

Many oriental cities had two or even three walls. If this was true of Mahanaim (the city of the two camps, Gen. 32, 2-10), then David waited for tidings in the space between. Most commentators, however, think that the wall had an inner and an outer gate. This would be a convenient place to receive news from the battle; besides, the public and official business of the city would be transacted at the gate, since it must have been the headquarters of the king and his counselors. **Watchmen.** Walled cities were guarded by day and night, especially in war times, by watchmen, whose business it was to notice every movement of the enemy on the outside, as well as to see that all was quiet on the inside. **Roof.** The word means a covering spread over something; here the solid masonry over the archway. The principal gates of cities were often finished into large towers with several rooms; the flat roof over the upper story would serve well for the watchman.

25. If he be alone. If only one man came, it was a certain proof that he was the bearer of messages from the army; whereas if many came running it would show that the royal army under Joab had been routed. **Tidings.** This word in the original usually, not necessarily, denotes good news; in verse 27 the adjective "good" is written with it. This is the same word that we translate "gospel." **Apace.** With a quickstep. The Hebrew of this first clause literally rendered runs thus: "he ran and ran and reached [the gate]."

26. Saw another man running. Why two messengers were sent is explained in verses 19-23. **The porter.** The gatekeeper, or the sentinel in charge. The Septuagint, Vulgate, and many modern exegeses read "toward the gate" for "to the porter." The word as printed denotes "porter." However, since it is only a question of vowels, the other reading is possible without violation to the original text. This agrees better with verse 24, when the watchman cries directly to the king.

27. Is like the running of Ahimaaz. Ahimaaz had borne other messages to David (see 2 Sam. 17, 15-18), and besides being quick-footed might have had some peculiarity about his gait. **He is a good man.** To bring good tidings meant a good reward, thus men whom the king desired to honor would be selected for the work. (See verse 20.)

28. All is well. These three words stand for the Hebrew *shalom* ("peace"), meaning either "peace be to thee," or "there is peace." **Blessed be the Lord thy God.** The Lord, who does all things well, deserves praise for his goodness to-day. **Which hath delivered up.** The verb translated "delivered" in this place is from a root meaning to "shut up," though the piel form is best rendered by "deliver." But even in English there is a close relation between delivering up and shutting up or capturing.

29. Is it well . . . with Absalom? Or

more literally, "Peace to the young man Absalom!" Absalom means "father of peace." Were the three Hebrew words rendered literally, we should have, "Peace to the young man the father of peace." We are not to suppose, however, that David was in a frame of mind to recognize such a play upon words. **I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.** He evades a direct answer, for he knew that Absalom was dead (verse 20). It would have been better for him to have incurred the displeasure of the king than to have evaded the truth and incur the displeasure of the King of kings. Lying is always wrong and sinful. People who will act evasively in one case will not hesitate to do so in another. To conceal a part of the truth is not very different from lying, no matter what the motive may be. The teacher or editor who will excuse lying under any circumstances is in poor business, and to say the least is not the best type of a Christian. Had it not been for Ahimaaz's ambition to be the first messenger to the king, he might have escaped this temptation. Ambitious men generally encounter great trials. We also know that Ahimaaz had consented to act as a spy for David. (See 2 Sam. 17, 16.) How hard it is for a spy to be an honest man!

31. And behold the Cushite came. (Cushi of the Authorized Version is misleading, for the Hebrew Cushi is not a proper name, but rather refers to the nation to which he belonged, that is, a Cushite or Ethiopian. It is almost always written with the definite article; the word Moor or Negro would be an excellent translation. **Tidings.** In the original we have a verbal form: "Let there be tidings [announced]." **The Lord hath avenged thee this day.** The Cushite and slave recognized Jehovah, whose name he employs, as supreme and the author of victory. "Avenge" is not a happy translation, since the verb means "to judge," or "to secure the right," or perhaps "to pronounce a verdict in one's favor."

32. Be as that young man is. That is, dead. The Negro slave had not yet learned the art of dissembling; he therefore tells the truth in unmistakable language, without any evasion whatever. This proves that culture and truth do not always go together.

33. The chamber over the gate. The tower built over the gate had a chamber in it. **My son.** This expression is repeated five times, which makes it very emphatic in Hebrew. The powerful king is entirely lost in the loving father. The heinousness of Absalom's crimes disappears in the intensity of David's love. **Would God that I had died for thee.** The word God is not in the original. This language of David reminds us of Moses's words (Exod. 32, 32), and St. Paul's (Rom. 9, 3). They also would have died, if by so doing they might have saved others. How at this moment the words of Nathan must have rung in David's

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