

# CHAPTER 23

The historian is now drawing towards a conclusion of David's reign, and therefore gives us an account here,

**I.** Of some of his last words, which he spoke by inspiration, and which seem to have reference to his seed that was to be for evermore, spoken of in the close of the foregoing chapter (v. 1-7).

**II.** Of the great men, especially the military men, that were employed under him, the first three (v. 8-17), two of the next three (v. 18-23), and then the thirty (v. 24-39).

## 2 SAMUEL 23:1-7

### DAVID'S LAST WORDS

We have here the last will and testament of king David, or a codicil annexed to it, after he had settled the crown upon Solomon and his treasures upon the temple which was to be built. The last words of great and good men are thought worthy to be in a special manner remarked and remembered. David would have those taken notice of, and added either to his Psalms (as they are here to that in the foregoing chapter) or to the chronicles of his reign. Those words especially in v. 5, though recorded before, we may suppose he often repeated for his own consolation, even to his last breath, and therefore they are called his *last words*. When we find death approaching we should endeavor both to honour God and to edify those about us with our last words. Let those that have had long experience of God's goodness and the pleasantness of wisdom, when they come to finish their course, leave a record of that experience and bear their testimony to the truth of the promise. We have upon record the last words of Jacob and Moses, and here of David, designed, as those, for a legacy to those that were left behind. We are here told,

**I.** Whose last will and testament this is. This is related either, or is usual, by the testator himself, or rather, by the historian, v. 1. He is described,

**1.** By the meanness of his original: He was *the son of Jesse*. It is good for those who are advanced to be corner-stones and top-stones to be

reminded, and often to remind themselves, of *the rock out of which they were hewn*.

**2.** The height of his elevation: He *was raised up on high*, as one favoured of God, and designed for something great, raised up as a prince, to sit higher than his neighbours, and as a prophet, to see further; for,

**(1.)** He was *the anointed of the God of Jacob*, and so was serviceable to the people of God in their civil interests, the protection of their country and the administration of justice among them.

**(2.)** He was *the sweet psalmist of Israel*, and so was serviceable to them in their religious exercises. he penned the psalms, set the tunes, appointed both the singers and the instruments of music, by which the devotions of good people were much excited and enlarged. Note, The singing of psalms is a sweet ordinance, very agreeable to those that delight in praising God. It is reckoned among the honours to which David was raised up that he was a psalmist: in that he was as truly great as in his being *the anointed of the God of Jacob*. Note, It is true preferment to be serviceable to the church in acts of devotion and instrumental to promote the blessed work of prayer and praise. Observe, Was David a prince? He was so for Jacob. Was he a psalmist? He was so for Israel. Note, the dispensation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal, and therefore, *as every man has received the gift, so let him minister the same*.

**II.** What the purport of it is. It is an account of his communion with God. Observe,

**1.** What God said to him both for his direction and for his encouragement as a king, and to be in like manner, of use to his successors. Pious persons take a pleasure in calling to mind what they have heard from God, in recollecting his word, and revolving it in their minds. Thus what God spoke once David heard twice, yea often. See here,

**(1.)** Who spoke: *The Spirit of the Lord, the God of Israel, and the Rock of Israel*, which some think is an intimation of the Trinity of persons in the Godhead — the Father *the God of Israel*, the Son *the Rock of Israel*, and *the Spirit* proceeding from the Father and the Son, *who spoke by the prophets*, and particularly by David, and whose word was not only in his heart, but in his tongue for the benefit of others. David here avows his divine inspiration, that in his psalms, and in this composition, *The Spirit of*

*God spoke by him.* He, and other holy men, spoke and *wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* This puts an honour upon the book of Psalms, and recommends them to our use in our devotions, that they are words which the Holy Ghost teaches.

(2.) What was spoken. Here seems to be a distinction made between what the Spirit of God spoke *by* David, which includes all his psalms, and what the Rock of Israel spoke *to* David, which concerned himself and his family. Let ministers observe that those by whom God speaks to others are concerned to hear and heed what he speaks to themselves. Those whose office it is to teach others their duty must be sure to learn and do their own. Now that which is here said (v. 3, 4) may be considered,

[1.] With application to David, and his royal family. And so here is, *First*, The duty of magistrates enjoined them. When a king was spoken to from God he was not to be complimented with the height of his dignity and the extent of his power, but to be told his duty. “Must is for the king,” we say. Here is a *must* for the king: *He must be just, ruling in the fear of God;* and so must all inferior magistrates in their places. Let rulers remember that they rule over men — not over beasts which they may enslave and abuse at pleasure, but over reasonable creatures and of the same rank with themselves. They rule over men that have their follies and infirmities, and therefore must be borne with. They rule over men, but under God, and for him; and therefore,

1. They must be just, both to those over whom they rule, in allowing them their rights and properties, and between those over whom they rule, using their power to right the injured against the injurious; see <sup><4016></sup>Deuteronomy 1:16, 17. It is not enough that they do no wrong, but they must not suffer wrong to be done.

2. They must rule in the fear of God, that is, they must themselves be possessed with a fear of God, by which they will be effectually restrained from all acts of injustice and oppression. Nehemiah was so (<sup><4155></sup>Nehemiah 5:15, *So did not I, because of the fear of God*), and Joseph, <sup><0438></sup>Genesis 43:18. They must also endeavor to promote the fear of God (that is, the practice of religion) among those over whom they rule. The magistrate is to be the keeper of both tables, and to protect both godliness and honesty. *Secondly*, Prosperity promised them if they do, this duty. *He that rules in the fear of God shall be as the light of the morning*, v. 4. Light is sweet and pleasant, and he that

does his duty shall have the comfort of it; his rejoicing will be the testimony of his conscience. Light is bright, and a good prince is illustrious; his justice and piety will be his honour. Light is a blessing, nor are there any greater and more extensive blessings to the public than princes that *rule in the fear of God*. As *the light of the morning*, which is most welcome after the darkness of the night (so was David's government after Saul's, <sup><1971B></sup>Psalm 75:3), which is increasing, shines more and more to the perfect day, such is the growing lustre of a good government. It is likewise compared to the tender grass, which the earth produces for the service of man; it brings with it a harvest of blessings. See <sup><1971B></sup>Psalm 72:6, 16, which were also some of the last words of David, and seem to refer to those recorded here.

[2.] With application to Christ, the Son of David, and then it must all be taken as a prophecy, and the original will bear it: *There shall be a rule among men*, or over men, that *shall be just*, and *shall rule in the fear of God*, that is, shall order the affairs of religion and divine worship according to his Father's will; and he shall be as *the light to the morning*, etc., for he is the light of the world, and as *the tender grass*, for he is the *branch of the Lord*, and the *fruit of the earth*, <sup><2110B></sup>Isaiah 11:1-5; 32:1, 2; <sup><1971B></sup>Psalm 72:2. God, by the Spirit, gave David the foresight of this, to comfort him under the many calamities of his family and the melancholy prospects he had of the degeneracy of his seed.

2. What comfortable use he made of this which God spoke to him, and what were his devout meditations on it, by way of reply, v. 5. It is not unlike his meditation on occasion of such a message, <sup><1071B></sup>2 Samuel 7:18, etc. That which goes before the Rock of Israel spoke to him; this the Spirit of God spoke by him, and it is a most excellent confession of his faith and hope in the everlasting covenant. Here is,

(1.) Trouble supposed: *Although my house be not so with God*, and *although he make it not to grow*. David's family was not so with God as is described (v. 3, 4), and as he could wish, not so good, not so happy; it had not been so while he lived; he foresaw it would not be so when he was gone, that his house would be neither so pious nor so prosperous as one might have expected the offspring of such a father to be.

[1.] *Not so with God*. Note, We and ours are that really which we are with God. This was what David's heart was upon concerning his children, that they might be right with God, faithful to him and zealous for him. But the

children of godly parents are often neither so holy nor so happy as might be expected. We must be made to know that it is corruption, not grace, that runs in the blood, that the race is not to the swift, but that God gives his Spirit as a free-agent.

[2.] *Not made to grow*, in number, in power; it is God that makes families to grow or not to grow, <sup><19A7H></sup>Psalm 107:41. Good men have often the melancholy prospect of a declining family. David's house was typical of the church of Christ, which is his house, <sup><80RB></sup>Hebrews 3:3. Suppose this be not so with God as we could wish, suppose it be diminished, distressed, disgraced, and weakened, by errors and corruptions, yea, almost extinct, yet God has made a covenant with the church's head, the Son of David, that he will preserve to him a seed, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his house. This our Saviour comforted himself with in his sufferings, that the covenant with him stood firm, <sup><253D></sup>Isaiah 53:10-12.

(2.) Comfort ensured: *Yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant*. Whatever trouble a child of God may have the prospect of, still he has some comfort or other to balance it with (<sup><400B></sup>2 Corinthians 4:8, 9), and there is none like this of the Psalmist, which may be understood,

[1.] Of the covenant of royalty (in the type) which God made with David and his seed, touching the kingdom, <sup><1021></sup>Psalm 132:11, 12. But,

[2.] It must look further, to the covenant of grace made with all believers, that God will be, in Christ, to them a God, which was signified by the covenant of royalty, and therefore the promises of the covenant are called *the sure mercies of David*, <sup><251B></sup>Isaiah 55:3. It is this only that is the everlasting covenant, and it cannot be imagined that David, who, in so many of his psalms, speaks so clearly concerning Christ and the grace of the gospel, should forget it in his last words. God has made a covenant of grace with us in Jesus Christ, and we are here told, *First*, That it is an *everlasting* covenant, from everlasting in the contrivance and counsel of it, and to everlasting in the continuance and consequences of it. *Secondly*, That it is *ordered*, well ordered in all things, admirably well, to advance the glory of God and the honour of the Mediator, together with the holiness and comfort of believers. It is herein well ordered, that whatever is required in the covenant is promised, and that every transgression in the covenant does not throw us out of covenant, and that it puts our salvation, not in our own keeping, but in the keeping of a Mediator. *Thirdly*, That it is *sure*, and *therefore* sure because well ordered; the general offer of it is

sure; the promised mercies are sure on the performance of the conditions. The particular application of it to true believers is sure; it is sure to all the seed. *Fourthly*, That it is *all our salvation*. Nothing but this will save us, and this is sufficient: it is this only upon which our salvation depends. *Fifthly*, That therefore it must be *all our desire*. Let me have an interest in this covenant and the promises of it, and I have enough, I desire no more.

**3.** Here is the doom of the sons of Belial read, v. 6, 7.

**(1.)** They shall be thrust away as thorns — rejected, abandoned. They are like thorns, not to be touched with hands, so passionate and furious that they cannot be managed or dealt with by a wise and faithful reproof, but must be restrained by law and the sword of justice (<sup><1911></sup>Psalm 32:9); and therefore, like thorns,

**(2.)** They shall, at length, be utterly burnt with fire in the same place, <sup><3118></sup>Hebrews 6:8. Now this is intended,

**[1.]** As a direction to magistrates to use their power for the punishing and suppressing of wickedness. Let them *thrust away the sons of Belial*; see <sup><1918></sup>Psalm 101:8. Or,

**[2.]** As a caution to magistrates, and particularly to David's sons and successors, to see that they be not themselves sons of Belial (as too many of them were), for then neither the dignity of their place nor their relation to David would secure them from being thrust away by the righteous judgments of God. Though men could not deal with them, God would. Or,

**[3.]** As a prediction of the ruin of all the implacable enemies of Christ's kingdom. There are enemies without, that openly oppose it and fight against it, and enemies within, that secretly betray it and are false to it; both are sons of Belial, children of the wicked one, of the serpent's seed; both are as thorns, grievous and vexatious: but both shall be so thrust away as that Christ will set up his kingdom in despite of their enmity, will *go through them* (<sup><2704></sup>Isaiah 27:4), and will, in due time, bless his church with such peace that there shall be *no pricking brier nor grieving thorn*. And those that will not repent, to give glory to God, shall, in the judgment-day (to which the Chaldee paraphrast refers this), be burnt with unquenchable fire. See <sup><1927></sup>Luke 19:27.

## 2 SAMUEL 23:8-39

### DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN

**I.** The catalogue which the historian has here left upon record of the great soldiers that were in David's time is intended,

**1.** For the honour of David, who trained them up in the arts of exercises of war, and set them an example of conduct and courage. It is the reputation as well as the advantage of a prince to be attended and served by such brave men as are here described.

**2.** For the honour of those worthies themselves, who were instrumental to bring David to the crown, settle and protect him in the throne, and enlarge his conquests. Note, Those that in public stations venture themselves, and lay out themselves, to serve the interests of their country, are worthy of double honour, both to be respected by those of their own age and to be remembered by posterity.

**3.** To excite those that come after to a generous emulation.

**4.** To show how much religion contributes to the inspiring of men with true courage. David, both by his psalms and by his offerings for the service of the temple, greatly promoted piety among the grandees of the kingdom (<sup>1</sup>1 Chronicles 29:6), and, when they became famous for piety, they became famous for bravery.

**II.** Now these mighty men are here divided into three ranks: —

**1.** The first three, who had done the greatest exploits and thereby gained the greatest reputation — Adino (v. 8), Eleazar (v. 9, 10), and Shammah, v. 11, 12. I do not remember that we read of any of these, or of their actions, any where in all the story of David but here and in the parallel place, 1 Chronicles 11. Many great and remarkable events are passed by in the annals, which relate rather the blemishes than the glories of David's reign, especially after his sin in the matter Uriah; so that we may conclude his reign to have been really more illustrious than it has appeared to us while reading the records of it. The exploits of this brave triumvirate are here recorded. They signalized themselves in the wars of Israel against their enemies, especially the Philistines.

(1.) Adino slew 800 at once with his spear.

(2.) Eleazar defied the Philistines, as they by Goliath, had defied Israel, but with better success and greater bravery; for when the men of Israel had gone away, he not only kept his ground, but *arose, and smote the Philistines*, on whom God struck a terror equal to the courage with which this great hero was inspired. His hand was weary, and yet it clave to his sword; as long as he had any strength remaining he held his weapon and followed his blow. Thus, in the service of God, we should keep up the willingness and resolution of the spirit, notwithstanding the weakness and weariness of the flesh — faint, yet pursuing (<sup>corrupt</sup> Judges 8:4), the hand weary, yet not quitting the sword. Now that Eleazar had beaten the enemy, the men of Israel, who had gone away from the battle (v. 9), returned to spoil, v. 10. It is common for those who quit the field, when any thing is to be done to hasten to it when any thing is to be gotten.

(3.) Shammah met with a party of the enemy, that were foraging, and routed them, v. 11, 12. But observe, both concerning this exploit and the former, it is here said, *The Lord wrought a great victory*. Note, How great soever the bravery of the instruments is, the praise of the achievement must be given to God. These fought the battles, but God wrought the victory. Let not the strong man then glory in his strength, nor in any of his military operations, but *let him that glories glory in the Lord*.

2. The next three were distinguished from, and dignified above, the thirty, but attained not to the first three, v. 23. All great men are not of the same size. Many a bright and benign star there is which is not of the first magnitude, and many a good ship not of the first rate. Of this second triumvirate two only are named, Abishai and Benaiah, whom we have often met with in the story of David, and who seem to have been not inferior in serviceableness, though they were in dignity, to the first three. Here is,

(1.) A brave action of these three in conjunction. They attended David in his troubles, when he absconded, in the cave of Adullam (v. 13), suffered with him, and therefore were afterwards preferred by him. When David and his brave men who attended him, who had acted so vigorously against the Philistines, were, by the iniquity of the times, in Saul's reign, driven to shelter themselves from his rage in caves and strong holds, no marvel that the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim, and put a garrison even in Bethlehem itself, v. 13, 14. If the church's guides are so misled as to persecute some of her best friends and champions, the common enemy will,

no doubt, get advantage by it. If David had had his liberty, Bethlehem would not have been now in the Philistines' hands. But, being so, we are here told,

[1.] How earnestly David longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem. Some make it a public-spirited wish, and that he meant, "O that we could drive the garrison of the Philistines out of Bethlehem, and make that beloved city of mine our own again!" the well being put for the city, as the river often signifies the country it passes through. But if he meant so, those about him did not understand him; therefore it seems rather to be an instance of his weakness. It was harvest-time; the weather was hot; he was thirsty; perhaps good water was scarce, and therefore he earnestly wished, "O that I could but have one draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" With the water of that well he had often refreshed himself when he was a youth, and nothing now will serve him but that, though it is almost impossible to come at it. He strangely indulged a humour which he could give no reason for. Other water might quench his thirst as well, but he had a fancy for that above any. It is folly to entertain such fancies and greater folly to insist upon the gratification of them. We ought to check our appetites when they go out inordinately towards those things that really are more pleasant and grateful than other things (*Be not desirous of dainties*), much more when they are thus set upon such things as only please a humour.

[2.] How bravely his three mighty men, Abishai, Benaiah, and another not named, ventured through the camp of the Philistines, upon the very mouth of danger, and fetched water from the well of Bethlehem, without David's knowledge, v. 16. When he wished for it he was far from desiring that any of his men should venture their lives for it; but those three did, to show, *First*, How much they valued their prince, and with what pleasure they could run the greatest hardships in his service. David, though anointed king, was as yet an exile, a poor prince that had no external advantages to recommend him to the affection and esteem of his attendants, nor was he in any capacity to prefer or reward them; yet those three were thus zealous for his satisfaction, firmly believing the time of recompence would come. Let us be willing to venture in the cause of Christ, even when it is a suffering cause, as those who are assured that it will prevail and that we shall not lose by it at last. Were they so forward to expose themselves upon the least hint of their prince's mind and so ambitious to please him? And shall not we covet to approve ourselves to our Lord Jesus by a ready

compliance with every intimation of his will given us by his word, Spirit and providence? *Secondly*, How little they feared the Philistines. They were glad of an occasion to defy them. Whether they broke through the host clandestinely, and with such art that the Philistines did not discover them, or openly, and with such terror in their looks that the Philistines durst not oppose them, is not certain; it should seem, they forced their way, sword in hand. But see,

[3.] How self-denyingly David, when he had this far-fetched dear-bought water, *poured it out before the Lord*, v. 17. *First*, Thus he would show the tender regard he had to the lives of his soldiers, and how far he was from being prodigal of their blood, ~~19724~~ Psalm 72:14. In God's sight the death of his saints is precious. *Secondly*, Thus he would testify his sorrow for speaking that foolish word which occasioned those men to put their lives in their hands. Great men should take heed what they say, lest any bad use be made of it by those about them. *Thirdly*, Thus he would prevent the like rashness in any of his men for the future. *Fourthly*, Thus he would cross his own foolish fancy, and punish himself for entertaining and indulging it, and show that he had sober thoughts to correct his rash ones, and knew how to deny himself even in that which he was most fond of. Such generous mortifications become the wise, the great, and the good. *Fifthly*, Thus he would honour God and give glory to him. The water purchased at this rate he thought too precious for his own drinking and fit only to be poured out to God as a drink-offering. If it was the blood of these men, it was God's due, for the blood was always his. *Sixthly*, Bishop Patrick speaks of some who think that David hereby showed that it was not material water he longed for, but the Messiah, who had the water of life, who, he knew, should be born at Bethlehem, which the Philistines therefore should not be able to destroy. *Seventhly*, Did David look upon that water as very precious which was got at the hazard of these men's blood, and shall not we much more value those benefits for the purchasing of which our blessed Saviour shed his blood? Let us not undervalue the blood of the covenant, as those do that undervalue the blessings of the covenant.

(2.) The brave actions of two of them on other occasions. Abishai slew 300 men at once, v. 18, 19. Benaiah did many great things.

[1.] He slew two Moabites that were lion-like men, so bold and strong, so fierce and furious.

[2.] He slew an Egyptian, on what occasion it is not said; he was well armed but Benaiah attacked him with no other weapon than a walking staff, dexterously wrested his spear out of his hand, and slew him with it, v. 21. For these and similar exploits David preferred him to be captain of the life-guard or standing forces, v. 23.

**3.** Inferior to the second three, but of great note, were the thirty-one here mentioned by name, v. 24, etc. Asahel is the first, who was slain by Abner in the beginning of David's reign, but lost not his place in this catalogue. Elhanan is the next, brother to Eleazar, one of the first three, v. 9. The surnames here given them are taken, as it should seem, from the places of their birth or habitation, as many surnames with us originally were. From all parts of the nation, the most wise and valiant were picked up to serve the king. Several of those who are named we find captains of the twelve courses which David appointed, one for each month in the year, 1 Chronicles 27. Those that did worthily were preferred according to their merits. One of them was the son of Ahithophel (v. 34), the son famous in the camp as the father at the council-board. But to find Uriah the Hittite bringing up the rear of these worthies, as it revives the remembrance of David's sin, so it aggravates it, that a man who deserved so well of his king and country should be so ill treated. Joab is not mentioned among all these, either,

**(1.)** to be mentioned; the first, of the first three sat chief among the captains, but Joab was over them as general. Or,

**(2.)** Because he was so bad that he did not deserve to be mentioned; for though he was confessedly a great soldier, and one that had so much religion in him as to dedicate of his spoils to the house of God (~~1338~~ 1 Chronicles 26:28), yet he lost as much honour by slaying two of David's friends as ever he got by slaying his enemies.

Christ, the Son of David, has his worthies too, who like David's, are influenced by his example, fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom, and in his strength are more than conquerors. Christ's apostles were his immediate attendants, did and suffered great things for him, and at length came to reign with him. They are mentioned with honour in the New Testament, as these in the Old, especially, ~~6214~~ Revelation 21:14. Nay, all the good soldiers of Jesus Christ have their names better preserved than even these worthies have; for they are written in heaven. This honour have all his saints.