
Lesson 24: This man David

Text: Second Samuel Chapters 15-16-17-18

David was a courageous and confident man. He was never at a loss how to get out of an awkward situation, never at his wits ends. In his long and difficult career as a soldier and monarch he neither despaired nor panicked. He always coolly appraised his enemy and acted with speed and determination.

When he was a young novice at Saul's court he escaped several times his jealous father-in-law (1 Samuel, 18, 11; 19, 10-16) who tried to kill him with a spear. Saul's spear was haunting him across the land, and David's escapes became almost routine in the coming years when he had to hide from Saul. Again and again he was almost caught, but he always succeeded in slipping through the dragnet. At one time he could no longer hide in Israelite territory and he found refuge amongst his erstwhile enemies, the Philistines, by acting as a lunatic (1 Samuel 21, 11-16). On one occasion he had to face a threat of rebellion by his own troop, when the Amalekites had captured their women and children in Ziklag (1 Samuel 30). David acted promptly and turned the danger into a decisive victory over Amalek and in enhanced prestige amongst the tribe of Judah (30, 26-31).

And yet, when his son Absalom rebelled he fell into utter despair, as if all the old fire and zeal had gone out of him. David cried out: "Arise and let us flee!" (15, 14). As they were running away the people were weeping, and the king too wept as he went up the mount of olives. "Behold, my son who came forth of my body seeketh my life", he bitterly lamented (16, 11).

At first it appeared that David was not going to do anything about the revolt. It seemed that the shock had numbed him into passivity. But suddenly the undaunted warrior in him gained over the stricken father. As soon as he met Hushai the Archite he worked out a plan to

foil Absalom's plans. David needed time to organize an army and he wanted Hushai to keep Absalom stalling and delaying.

But, despite his resourcefulness in planning Absalom's defeat, he could not muster his old heroic and nonchalant fighting spirit. David was unable to forget that he was forced to fight his own son, and when Absalom was finally defeated, a brokenhearted David lamented: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" (19, 1). Whilst still fleeing from the capital he said resignedly to Zadok the priest: "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me both it and this habitation. But if He says thus: I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him to do me as seemeth good unto Him" (15, 25-26). Then there was Shimei the son of Gera, of the family of the late king Saul, who cast stones at David and cursed him. David did not allow the soldiers to kill Shimei. He meekly said: "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing of me this day" (16, 11-12).

This was the behavior of a broken-hearted man. He knew why this tragedy had come upon him; he remembered the prophet's warning after the affair with Bathsheba: "Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house... I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (12, 10-11). David resigned himself to suffer the divine punishment.

David was not a weak reed. Rather he was like a pillar of steel bending his own will before the will of God. This was truly a great tragedy.