

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Thirty-Ninth Week - Wednesday

THE RESTORATION

"So King David sent to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, saying 'Speak to the elders of Judah, saying, 'Why are you the last to bring the king back to his house, since the words of all Israel have come to the king, to his very house? You are my brethren, you are my bone and my flesh. Why then are you the last to bring back the king? And say to Amasa, "Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if you are not commander of the army before me continually in place of Joab."' . . . Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, 'Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David's men with him across the Jordan?' So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, 'Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?' And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, 'We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you'" (2 Samuel 19:11-13 , 41-43).

Absalom is dead. David is victorious. What more has the king to do but to cross the Jordan, march to Jerusalem, and take possession of his throne?

David is much to be commended for the delicacy with which he acts. Knowing that the people west of the Jordan had defected in preference for Absalom, David was reluctant to appear as one forcing himself upon them and recovering possession of his throne as a conqueror. He therefore tarried beyond the river, waiting to be invited back. There was some delay on the part of the western tribes in giving this invitation, perhaps because the king's wish and his motive in delaying to move westward were not at first understood. But once they were understood, and realizing that the option to invite him back was now in the people's hands, his delicacy was not so generally appreciated as it deserved. There was a strife of parties, and some were inclined to accept the option by declining to receive him. It appears to us not unlikely that if any acceptable candidates had appeared, the division of the realm into two, if not into three kingdoms, might then have taken place.

David's power was safe beyond the Jordan. But on the western side the seeds of disunion between the great tribe of Judah and the other tribes had already ripened, so they would have scarcely concurred in the choice of a new king unconnected with the house of David. As it

was, the strife of parties ended in the general but scarcely unanimous determination to recall him. When David became acquainted with the situation and the tribes' desire to recall him, he then found himself in a new difficulty. The decision was that of the ten tribes only, in which his own tribe of Judah had not concurred. Some may think that he might have *assumed* the fact of Judah's attachment to him. But it seems to us that the ease and rapidity with which Absalom had been hailed king at Hebron, joined by such numbers as enabled him to move at once upon Jerusalem, might well justify David in suspecting that the procrastination of the tribe of Judah arose from some disinclination to receive him.

There was great danger in adopting a course which might indicate to the other tribes that he took a separate and special interest in Judah, since it was too well remembered that Judah was his own tribe and had been for some years his separate kingdom. Nevertheless, David displayed his favoritism by sending the two high-priests there to urge them to hasten and escort him home, and not to be the last in the general movement. They did so. Though the last to call him, they were the first to escort him. And when they came to escort him home, he at once moved forward without waiting till the other and more distant tribes arrived to take part in this great public act.

The danger of this policy is apparent. The least he could have done was to have waited until the other tribes arrived to take part in the procession, aware as he must have been of the importance which all Orientals attach to such points of ceremony. But it is plain to us that David, being aware that eventually the main interest of his house lay in Judah, he was determined to reign there at all hazards, whatever became of the rest of his kingdom. The result that might be anticipated ensued.

When the other tribes came to conduct the king home, they were affronted to find that they had been anticipated and that Judah alone had assumed the right and honor of bringing the king back. There then arose a hot contention between Israel and Judah. The former contended, and with reason, that as they "had ten parts in the king" and Judah but one, the latter had taken too much authority on their own in bringing the king back. In reply to this, Judah used the argument (which was dangerous for David's house but which his own part in the matter had distinctly sanctioned) that they had a right to act as they had done because the king was peculiarly their own--"was near of kin to them."

This argument of the tribe of Judah was by no means calculated to conciliate the ten tribes; and there can be no doubt that the king himself incurred a share in Israel's displeasure for the part he had taken in this matter, for it was certainly on David's distinct invitation that the men of Judah had acted. Thus a festering wound took hold only to break out not far in the future.

Among the spectators was one Sheba, the son of Bichri, who, perceiving the disgust of the ten tribes at the arrogance of the men of Judah, thought that the contention of the other ten tribes might easily be turned into a disavowal of having any part in David. Therefore he raised the seditious cry, "We have no share in David, nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; every

man to his tents, O Israel!" In the present state of animosity, this cry acted like magic. Nearly all the men of Israel left the king and the Judahites alone escorted him from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

Here was a perilous emergency. David did not hesitate to treat this outbreak as sedition. But whom was he to employ? Considering that this recall was like the beginning of a new reign, where new officers take the place of the old, he had offered Amasa (the late commander of Absalom's forces) the position of commander-in-chief in place of Joab. This was a step which we cannot view with satisfaction. It involved the sacrifice of the long-trying devotion of Joab, who had often and lately rendered high service to the king and state. It was also a sacrifice of the allegiance of Abishai, who would not likely overlook this affront to his brother. And all for the purpose of purchasing the allegiance of one who had but yesterday been in arms against him, and who had certainly not acquired much military reputation in the campaign.

The truth no doubt is that David thought that he might free himself of the inconvenient and overpowering influence of Joab, while at the same time ridding himself of the presence of the man who had slain Absalom. He was, however, greatly mistaken in his calculation, and had much overrated his own strength. Joab was not to be disposed of so easily.

And so David made Amasa commander-in-chief, and it was to him that David committed the charge of putting down Sheba's dangerous insurrection. He was ordered to collect the forces of Judah within three days and appear with them at Jerusalem. The speedy and efficient Joab would hardly have required even three days for this service. But the three days passed and Amasa did not appear. This fact is significant.

The men of Judah did not approve of the step which the king had taken and were reluctant to follow this new leader. Amasa was thus not able to get the required force together in the time assigned. This might have convinced David that he had erred again, for accustomed as he was to the sharp, rapid, and decisive action of Joab, he could little tolerate this tardiness. But still reluctant to call Joab back into service, yet aware of the danger of delay, he commissioned Abishai to put down this dangerous conspiracy.

Abishai alone had been commissioned, but Joab went with him and doubtless became the actual commander. They had gotten no further than Gibeon, where they halted, when Amasa overtook them with the forces he had been able to get together. On his approach, Joab went to meet him. He had contrived that his sword should fall out of its sheath to the ground as he drew near. Snatching it hastily up, without pausing to sheath it in his polite zeal of attention upon Amasa, Joab took hold of Amasa's beard and gave him the kiss of affectionate respect, saying, "Are you in health, my brother?" As the words passed his lips, Joab buried the naked sword into the body of Amasa under the fifth rib.

This was almost exactly as he had done before to Abner, and from almost entirely the same motives; but it was by far the more villainous act of the two. In Abner's case Joab had at least

the excuse of vengeance for a brother's blood as well as a real or pretended belief that Abner designed to betray David. But here there was nothing more than a naked desire to fling a formidable rival from his path. One does not know whether to be more astonished at the outright atrocity or the bold hardihood of the deed, for it was no less than the murder of a general at the head of his troops!

Joab, nevertheless, knew the power he held over the troops. One near him cried, "Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David--follow Joab!" Such was the power of his name and the astonishing influence he had acquired over the troops that the men of Amasa forthwith joined the others in following him in pursuit of Sheba. The advantage of this unexpected promptitude appears in the fact that the rebel leader, being allowed no time to gather strength, shut himself up in the strong town of Abel Beth-maachah. Joab arrived and began building a siege mound, but a wise woman interceded for the city. Joab assured her that he was seeking only Sheba, who had raised his hand against the king. "Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city." She went to all the people, "and they cut off the head of Sheba and threw it out to Joab. Then he blew a trumpet, and they withdrew from the city, every man to his tent."

Thus ended this dangerous political upheaval; and although the result was the establishment of David's power over all Israel, some damage had been sustained by all parties concerned. First, the king himself had committed some serious political indiscretions, tending to establish ill-will between Israel and Judah. Second, the high-handed manner in which Joab had resumed his command had convinced David that Joab could not be displaced, and this must materially have deepened his own settled hatred of him to whom he was now obliged to entrust the military power of the state. Third, David's horror at the murder of Amasa remained undiminished, not only by his inability to call the assassin to account, but by the consciousness that it was his own injudicious proceedings which had provided the catalyst for this frightful crime.

In going through these sad passages, the question continually recurs, How is it we no more hear of David asking counsel of the Lord? The time was when the sacred oracle was consulted on matters of comparatively small importance; but since he became king of all Israel we have had only one instance of his resort to this sure guidance, and that was at the beginning of his reign. We shall not be far wrong in ascribing to this neglect the serious mistakes into which he appears to have fallen.