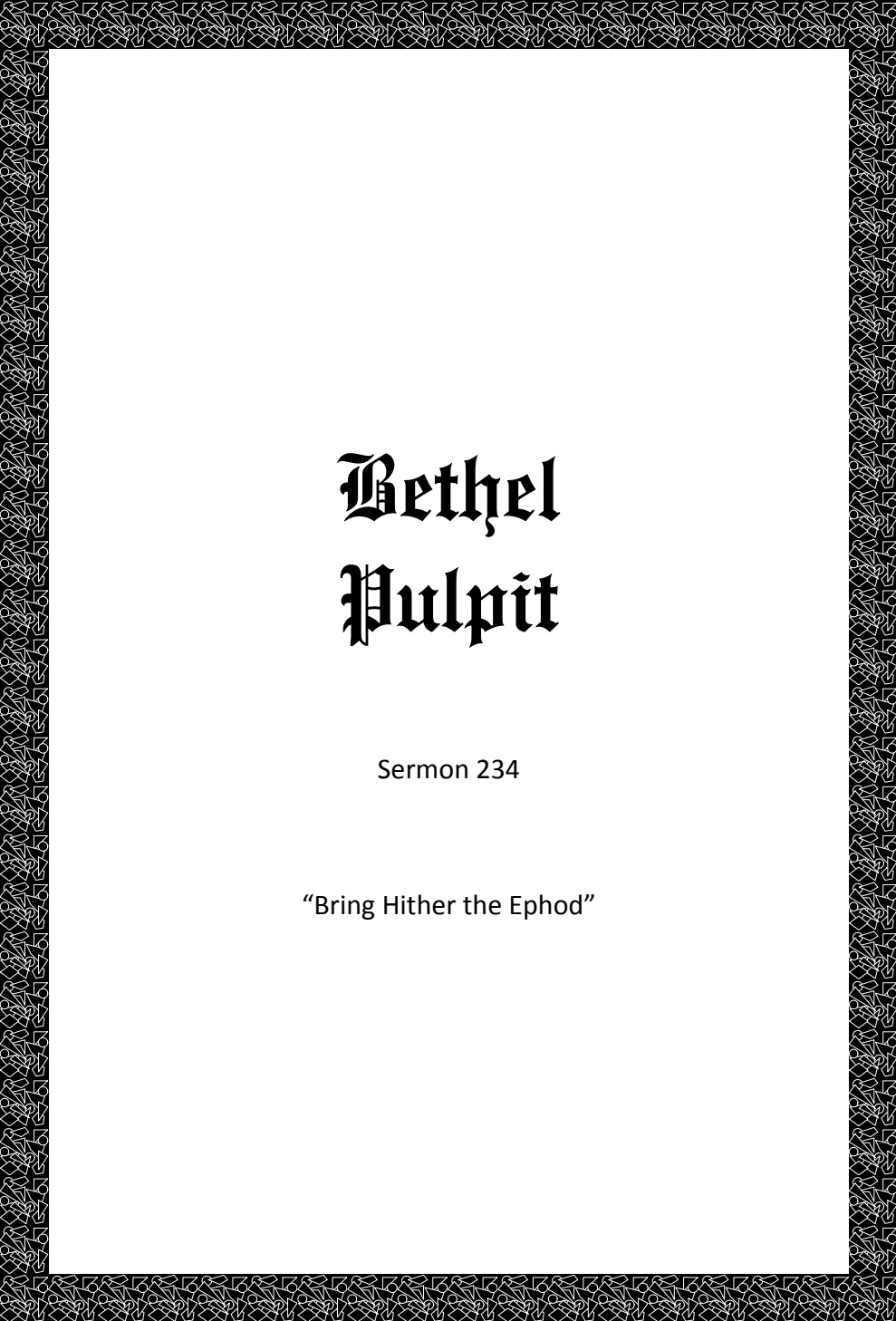




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 234

“Bring Hither the Ephod”

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 25th July, 2004**

Text: *"And he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod" (1 Samuel 23. 9).*

These were very dark days in the life of David, these days before at last he was crowned king of Israel. Saul sought his life day by day. David had to flee, to hide in caves, to live in the wilderness. From the moment when Samuel anointed David to be king to the moment when David at last was crowned king, O what trials and what deliverances, what sorrows, what joys during those years! Really, these were David's best days, when he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains, when he fled from Saul. They were such uncomfortable days, such troublesome days, but they were David's best days – days of nearness to God, days of dependence on God, days of prayer, walking with his God and Saviour.

I am sure some of you look back to some of your early days and those trials and sorrows and perplexities, and yet those were good days when you were able to draw near to God and prove His love and His divine help and His faithfulness. Mind you, David was as sure of being king the moment Samuel anointed him as when at last he sat on the throne. Yet there was a painful, dark pathway to come there. That moment when the Lord first sealed you as an heir of heaven, well you were as sure of reaching heaven, as sure of being in heaven then, as when at last you are safely landed there. But you are not yet landed and you have to walk it out, and you have worse than Saul. You have the devil, a carnal heart, indwelling sin, and you have to pray your way along. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."

So these dark, trying days when David's life was sought day by day. In one of the Psalms he tells us what the posture of his heart was in those years. It was this: "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in Thee: yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast" (Psa. 57. 1). If you want to know what *these calamities* were, all you need to do is read this chapter again, 1 Samuel 23. It is nothing but calamities. If you will, it was David's worst time. It was a time when David reached rock bottom. It was a time when there was a step between himself and death. "These

calamities.” “In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge.” David had a good God and he was under the shadow of His wings, the shadow of a Father’s love, the shadow of His almighty protection, the shadow of His all-wise providence. One day these calamities were overpast, but until then, “In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge.” And some of you, perhaps you feel you are right in the midst of *these calamities*. One day they will be ended, but not now, not yet. But, “In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast.”

Now in this chapter, David reached rock bottom. Not only was Saul seeking him every day to take his life, but David treated these men of Keilah so wonderfully, he risked his life for them to help them, to deliver them, and they turned traitor. Yet they were going to deceive him and hand him over to his enemy, Saul. And then when he had to flee and was in Ziph, again the treachery of those who should have loved him (verse 19). Poor David was reaching rock bottom in this chapter. “And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand” (verse 14). You see, “*But God*,” and that was a wall of fire round about David, and Saul could never penetrate it. And dear child of God, you have the same wall of fire round about you. Satan may seek you every day. “But God.” You can never get beyond that; you can never sink beneath it. “But God. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “But God delivered him not into his hand.”

And then right at the end of the chapter David seemed finished. He was completely surrounded. Just another moment and Saul would take him. It was death, destruction; it was the end. Now you have another *but*. This time it was *but God’s providence*. “But there came a messenger,” just at that very moment, not a moment too late. “But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David” (verses 27, 28). O the mystery of divine providence, ordering everything, each detail!

“His providence unfolds the book,
And makes His counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design.”

Well, so much for the background and this chapter. It was in the midst of all these troubles that David “said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.” You know you are not to expect anything fanciful from

me or any unusual interpretation or any strange spiritualisation. If you are expecting that, you will be disappointed. What is the mind of the Spirit here? The old Lancashire preacher, Mr. Lythgoe, almost always began his sermon, “What is the mind of the Spirit in this passage?” Well, I believe there is a vital principle here, something that vitally affects us in our spiritual life and in our conduct and day by day and every moment of our life.

First of all, bear with me while as simply and as briefly as I can I explain what the ephod was and why the ephod was so important, and why it meant so much to David. The ephod was the essential priestly garment. In the early days it belonged to the high priest alone. Remember that the high priest according to Exodus 28 had those garments “for glory and for beauty,” and the essential garment that marked him as the high priest was the ephod. Of course, there was the long, blue robe of the ephod, all blue with the bells and the pomegranates at the bottom. The ephod itself was more like a tunic that went over the robe of the ephod. It was mainly blue, but it was to be made of blue and purple and scarlet and gold and fine linen with cunning work. It was the essential garment of the high priest. But almost part of that ephod, inseparably united to it, was the breastplate, fastened to the ephod with twelve precious stones, one for each of the tribes of Israel and the name of each tribe engraven on the stone.

This is what we are coming to and this is one of the mysteries of the Old Testament. In the ephod, in the breastplate was what was described as the Urim and the Thummim (Exod. 28. 30). Exactly what they were, we are not told and no one has ever been able to find out. But there in the breastplate on the ephod were the Urim and the Thummim. The names just mean *light* and *perfection*. But the Urim and the Thummim were exceedingly precious. Whatever they were, whatever they were not, an Israelite could go to the high priest with a question or seeking advice or asking what to do or seeking counsel, and he was promised that God would give a perfect answer through the Urim and the Thummim. It would be God’s own voice. That is what we read so often in Scripture, of people enquiring of the Urim and the Thummim, and the awful thing said about King Saul, that God refused to answer him by the Urim and by the Thummim (1 Sam. 28. 6).

How the Urim and Thummim gave the answer to the Israelite’s enquiry, we do not know. Some think that there was a voice from heaven,

an audible voice which could be heard both by the priest and by the Israelite. Others have felt that rather God put it into the heart and mind of the high priest to give an infallible answer. Yet another thought, perhaps the most popular thought, is that all the various letters on the names of the high priest's breastplate would light up spelling out the answer to the enquiry. But we do not know; we are not told. But we do know this: that any Israelite had the privilege of going to the high priest asking for the ephod, seeking God's help, God's wisdom, God's counsel, and promised on the ground of mercy an infallible answer. Now I have tried to be as brief as I can and as simple as I can.

David here was in trouble. O what a delight it was to him when "it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand" (verse 6). Here, "when David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him ... he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod." David did not want the ephod to wear it himself, to put it on himself. He wanted Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod so he could seek God's help, so he could seek gracious counsel, so he could commit his way to the Lord, so he would receive an infallible answer.

So there is a principle here, a vital principle, and it is just as much a principle this evening as it was when David sent for Abiathar. That is, in every time of need, in every time of trouble, in every time of sorrow, in every time of uncertainty, to "send for the ephod," to seek the help of a great High Priest, to commit your way to Him, to be saved from your own wisdom. So there is a vital principle here: "Bring hither the ephod."

I think you will find there was something that was exceedingly precious to David. One thing I have noticed in the life of David, and you have it over and over and over again: "And David enquired of the Lord." Now there is a principle here, and there is a blessed example for you and me. David is described as a man after God's own heart. He had plenty of grace, he had plenty of wisdom, and he was a great man. He was king in Israel. But again and again we find this, that David had no confidence in himself, that David dare not trust himself, that David dare not venture without the help of God, that David could do nothing without committing his way to God, even the simplest thing. I think you will find that as you read the life of David, his life, his Christian life, his spiritual life was marked by this: he constantly enquired of God. Especially he was

enquiring concerning his soul's salvation, enquiring after mercy, enquiring after forgiveness, enquiring after divine help. O but David, an enquirer. We use that word; people say, "I think so-and-so might be an enquirer," as if they are just a beginner. Well David, the man after God's own heart, was an enquirer right down to his dying day. There is a blessed example here.

If I may interject this, before Moses died he blessed all the tribes of Israel. When he came to the tribe of Levi, what was Levi's greatest blessing? The Urim and the Thummim. And this was Moses' dying word to the tribe of Levi: "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One" (Deut. 33. 8). Sometimes over the years I have felt that word. A time of need, a time of darkness: "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One." Put it into the Lord's hand. Do not try to manage it yourself. "Leave God to order all thy ways, and trust in Him whate'er betide." "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One." David knew that and David walked it out. He was an enquirer all his days.

So David said, "Bring hither the ephod." I have thought of the twenty-seventh Psalm. "One thing," says David, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." Why? "To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to *enquire* in His temple." So David has one desire. Mind you, it is a composite desire with one or two things in it, but he has one desire and part of it is this: that all the days of his life he might be found enquiring. There is a principle here: to be an enquirer. "They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward." Ask the way and keep on asking the way. If you are going on a journey, the best thing is if you are absolutely sure and certain of the way, but the next best thing is to keep stopping and asking; you will get there just as surely. But it is the person who thinks he knows the way and does not who gets lost and ends up in the ditch.

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple." Later in the twenty-seventh Psalm: "When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." When he was encouraged to enquire, when he was encouraged to seek the Lord, he did not rebel. He did not say it was not necessary. With what holy delight did he respond: "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Then at the end of Psalm 27, "Wait on the Lord." In

other words, keeping on sending for the ephod; keep on sending for the high priest; keep on sending for Abiathar; keep on asking, “Bring hither the ephod.” “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”

“And he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.” Now you find in this chapter not just once but a few times this enquiring of the Lord. I would just say in verse 6 we read of Abiathar coming with the ephod in his hand, but it would seem that the implication of that verse is that he came at the beginning of this chapter. We have these two or three times when David is sending for the ephod. Now the first is this: “Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors” (verse 1). Some enemies had invaded the land and they were harassing the people in this little town of Keilah and robbing them. David had this gracious desire to go for their help, to go for their defence. But, “Bring hither the ephod.” David enquired of the Lord. He was a wise man, a godly man, and it seemed the right thing to do. “David enquired of the Lord” (verse 2), and he exercised great distrust of himself. He was dependent on the Lord. “Shall I go and smite these Philistines?” And he got this answer: “Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.” What happened? The people began to find fault with David, even his own friends, his own followers. Really they said, “We have enough trouble here without bringing more trouble.” Do not be surprised if you are constrained by the love of Christ to do something if people start finding fault, and do not be surprised if you have clear direction from God to do something if people start finding fault.

Now this is interesting. There is a principle here, an example for you and me, a lesson for you and me there. David’s men grumbled; they complained; they were angry with him. Now what did David do? Well, he did not tell them to mind their own business. He did not tell them to be quiet. He did not tell them they were wrong. He did not tell them he was right. He did not even say he had clear direction from the Lord. “David enquired of the Lord yet again” (verse 4). That is grace. If only you and I could walk this out. Perhaps people complain against us. It may be justly, it may be very unjustly, but may we “bring hither the ephod.” May we enquire of the Lord yet again. He was not so certain he was right; he was not so certain others were wrong. He wanted to be sure. “David enquired of the Lord yet again. And the Lord answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand.”

Then there is a third time in this chapter. That is the occasion we have here, the treachery of these men of Keilah. I think one of the hardest things for the people of God is if they do something, constrained by love and it costs them something, and the very people they help turn against them. There is a proverb about a dog biting the hand that feeds it. These men of Keilah were plotting to overthrow David who had been so kind to them. It was told David; David heard it. “And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, Thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as Thy servant hath heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech Thee tell Thy servant.” He got the answer from the ephod. “The Lord said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up.” “Bring hither the ephod,” and he got the answer (verses 7-12).

Not to be tedious, I read those few verses in chapter 30 to show that this was always David’s practice. You remember when he came to Ziklag, the city had been burned with fire. His possessions had been taken. His very friends spoke of stoning him. “And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech’s son, I pray thee, *bring me hither the ephod*. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David enquired at the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.” You know what comes before that, one of the well-known passages of the Old Testament: “David was greatly distressed ... but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” How did he encourage himself in the Lord his God? “Bring hither the ephod.” He knew there was the priest there. He knew there was a way of access to God. He knew there was the Urim and the Thummim. He knew he could seek God’s help. He knew he could commit everything into His hands. He knew it would not be in vain. “David was greatly distressed.” Perhaps some of you are greatly distressed. “But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” At the end of the chapter: “And David recovered all.” Read through the rest of David’s life. After Saul had died, David enquired of the Lord what he had to do if he was crowned king, the various things coming along (2

Sam. 2. 1; 5. 19). “And David enquired of the Lord.” There is an example, a principle.

Well, a few things as it concerns you and me. “Bring hither the ephod.” A famous minister once said that every believer should start the day by saying, “Bring hither the ephod.” What did he mean? At the start of every day commit everything into the hands of God; seek God’s blessing on what lies before, known to God, not known to us. Seek God’s help, especially His gracious counsel, His gracious guidance. A believer should begin every day saying, “Bring hither the ephod.” You have things in your family and they are difficult. “Bring hither the ephod.” You young people have a choice to make, a decision to take. It is so important. “Bring hither the ephod.” There are things in the church of God: what is right? what is wrong? “Bring hither the ephod.”

Some of you may say, “If only we had it outwardly, practically, as David had.” Let me ask you a question. You do not think the Lord would give such gracious provision to the Old Testament church and deny it to the New Testament church, do you? “Seeing then that we have a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” We have a great High Priest, a greater than Aaron, a greater than Abiathar. He is passed into the heavens. He is Jesus the Son of God, and He still wears the breastplate. Not with precious stones engraved, O but with His people’s names deeply cut on His heart of everlasting love, He still wears the ephod. Do you believe it? He still bears the Urim and the Thummim. “Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One,” this great High Priest. He is still all-wise, all-gracious. That wonderful eighth chapter of the Proverbs: “I am understanding; I have strength.” The wonderful privilege that a poor, unworthy sinner has a God, a great High Priest to go to, to seek His help, to seek His guidance, to seek His counsel, to depend on Him, to look to Him. And He never made a mistake, and He will never tell you wrong, and He will never lead you amiss. Why, He leads by His Word and by His Spirit. He directs your heart, your affections into His Word. He exercises your mind. He closes wrong doors; He opens right doors. He restrains you; He constrains you. He says, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” But the great point is, like David, to exercise the greatest distrust of self, to look to the Lord, to look to Him alone, this great and glorious High Priest, to look to Him for help, to look to Him for counsel, for guidance, to look to Him

alone, to depend on Him alone. He makes no mistakes. He will not fail you.

“Bring hither the ephod.” “Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy Holy One.” O but the wonderful privilege that there is “a great High Priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.” And not only that there *is* a great High Priest, but, “We *have* a great High Priest.” And it is a mercy if our unworthy names are engraven on His heart. It is a mercy if we have a saving interest in Him, in His precious blood, in His all-prevailing intercession. It is a mercy if He is our Saviour and our God.

“Upon Him call in humble prayer,
Thou still art His peculiar care” – this great High Priest –
“He’ll surely turn and smile again,
Nor shalt thou seek His face in vain.”

“And he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.”