and the low (ix 13), The verse so explained is firmly connected with the imagery and the ideas of Isaiah.

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THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM

The abortive rebellion of Absalom against his father David, with the tragic results for both son and father, is described with dramatic skill by the narrator of 2 Samuel xv-xviii. Historians, realising that this rebellion could not have started in a political vacuum, have postulated a background situation in which there were serious defects in David's rule which gave rise to a revolt against him. Some see in this situation a weakening of David's interest in, and control of, his subjects, with the consequent growth of, what BRIGHT describes as, 'a mass of indefinable grievances' 1). NOTH admits that 'we do not learn exactly what had made David so unpopular in Israel' 2), while JAMES suggests that 'David, by his aloofness and inaction, must have lost much of his hold upon the people' 3). PFEIFFER states, rather vaguely, that 'by his national policies he (David) had failed to gain the Israelites' affection' 4). Th. ROBINSON concludes that 'David was already growing old and was unable to attend as closely as he had done in earlier years to his judicial function' 5).

These varied observations, prompted by the need to find some historical situation which gave rise to the rebellion, fail to achieve their objective, for they are either negative or, at least, uninformative. No realistic explanation is offered to account for the initiation of the rebellion or the impetus which the rebel movement gained, with the active support of a large section of the people. This was no secessi- nist movement, as happened later under the ill-starred leadership of Sheba ben Bichri (2 Samuel xx 1 ff.); southerners and northerners joined together in a military campaign to remove David by force and to place Absalom on the throne. It is true that Absalom made no secret of his ambition to usurp the throne from his father and that

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he carefully prepared the way for the realisation of his aim. He surrounded himself with royal pomp and pageantry and openly assumed the role of champion of men’s grievances, thereby undermining his father’s authority and influence. That he was able publicly and with impunity to indulge in such displays of regal splendour does, indeed, imply a serious deterioration in David’s status. What eludes us, however, is what brought about such a degeneration in David’s influence as to invite rebellion.

It would seem that Absalom’s ambition and initiative in attracting popular allegiance were of secondary importance; he was the instrument at hand for implementing the aims of a revolutionary movement to get rid of David. What we must try to determine, primarily, is why, in spite of David’s magnificent achievements, widespread bitterness was generated against him, culminating in his being rejected by a large portion of the people. We must find the answer to the question why such a leading personality as Ahitophel broke with David and openly joined the rebels.

Curiously enough, the answer to these questions is given in a Rabbinic comment in Midrash Tannuma on Ki Tišša’ 4, which looks like a truly historical appraisal of the situation. The author draws attention to Psalm iii 3 which reads: “Many are saying about me: ‘There is no salvation for him in God’”. Bearing in mind that the superscription attributes this Psalm to David ‘when he fled before his son Absalom’ the Midrashic commentator observes: “They were saying of David: ‘(How) can there be salvation for a man who had taken the lamb captive and slew the shepherd and who caused Israel to fall by the sword’?”. The first part of this comment clearly refers to David’s unsavoury affair with Bathsheba and his callous disposal of her husband Uriah. The second part contains a severe criticism of David’s ruthless policy in his military campaigns. Here we may find the clue to the true historical situation which generated the rebellion against him.

One marvelled at, but could not adequately explain, David’s remarkable military successes in subduing the Philistines, conquering the territories southeast of the Jordan and extending Israel’s northern frontier. The Rabbinic comment cited here would imply that David achieved military supremacy by sacrificing his troops in battle. His ruthlessness in internal affairs is attested by his brutal elimination of the surviving members of Saul’s family. Something of the bitterness which at least a section of the people felt towards him was expressed