

[R1996 : page 142]

DAVID, KING OF JUDAH.

– JULY 5. – 2 Sam. 2:1-11. –

Golden Text. – "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice."

– Psa. 97:1.

DAVID was a man of a high and varied order of natural ability, a combination of the rare qualities of the successful statesman, warrior, musician and poet. His disposition was, in the main, noble, generous, humble, kind, enthusiastic and heroic. He was reverential toward God, and seemed from his youth to have almost implicit faith in the promises and providences of God. Yet David was not a model saint: there were some strange inconsistencies in his character which stand out the more prominently in contrast with the beautiful and noble traits which fill us with admiration. But since these, so far as he was able to see them, were most sincerely repented of, we can appreciate the humility that led to repentance, and regard David from the same standpoint of that loving and merciful consideration from which God regards all his fallen and weak followers who struggle against inherent depravity, humbly acknowledging their shortcomings, and leaning upon his tender mercy. While in his youth, when God was about to anoint him king of Israel, it was said of David, "The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), the same in many respects might also have been said later, notwithstanding his faults, in view of his deep contrition. This [R1996 : page 143] statement, however, is not to be regarded as a testimony to the perfection of either the youth or the man, but rather to his fitness for the office to which God had appointed him; and as the office was one of great honor and trust, fitness as God's choice for the office implied a high order of character and ability, especially at the time he was chosen. So it was also in the case of Saul at the time of his anointing, of whom Samuel the prophet said, "See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people?"

The peculiar experiences of David's early life had much to do toward preparing him for his life work as king over Israel. His encounter with the lion and the bear when a shepherd boy, his later conflict with the giant Goliath, his experience at court with Saul, his acquaintance and friendship with Jonathan and others, his flight from the pursuit of Saul, all served to develop and prepare the chosen man for the office he was to fill after the death of Saul. In this school of experience he learned the valuable lessons of courage, fortitude, reliance upon God, how to act wisely under peculiar difficulties and under severe temptations and trials. He also became acquainted with the circumstances and conditions of court life; and his subsequent seven years in exile among other nations acquainted him with their characteristics, and were doubtless of service to him later in knowing how to deal with them. In his exile there gathered around him a company of discontented people, mostly victims of Saul's oppression. Among these were a number of prominent men of the nation, and these were of service to him later.

Thus God not only chose, but trained, his servant for the duties to which he had called him. And this providence in David's case reminds us of God's providences in general, how wisely he adapts means to ends and guides in all things to the accomplishment of his will. Many of the most comforting psalms of David were the results of his hard experiences in this time of his exile. In fact, the peculiar and varied experiences of the man, and the lessons derived from those experiences as expressed in his psalms, have been the comfort and blessing of God's people in all ages since. In a general way, David's experiences correspond to those of the gospel Church whom God is similarly preparing for the Kingdom of heaven. And doubtless it is for this reason that the lessons of David's experience find an echo in so many of our hearts.

The record of David's course from the time of his anointing to his establishment in the kingdom shows an implicit trust in God – that he who had called and anointed him was able also in his own good time

to bring him to the throne and to establish his kingdom. He took no measures whatever to displace Saul, nor to undermine his authority, even when Saul was pursuing him to take his life. And when Saul was unconsciously in his power, so that he could have slain him, he would not put forth his hand to touch the Lord's anointed. He was willing to wait patiently the Lord's time, knowing that what God had promised he was able also to perform; and so, even after Saul's death, he was not in haste to claim the vacated office, but he first inquired of the Lord to know if his time had come.

The Lord's time having come, David was directed to Hebron with his family and the men that were with him and their families, and there, without ostentation or any assertion of his rights, he calmly waited the further indications of providence. "And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah" – thus falling in line not only with the divine anointing, but also with their own preferences. Thus the kingdom came to David, not only by divine appointment, but also by choice of the people.

In David's course in all this and in the course of divine providence with him there is a wholesome lesson for the anointed people of God of this age – the gospel Church. Having been called and anointed of God to be kings and priests unto him, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ of his Kingdom and glory, it is our part to wait patiently the Lord's time for that exaltation; and in the meantime, like David, to patiently endure all the discipline which God in his providence sees to be necessary to fit us for the position of authority and power we are to hold in the future, and to exercise with loving consideration for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

On coming to the throne David's course was marked with the same wisdom and magnanimity that had characterized him previously. Among other wise measures the honor he paid to the memory of his deceased rival and enemy is very notable, and without a precedent on the pages of history. David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead

to express his appreciation of their kindness in rescuing the bodies of Saul and his sons from the ignominy to which the Philistines had exposed them, and giving them a decent burial. This the men of Jabesh had done in remembrance of a kind service Saul had once done for them. (1 Sam. 11:1-11.) And David said to them, "Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord show kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing."

How different is this from that evil spirit which would triumph over the death of a powerful rival and relentless enemy. Instead of doing so, David seemed to call to mind all the good traits of Saul and to lament the evil spirit that had come upon him in his later years and driven him to such a wicked course; and the memory of the love of Jonathan was ever precious to him. In this, more than in any thing else, David triumphed over his enemy.

While David was thus the acknowledged king of Judah, the other tribes of Israel, ignoring the divine anointing of David, made Ish-bosheth, the surviving son of Saul, their king. In this David set up no opposition claims, and his course with reference to the rival kingdom was merely defensive, not aggressive. However, in various battles and skirmishes his forces were victorious; and his strength and influence grew while those of his opponent declined. Would that the same spirit of forbearance and disinclination to assume authority were general among both political and religious leaders. The usual course is for leaders rather to force themselves upon the people – to seek the office, instead of allowing the office to seek the man.

The golden text – "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice" – is prophetic of that blessed time when the antitype of David's throne, the Kingdom of Jehovah's Anointed, our Lord Jesus, shall be established in all the earth. Then indeed may the earth rejoice; for that king will

reign in righteousness, and justice and judgment will be the habitation of his throne.
