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## The Way Of Recovery

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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"David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave of Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men" (1 Sam. 22:1,2; ASV).

"Now these are they that came to David to Ziklag, while he yet kept himself close because of Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men, his helpers in war" (1 Chron. 12:1).

"And these are the numbers of the heads of them that were armed for war, who came to David to Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the Word of the Lord" (1 Chron. 12:23).

### **Spiritual Weakness Must Be Made Manifest**

This was a period during which Israel was particularly menaced by the Philistines. These latter were always the shadow over Israel's life, and the instrument by means of which Israel's weakness and helplessness were brought out and made manifest. The Lord usually has some particular thing by which a state or condition is revealed. It is not always recognizable as a state in itself; there has to be something that brings it out. Because of this or that, the real condition of things is manifested as it would not be apart from that instrument that the Lord uses for its uncovering. It becomes positive, rather than abstract, by reason of certain things. The Lord will, for instance, raise up a situation, an

experience, a difficulty, a concrete challenge, and then the inability to meet it and deal with it shows that that particular thing - which in other circumstances, had things been different, would have counted for nothing and would have at once been conquered and subdued - has now become the Lord's means of showing how bad the spiritual state is. The Lord has a way of doing that. When Israel came into right position and condition under David the Philistines did not count for anything, they lost all significance. But here they are very significant; they occupy a very dominant place; and that is only because of the spiritual state of the Lord's people. So spiritual weakness is here made manifest by means of the Philistines.

We have to ask, Why was it that Israel was helpless before the Philistines? Why was it that their deplorable condition of weakness was manifested in the presence of the Philistines, who otherwise would not have signified anything? When you look closely for your answer, you find that it was because deep down there was so much in common between Israel and the Philistines. The Philistines are known to us by a certain epithet - the 'uncircumcised Philistines'. David used that phrase concerning Goliath of Gath (1 Sam. 17:36). Now when you look at Israel, that was really their spiritual state. They were uncircumcised in heart. They were called the Lord's people, and traditionally they were such. They had the ordinances - even the ordinance of circumcision - but it was all outward. Paul draws that very distinct line of discrimination between the outward circumcision, which he calls the concision, and the inward circumcision of the heart. He says it is the latter that makes us Israelites in truth, not the former (Rom. 2:25-29). Here you find Israel in exactly that position - uncircumcised in heart. The fact that they said, "Make us a king... like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5) showed that the thing which was common to the nations had come into their hearts. They wanted to be like the other nations. That is to say, the spirit of the world had come inside, and thus they knew nothing of what Paul called "the circumcision of Christ", not "the putting away of the filth of the flesh" (1 Pet. 3:21), but the putting away of the old man entirely. There was deep down in Israel something quite in common with the Philistines, and that being so, the fact had to be exposed; and the world exposed their weakness.

It is like that with a church, with a Christian community, or with Christendom, when it is really worldly in spirit, in principle, in method. It is the world that exposes their weakness and shows how helpless they are. The world, like the Philistines, laughs at them, and says, 'You don't count for anything, you are not to be taken seriously.' The world laughs at the church or the Christian who in principle has that which is in common with itself, and the world can say 'We can do your job better than you can.' So we find that the world is very largely the instrument of exhibiting or exposing the weakness of Christians, simply because there is that common basis.

### **The Way Of Spiritual Strength**

#### *(a) A Life Of Faith In Separation Unto GOD*

At that point in their history, when things were like that, David is introduced. Over against Saul, who is a type of the world principle in the Church, David is brought into view, and we have these three gatherings to David; and they are very significant in relation to what we have just been saying. David, then, represents separation unto God and a life of faith. Israel had said, "Make us a king... like all the nations". 'We want something visible to rest upon, something we can see and take account of with our senses, something tangible, something altogether contrary to the life of faith.' The Lord said, "They have rejected Me, that I should not be king over them" (1 Sam. 8:7). They turned from a life of faith. David comes in as God's principle of faith calling for separation from the world principle, the

world spirit, the world mentality. Then it is not long before David, having been quite clearly indicated and signalized by God as the one with whom God was and to whom He had committed Himself, is, by the sovereignty of God, put into a position which is going to be the testing situation for the people of God. He provides a supreme test as to whether these people really are going on with God, or going on with Saul; going on with heaven, or with earth; going on in the Spirit, or in the flesh. David becomes the test now of spirituality - real spirituality.

In the first place, we find him in the cave in the wilderness - that is, the place outside, spiritually outside, in rejection; the place apart from that worldly system which had captured the Lord's people; apart from that merely traditional order of things which was only outward, in form and ordinances, but not a thing of the heart. David was put right outside of that in the wilderness, and of course he was repudiated by that whole official system, and it was positively against him - if possible, for his destruction. So that the very first thing that arose for the people of God was the question of their discernment, discernment as to where God really was - with Saul or with David - and as to where their deepest spiritual needs would be met. I think it is very unfortunate that the Hebrew word has been translated "discontented" in the text. It would have been far better to keep the marginal rendering in the text - "bitter of soul". It has been made use of by a lot of people who speak disparagingly of a place as a 'cave of Adullam', implying that it is the place of a lot of discontented and disgruntled people who cannot get on with anybody else. But to give it that kind of meaning is to sweep aside the whole spiritual significance of this. God has had to do this sort of thing again and again. When the Church has departed from a purely spiritual, heavenly position, a true life of separation unto Himself, it has been found that the majority were not ready for such a position. It has only been a minority who were ready for it, and then people have said of them, 'Oh, that is a cave of Adullam, a lot of discontented people'. No, they were bitter of soul, and unable to meet their spiritual liabilities; in debt because the provision for spiritual competency had been lost on account of something quite false having gained the position amongst the Lord's people. That is quite a true position spiritually.

But here was David outside of that whole world system that had captured the Lord's people, and it was a question of whether the Lord's people could discern; and those that did discern went out to David to a place of faith.

#### *(b) Union With Christ In Death*

What I want to say here in the first place is that this position in the wilderness, and all that it involved for David and for those who went out to him, clearly and positively represents the believer's union with Christ in death. These others have been glorying in this wonderful fellow Saul, glorying in this idea of their's of a great kingdom. It was a worldly thing, according to the nations. Paul said, "Far be it from me to glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). It is that union with Christ in death to the whole world spirit and system, to the whole world tendency that is constantly invading the Church, like the Philistines who came in again and again with their worldly principles, causing trouble and bringing the Lord's people into a place where He could not go on with them nor commit Himself to them. Those who went out to David took a position outside of that, and represent the truly spiritual people who take their place in that aspect of the Cross which means death to that whole thing. David's life was being sought, and those who joined him became fugitives with him and really, from one standpoint, it was a laying down of their life to the whole world. They lost their position and all their

hopes in that kingdom. They laid down their life, and took all the risks bound up with associating with David.

*(c) Union With Christ In Resurrection*

The second passage, at the beginning of 1 Chronicles twelve, brings us to Ziklag. We will not stay to rehearse how David came into possession of the city, but here we find that in Ziklag there was another secession to David. What we do know about Ziklag is that while David and his men were away one day, the Amalekites made a raid on the city and captured everything, wives and children and all possessions, and then burned the city with fire and went off. When David and his men came back, they found everything gone or destroyed. They wept, it says, "until they had no more power to weep". It was a very serious and critical situation. It was the death side in very truth. But then it says, "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God", and he inquired of the Lord whether he should pursue after the Amalekites, and the Lord said, 'Yes, pursue.' The Lord sovereignly facilitated his overtaking of the Amalekites, so that he recovered everything (1 Samuel 30:1-31).

This is another stage in true spiritual life and fulness. To me it corresponds to the Letter to the Romans. In the first chapters of that letter you find everything being lost. From the very first verses, you mark this movement to discover something that has been lost in Adam, and when you get to the end of chapter five, you have reached the point where everything is lost. Chapter six brings in the Cross, and from then onward you find everything is being recovered. Everything that was lost is recovered through the Cross. In chapter eight, you have a full recovery, and you find that the whole creation, which was subjected to vanity, is recovered. All that was lost through Adam's sin has now been recovered, and this is the resurrection side of the Cross. The death always goes with it. The Lord never overlooks the death side - that in Adam, in the world under judgment, everything is lost. In the case of David we carry over from the wilderness to Ziklag on the death side, but then we take a further step here to the recovery of everything in resurrection. David strengthened himself in his God. The Lord said, "Pursue... overtake, and (thou) shalt without fail recover all". That is the other side. There is resurrection union with the Lord Jesus as well as death union. It would not do for us to take the death position with Christ and leave it there; we must come on to the other side. Spiritual progress means the apprehending of Christ risen for the recovery of all that has been lost: and it has been recovered. It was a very full recovery.

*(d) Union With Christ In The Heavens*

Pass to the third passage, in the second part of 1 Chronicles twelve. "These are the numbers of the heads of them that were armed for war, who came to David to Hebron". The third stage - Hebron. The name means League or Fellowship. It says of Hebron that it was a very ancient city. Its history lay right back in the mists of antiquity, as though outside of this world. This is a very advanced position spiritually. Where do we come to through death and resurrection? What is the next position? Surely it is in the heavens. The sovereignty of the Lord Jesus as enthroned now comes into view. It is here they make David king. The whole question of His heavenly exaltation and government as outside of this world comes before us when we come to Hebron. I think you see quite clearly what this means. We pass from 'Romans' now into 'Ephesians'. It is "the heavens in Christ Jesus". GOD "raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named" (1:20,21). David is coming to the throne now, and there gathered to him many to turn again the kingdom to him - at Hebron. It is the Church in the heavens that, in type, we see here - the

fellowship that is outside of this world, of a truly spiritual nature; union with Christ in ascension in the heavenlies where He is absolutely, unquestionably Lord. He is made King. He is "Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him That filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23). Well, here it is something more than an earthly society or institution, something more than a company of the Lord's people like a congregation on the earth. It is that thing which is brought out from the antiquity of "before the foundation of the world". "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4) - the Church of the eternal counsels of God. It is a heavenly position, a heavenly thing, a heavenly fellowship, which has broken its contact in spirit with this whole world system even as it is found in the Church.

And there we find at Hebron they had a very good time. Seven days they feasted, they ate and they drank, and they wanted to have another seven days. With anybody who tastes real, heavenly fellowship, there is no question of 'What do you belong to, what denomination, sect, association?' They have left all that behind. They have come into a realm where it is Christ as sole and absolute Lord. If you taste that sort of fellowship you want to go on. You are ready to excuse Peter for wanting to make three tabernacles! 'Let us not go back to business, let us stay here forever!' That is how we ought to feel. We have, of course, to go back to our business, but what we are thinking of is not of a conference for seven days "in the heavenlies" and then of our leaving our heavenly position and resuming the old earthly one. No! This is to be the constant consciousness of the life of the Lord's people. You have to go back to business, but you can still be in the spiritual good of the heavenly fellowship of the Lord's people, and you must stand for that.

The next stage would be Jerusalem. When the Lord gets on earth something such as we have been speaking of, you may expect the Lord's coming before long. Jerusalem will be the next thing.