter, The man of Baal. The existence of Baal as an element in names seems to indicate the incompleteness of the emancipation from idolatry in Saul's time, and the change will then indicate the keener monotheistic conscience of later days. Another explanation is that Baal (Lord) was in these cases used as a name for Jehovah, and was changed at a later period for the purpose of avoiding what was interpreted then as a compound of the name of the Phoenician deity Baal (Driver, Notes on Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel).

Abner set up his tool in Mahanaim, sacred for its associations with Jacob, but, no doubt, recommended to him rather by its position on the east side of Jordan, safe from the attacks of the victorious Philistines. From that fastness he made raids to recover the territory which the victory at Gilboa had won for them. First Gilead, on the same side of the river as Mahanaim; then the territory of the Ashurites-- probably a scribe's error for Asherites, the most northern tribe; and then, coming southward, the great plain, with its cities, Ephraim and Benjamin,--in fact, all Israel except Judah's country was reconquered for Saul's house.

The account of the distribution of territory between the two monarchies is broken by the parenthesis in verse 10, which, both by its awkward interposition in the middle of a sentence and by its difficult chronological statements, looks like a late addition.

For seven and a half years David reigned in Hebron, but was rather shut up there than ruling thence. The most noteworthy fact is that he, soldier as he was, took no steps to put down Abner's rebellion. He defended himself when attacked, but that was all. The three figures of David, Ishbosheth, and Abner point lessons. Silent, still, trustful, and therefore patient, David shows us how faith in God can lead to possessing one's soul in patience till the vision comes. We may have to wait for it, but it will surely come, and what is time enough for God should be time enough for us. Saul's son was a poor, weak creature, who would never have thought of resisting David but for the stronger will behind him. To be weak is, in this world full of tempters, to drift into being wicked. We have to learn betimes to say No, and to stick to it. Moral weakness attracts tempters as surely as a camel fallen by the caravan track draws vultures from every corner of the sky. The fierce soldier who fought for his own hand while professing to be moved by loyalty to the dead king, may stand as a type of the self-deception with which we gloss over our ugliest selfishness with fine names, and for an instance of the madness which leads men to set themselves against God's plans, and therefore to be dashed in pieces, as some slim barrier reared across the track of a train would be. To rush against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler does no harm to the buckler, but kills the insane assailant.