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## **A BED OF ROSES HAS A MATTRESS OF THORNS!**

**Today's Text:** 2 Sam., Chaps. 2-5

### **Extracts:**

1. **“And the men of Judah came [to Hebron] and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. ... And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months” [2 Sam. 2: 4,11]**
2. **“Now there was *long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker*” [2 Sam. 3: 1]**
3. **“So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord; and they anointed David king over Israel. ... In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah” [2 Sam. 5: 3, 5]**

*Ladan Bijani and her twin-sister, Laleh, were Iranian twins who were joined at the head from birth. They lived that way for 29 years and both had become law graduates. However, their one consuming wish was to “be separated under all circumstances” so as to be able to live independent lives. Their prayer was finally answered when a hospital in Singapore assembled a team of international neurosurgeons to perform the surgery dubbed “Operation Hope.” The team included the famous Dr. Benjamin Carson of the John Hopkins University. However, on Tuesday, 8 July 2003, after 50 hours of anesthesia and continuous surgery, the separation effort began to fail. In no time, Ladan and Laleh died.<sup>1</sup> Their death has touched the hearts of peoples of all faiths around the world who had been praying for the success of the operation. The roses of hope have been choked to death by the thorns of failure.*

*How often as believers have we looked forward to the day that God's promises in our lives would be fulfilled? When the day finally arrives, does it mean that that is the end of our struggles? Far from it. Actually, it may mark the beginning of a new set of challenges! After 40 years in the wilderness, the children of Israel looked forward to stepping on easy streets in the Promised Land. On arrival, however, they discovered that they would have to fight for every square millimeter of space [Josh. 11: 18-20]! In deed, roses are embedded in thorns and if we are not careful, we could be pricked!*

*In today's lesson, we shall study how we can go about taking possession of God's blessings for us. We shall use the story of how David became the king of Israel after the death of Saul to guide our analysis.*

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<sup>1</sup> “Twins die after separation surgery” in [www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/07/08/conjoined.twins/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/07/08/conjoined.twins/index.html)

## 1. David who?

With the death of Saul and his crown prince, Jonathan, the way was clear for David to be sworn in as the next king of Israel. But was it going to be that simple? Let us examine the political and military climate that faced David:

### a) *Political questions*

Although the sons of Saul [of military age] had died in the battle with the Philistines on mount Gilboa, the dead king still had other sons who were claimants to his throne. For example, his father's supporters made Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, king over all of Israel except Judah. He was 40 years old, that is, ten years older than David, which in the eyes of the people should make him better qualified [2 Sam. 2: 8-10]. However, for David to challenge Saul's family's claim to the throne, he had to be put up as a candidate by at least some of the tribes of Israel. A political crisis was inevitable.

### b) *Military questions*

As the king, Saul was the commander-in-chief of the army of Israel. He had in place a command structure that remained even after his death. Abner was the captain [army general] of Saul's troops and he was the one who masterminded the swearing-in of Ishbosheth as king [2 Sam. 2: 8-9]. Joab and his brothers, Abishai and Asahel, led David's troops [2 Sam. 2: 18]. However, since David had only about 400 men in his 'wilderness army,' he needed some political authority to form a new army or to command the loyalty of the old one. A military confrontation was inevitable.

It is true that David had been anointed king by God through Samuel almost thirteen years earlier [1 Sam. 16: 13]. But, if he were to just walk into Israel and say, "I am David your new king by the grace of God," the people were likely to reply, "David who?" So, how did he go about claiming his crown?

## 2. How David claimed his blessing

Here are the delicate steps that David took:

### a) *He asked God for a road map*

After David had mourned Saul, he prayed to the Lord and asked, "Shall I go up into *any of the cities of Judah*?" God told him to go. But David wanted a more precise road map. So, he asked God, "Whither shall I go up?" and the Lord replied, "Unto Hebron." David took his family members and troops [with their families] and settled "in the cities of Hebron." When the people of Hebron heard of David's arrival, they told

their tribesmen and “the men of Judah came and *there* they anointed David king over the house of Judah” [2 Sam. 2: 1-4].

Recall that Israel consisted of twelve tribes of which Judah was just one. David came from that tribe. His own people had united behind him and recognized him as their king. That gave him a strong bargaining position with the rest of the country. David rested on this foothold for the next seven-and-a-half years [2 Sam. 2: 11].

Here we see the importance of *patience*. An average believer would take a new broom to sweep all his opponents away, claiming that no weapons fashioned against him/her would prosper! He/she would be impatient to assert control over the whole country claiming that God gave it to him thirteen years ago! But, we all know that a newborn child does not start with solid food. We all know that somebody breaking a seven-day fast begins with fluids, such as water or fruit juices. In both cases, if you start with solid food, you are actually attempting suicide! David had been in the wilderness for 13 years. He needed to adjust to settled life and this had to come in stages. Dr. Benjamin Carson has admitted that the separation of the Iranian twins might have been successful if the procedure had been done in stages weeks apart. However, the team of doctors was under pressure from the family of the conjoined twins to proceed, “that death was preferable to living joined at the head.”<sup>2</sup>

In taking possession of the Promised Land, God gave Moses the following “conquest regulation,” “I will not drive them {the current occupiers} out from before thee *in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased and inherit the land*” [Ex. 23: 29-30; Deut. 7: 22]. So, we must let God determine the road and the pace of our possessing His blessings for us.

b) *David waited on God while waiting for Him!*

While waiting for the full manifestation of God’s promise, David demonstrated the fruits of God in his relationships with those around him. Let us look at some of those qualities:

- He rewarded those who had buried Saul

As soon as David became king over Judah, word came to him that it was the men of Jabesh-gilead who had risked their lives to break through the ranks of the Philistines to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons for burial at Jabesh [1 Sam. 31: 11-13]. He sent

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<sup>2</sup> “Complication almost stopped separation surgery,” [www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/07/11/conjoined\\_twins/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2003/HEALTH/07/11/conjoined_twins/index.html)

messengers to thank them, saying, “Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you; *and I also will requite {repay} you this kindness* because ye have done this thing” [2 Sam. 2: 5-7].

- He condemned his troops’ excesses against Saul’s troops

In the battle against troops loyal to Ishbosheth, Saul’s son who had been sworn in king by Abner [captain of Saul’s troops] over the rest of Israel, Asahel, the younger brother of Joab [commander of David’s forces], was killed. So, Joab bore a grudge against Abner [2 Sam. 2: 12-32]. However, after a long war between the two rival houses, David waxed stronger while the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker [2 Sam. 3: 3]. As a result of that, and possibly in the light of David’s reputation as a God-fearing king, Abner led twenty leaders from among Saul’s loyalists to Hebron to sound out David. David received them very well. In appreciation, Abner told David, “I will arise ... and gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth” [vv. 6-21].

When Joab heard that his brother’s killer was in Hebron, he organized an ambush and killed Abner on his way home. When David heard this, “the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner and all the people wept” [vv. 23-32]. Abner was buried in Hebron. In his eulogy, David said, “Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And *I am this day weak, though anointed king* ...the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness” [vv. 38-39]. At David’s deathbed about 30 years after this event, he reminded his son, Solomon, to execute that judgment against Joab. Solomon killed Joab for shedding innocent blood in peace time [1 Kgs. 2: 5-6, 28-35].

- David avenged the murder of Ishbosheth

With his army commander, Abner, now dead, the king of Israel, Ishbosheth, knew that he could no longer contend with David. So, he became as worried as his own people. Two of his men, Rechab and Baanah, stole into the king’s bedroom at noon and killed him. They cut Ishbosheth’s head and carried it to David, hoping to be rewarded. David called them “wicked men {who} have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed.” David commanded the two young men to be executed for murder. He

took the head of Ishbosheth and buried it in the “sepulchre of Abner in Hebron” [2 Sam. 4: 1-12]

c) *David built political alliances*

Having demonstrated the qualities of a God-fearing leader, “all the people took notice of it and it pleased them; *as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people*” [2 Sam. 3: 36]. Consequently, *all the tribes of Israel* came to David in Hebron and said to him:

*Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. Also in the time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel; and the Lord said to thee, thou shalt feed My people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel* [2 Sam. 5: 1-2].

They made a league with David “before the Lord” and anointed him king over Israel. That was after David had been king in Judah for seven-and-a-half years [vv. 3-4]! David went on to conquer the Jebusites in Jerusalem and took over the stronghold of Zion and made it the city of David [vv. 6-7].

d) *Finally. David built his family*

It was after taking full possession of the blessing that God had promised him about 20 years earlier that David began to settle down his family. He took more wives and bred more children. One fruit of his new alliance with Hiram, the king of Tyre, was an abundant supply of cedar trees, carpenters and masons who built David a befitting house for the king of Israel [2 Sam. 5: 13-16]. At this stage, “David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel’s sake” [v.12]. That is, almost eight years after his ascent to the throne!

### 3. Lessons

There is a gas station near Kapok hotel in Port of Spain, Trinidad. I love going there because the owner puts up billboards that put smiles on the faces of customers. He changes them often and you are likely to find a new one each week you visit. In one, a woman who had divorced her husband says, “I don’t hate my former husband enough to return his jewel ring!” The one I like for our lesson today says, “luck means that opportunity has met preparation.” Is that not interesting?

For a believer, luck actually means miracle, that is, the fulfillment of God’s word or promise. David prepared *spiritually* and *practically* to become the king of all Israel. When the opportunity presented itself, the people anointed him king.

Therefore, the lessons that we have learnt from David's story can be summarized as follows:

a) *How prepared are you to receive the blessing?*

In most cases, we are the ones that delay the delivery of God's promises because we are not ready. For example, God has told us that if we pay our tithes, He will "open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, *that there shall not be room enough to receive it*" [Mal. 3: 10]. Certainly, this blessing is limited by the size of vessel that we bring before Him! If you do not pay tithes at all, just don't bother because the blessing is not meant for you!

Many of us do not obey God's word or we do so partially. That is why Jesus has asked, "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, *and do not the things which I say?*" [Lk 6: 46]. Until we do what God asks us to do, we delay our arrival in our Promised Land, just as a 40-day journey for the children of Israel became a 40-year journey. David obeyed in all things and he kept being blessed both in the wilderness and on his ascent to the throne.

b) *What do you do with the opportunities?*

One of the reasons that God's blessings come in bits and pieces is to test what we shall do with them. Remember, the blessings are His and, as Jesus has also taught, "if you have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" [Lk 16: 12]. David used his seven-and-a-half years as king of Judah to demonstrate that he was capable of ruling over the whole of Israel. The people gave him the chance not by conquest but of their own free will because "whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner" [2 Sam. 3: 36-37].

We all need patience "for ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the blessing" [Heb. 10:36]. Even when the time comes for His promised blessings to be fulfilled, He still wants to be sure that we can contain them. God hates to waste. That is why after Jesus had miraculously fed a crowd of 5,000 and they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, *that nothing be lost*" [Jn 6: 12].

We all want to lie on a bed of roses. However, we should also remember that the mattress on that bed is made of thorns! So, pick your roses carefully so that you may not be pricked.