

KING SAUL'S LAST BATTLE

– MAY 23. – 2 SAMUEL 2-5. –

DISTRESSED, HE ASKED AID OF THE WITCH OF EN-DOR – DECEIVED BY EVIL SPIRITS – THE BATTLE LOST – SAUL AND JONATHAN SLAIN – THE SONG OF THE BOW, OR SAUL'S DEAD MARCH – DAVID KING OF JUDAH – THEN OF ALL ISRAEL.

"Jehovah is my strength and my Shield; my heart hath trusted in Him, and I am helped." – Psalm 28:7.

TODAY'S STUDY covers an interesting period in the history of Israel and in the experiences of David, the beloved of God. Persecuted and hunted by King Saul, no place was safe for David. The Philistines, desiring him for a friend rather than a foe, gave to David and his followers the city of Ziklag. While residing there, David's conquests were over the Amalekites, and never against the Israelites. He could not willingly battle against the Lord's people, though he felt free to fight against those whom the Lord declared were to be destroyed because their wickedness was come to the full, to the limit of Divine permission.

Meantime, the end of Saul's reign was nearing. A fresh invasion of the Philistines required all the army he could muster, and then he felt very dubious respecting the results. Although as king, in harmony with the Divine regulation, he had ordered all witches, wizards, and all who claimed to communicate with the dead to leave the land of Israel, nevertheless there were some here and there remaining. In his extremity, seeing the Lord would not answer him, King Saul visited the Witch of En-dor – said by some to have been the mother of the king's chief general, Abner.

The witch, after being assured that it would not work ill for her, got into communication with the fallen angels, who she

supposed, as spiritualists still suppose, were the spirits of the dead. Doubtless she was honest, and thought it was Samuel that was called. But the Bible assures us that "the dead know not anything." Samuel was sleeping with his fathers, waiting for the resurrection morning, and could give no counsel, could know nothing about matters going on.

The evil spirits, however, in that time as well as now through mediums, personated the dead and, using their superior knowledge, answered as instead of the dead. The questions having been propounded in this case, the answer was that the king would lose the battle the next day, and that himself and his sons would be slain.

We do not know how the fallen angels know so much about the matters of our race, but we do know that it is unwise for any to have any dealings with them; for the Lord has forbidden it. Their sole object is to deceive the people; and, according to St. Paul, through dreams and revelations they have brought into the Church various doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1), which, becoming incorporated in our creeds, like the fly in the ointment, have made them to stink. – Eccl. 10:1.

Happy would it be for people if they realized what the Bible so clearly teaches; namely, that the dead are dead and can give no information of any kind, that they have neither joy nor suffering, but are simply in a state of suspended animation, awaiting the Dawn of the better Day in which Immanuel, Messiah, will bring the knowledge of the glory of God to all as the result of His Ransom-Sacrifice at Calvary. The teaching that the dead are more alive than they were when they were alive is not only senseless, but contradictory to the Lord's Word, and has become the foundation of all the various grievous errors which have distressed the reasoning faculties of Christian people. None would pray for the dead, or say masses for them for their release from Purgatory,

if they knew that their dead friends were merely sleeping until the resurrection morning. [R5674 : page 124]

But, worst of all, this theory that the dead are alive has become the foundation of serious blasphemies against God, in which all denominations are more or less joined as represented by their creeds. These blasphemies consist in declarations respecting God's character and Plan which would be a disgrace to any devil, and are far from the character and attributes of the God of all grace, the Father of all mercies, from whom cometh down every good and every perfect gift. – James 1:17.

"THE SONG OF THE BOW"

When David heard of the results of the battle, his sympathy for Saul and for Jonathan was expressed in a beautiful poem, which is remarkable for the fact that it contains not a single suggestion of how Saul had persecuted him or sought his life. It compliments Saul for what good he had accomplished. It tells of the tender love of Jonathan, surpassing that of women. This ode is recorded in 2 Samuel 1:17-27. The Dead March from Saul is an attempt on the part of the musician to put the sentiment of David's Song of the Bow for Jonathan and Saul into the music of our day; and thus it has become identified with the funeral services of the great today.

In the battle Saul's sons were killed, including Jonathan. Saul himself was wounded. Fearing that if he should fall into the hands of the Philistines alive they would torture him to death, he desired his armorbearer to slay him, and finally suicided with his own sword.

A young Amalekite, thinking to curry favor with David, and knowing something of how he had been persecuted by Saul, brought him the news of the death of Saul and gave him Saul's crown and the bracelet that was on Saul's arm, telling that he had

dispatched King Saul at the latter's request – probably, however, manufacturing this part of the story to bring honor to himself. At all events, David received the matter in a totally [R5674 : page 125] different way from what was expected, saying to him, "How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" David then commanded him to be put to death. But for Saul and Jonathan he mourned until evening.

David waited upon the Lord those many years, fully confident that in the end he should be the king of Israel, but not hastening the event in any way, simply standing ready for the responsibilities and the power of the office where the Lord should put him. What a wonderful example we have in David's course! How much Christians can learn of patient waiting for the Lord's time in all their affairs – not only waiting for the Kingdom while they pray, "Thy Kingdom come," but also waiting for the Lord's leading and providence in all their affairs, overruling them all for good! It is one of the too frequent mistakes made by Christians, that they overlook the Lord's providence and promised supervision of their interests, and attempt to do for themselves, often to their own disadvantage.

David realized that the time had probably come for himself and his companions to move from the Philistines' country, and he inquired of the Lord by the priest and the ephod. The answer was that he should go into Judea. Next he made inquiry, Into which city? and the answer was, Hebron. Thither David and his companions removed with their families; and the tribe of Judah, his own tribe, promptly recognized him as their king. It was over seven years after this, however, before he became the king of all Israel. Meantime, one of the sons of King Saul, Ishbosheth, had survived; and Abner, Saul's chief general, had him anointed king of Israel. King David of Judah made no attempt to coerce the other tribes, but continued his waiting for the Lord's due time.

Meantime, however, Abner gathered an army against David's servants, and a fierce battle ensued, in which David's forces were the victors; the others lost the fight. Finally Abner, angered with King Ishbosheth, proposed to David that he would become David's vassal, and would assist in turning the hearts of all the Israelites toward him. King David appreciated the proposition, doubtless considering it to be the Lord's will and in harmony with the Lord's promise. However, the matter did not so carry out; for Joab, David's nephew, the chief man of war, slew Abner deceitfully. Again we see David's conduct in contrast with the average sentiment of his time. Instead of rejoicing in the death of Abner, the king mourned for him, and denounced his nephew for the wrong course he had pursued. He was courageous enough in the presence of his own ablest soldier to extol the virtues of Abner as a great soldier, saying, "A mighty man has fallen in Israel."

KING OF ALL ISRAEL

But a little while after this, others, misunderstanding King David, slew King Ishbosheth and brought his head to David as an evidence of his death, expecting doubtless that they would be rewarded. On the contrary, they also were condemned. They had slain the king. They were esteemed worthy of the same punishment, and were themselves slain. Thus did the people see exemplified in David's course principles of righteousness quite uncommon in his day, and we might say, uncommon still. All these things served to endear to the people the king, who, they perceived, was not merely self-seeking, narrow, but was broad-minded and even generous toward his opponents, his enemies. He seems to have had a great appreciation of justice and also a breadth of sympathy for his enemies.

King David was thirty-seven years old when finally the eleven tribes sent a delegation to confer with him, indicating that they would appreciate having him as the king over all Israel. This

was seven years and a half after the death of King Saul, and probably about seventeen years after David had been anointed first by Samuel. Faith and patience mark every step of those years and show us King David's character as we could not otherwise have known it. Its grandeur was chiefly shown in that it manifested a devotion to God and a submission to the Divine will.

The king's acceptance as king of all the tribes of Israel marked the third time that the holy anointing oil was put upon his head.

Meantime King David had grown stronger and stronger in conquering his enemies – the enemies of the Lord – those whom God declared should be destroyed. We remind our readers afresh that the Lord declared that the iniquity of the Amorites had come to the full, and thus indicated it to be His will that they should be destroyed from the earth. Whether destroyed in battle or by pestilence or famine, mattered nothing to them, as the Divine sentence of death must be carried out.

However, all the while that God has been permitting sickness, war, famine, pestilence, death, to reign in the world. He has been preparing for human redemption, human salvation through the great Redeemer. Messiah's Kingdom is soon to take control of the earth, to cause a cessation of the reign of Sin and Death, to cause the binding of Satan and to cause the sunlight of Divine Truth to flood the earth. Then all the blind eyes will be opened and all the deaf ears will be unstopped, to know, to understand the true God, His true Message.

Meantime, those who died by Israel's sword will know nothing of the lapse of time. They will awake in the Millennial Kingdom, when all that sleep in the dust of the earth will awake. They will then be under the most favorable conditions we could ask for them – freed from the shackles of ignorance and superstition, with Messiah's Kingdom ready to help them out of

their weaknesses and degradation back to human perfection, lost in Eden, redeemed at Calvary.

