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BIBLE LESSONS.

STUDIES IN JEWISH HISTORY.

Third Quarter.

Lesson XII. Sept. 22. 1 Samuel 31: 1-13.

DEATH OF SAUL AND HIS SONS.

GOLDEN TEXT.

The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.—Ps. 34: 16.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE PHILISTINES INVASION. The great enemy of Israel on the east, who had made trouble for Saul during a large part of his reign, now made an incursion farther north than usual. Their object seems to have been to plunder the rich country of the plain of Esdraelon, and the neighboring hills.

II. SAUL IN DESPAIR SEEKS HELP FROM THE WITCH OF ENDOR. Saul from the slopes of Gilboa could see the armies of the Philistines, and he was cast down with discouragement and despair (1) at the great numbers of the enemy, their chariots and horses, and warlike equipment. (2) He was himself becoming old, at least 60 years, and his envy and passion, and insane spells, had worn him out beyond most of his age. (3) He could get no answer to his inquiries from God. (4) This silence of God awakened his conscience. He felt guilty. (5) He knew that David was with the Philistines, and imagined that he would of course take part with them, and the Lord was with him.

III. THE WITCH OF ENDOR. Failing in other ways of learning what to do, Saul sought some one with a familiar spirit to give him advice. Saul had fasted all day in his efforts to obtain counsel from God (28: 20), and now disguising himself he took the long and dangerous journey by night to inquire of the witch of Endor. With the same facts before us there are two probable interpretations of this interview of Saul.

FIRST, That Samuel really appeared to Saul, but contrary to the expectations of the witch, who was more surprised at his appearance than was Saul. In that case this was a real miracle, wrought by God, not by the witch, and the word was the word of God.

SECOND, That the whole scene was a deception on the part of the woman. James Sime, and Milman, argue for this interpretation, because God, who refused to answer Saul by prophet or oracle, would not be likely to answer him through the medium of a witch, "thus sanctioning and confirming the belief in necromancy, a capital crime in the law."

III. THE GREAT DEFEAT. Saul returned the same night, weak from fasting, excitement, and want of sleep, and the next morning the battle began, and lasted all day. 1. And the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines. The Philistines seem to have driven them in a state of panic up the heights, for it was upon the "high places" that the corpses of Saul and his sons were found next day by the conquerors.

2. Followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons: the three sons who were with him in the battle. Saul had another son, Ishbosheth, who was not there, and hence survived him. Slew Jonathan. Fighting bravely as of yore.

IV. THE DEATH OF SAUL. 3. The battle being over against Saul. He seems to have bravely maintained his ground for some time longer. And the archers hit him: or overtook him (with their arrows). And he was sore wounded of the archers. Better, as in Rev. Ver., and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers. They pressed close upon him that he saw no way of escape.

4. Then said Saul unto his armorbearer, Draw thy sword. Jewish tradition tells us that the faithful armorbearer was Doeg, the Edomite, and that the sword which Saul took apparently from the hand of the armorbearer was the sword with which Doeg had massacred the priests at Gibeon and at Nob. Let these uncrucified (Philistines) . . . abuse him: torture him. He must die anyway, and he would rather die by slow torture at the hands of cruel enemies, than be mutilated afterwards. But his armorbearer would not: for he was sore afraid. It would be worse than death to kill the man he was appointed to defend with his life. He would never have peace again, and the people would hold him guilty of the most detestable murder. So he took the sword, and fell upon it. Planting the hill in the ground, he fell upon the point.

5. And . . . his armorbearer . . . fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. Being answerable for the king's life, he feared punishment; or from a nobler motive of true fidelity, refused to survive his master.

6. So Saul died. The young Amalekite, who brought the news to David, declared that he killed him (2 Sam. 1: 6-10), but evidently he lied in hopes of reward. And all his men: his personal staff, and all of his sons who were in the battle.

9. And they cut off his head: to send as a trophy and proof of their victory. It was hung in the temple of Dagon at Ashdod (1 Chron. 10: 10). Stripped off his armor, and sent into the land . . . to publish it in the house of their idols. His arms were sent around in festive processions to the Philistine cities, and finally deposited in the temple of Ashtaroth in the Canaanitish city of Beth-shean, hard by the fatal field.

10. They fasted his body to the wall. Together with the bodies of his sons. They were hung on the wall in the "open place" (2 Sam. 31: 12). E. V. By the gate, that all passers by might join in exulting over the defeat and disgrace of Israel.

V. A VALIANT ACT OF GREATFUL REMEMBRANCE. 11. And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard. Jabesh-gilead was a city of Manasse, east of the Jordan, about ten miles across the Jordan Valley from Beth-shean. The inhabitants remembered the splendid feat of arms by which King Saul at the very beginning of his reign delivered them from the Ammonites under Nahash, who agreed to spare them only on condition of the loss of their right eyes. "It was singular how that first deed of splendid patriotism, done in the early fervor of his consecration, bore fruit after so many long years.

12. All the valiant men. It required brave and strong men to take the bodies of Saul and his sons from off the fortress

under the very eyes of the victorious Philistines. Went all night. The city was ten miles distant, and the deed must be done while the soldiers were asleep. And burnt them there. The mutilated trunks had been exposed for some days to the air, and the flesh was no doubt in a state of putrefaction. The flesh here only was burned. The bones were reverently and lovingly preserved.

VI. THE SONG OF THE BOW. The battle of Gilboa was probably fought on the same day that David gained his great victory over the Amalekites, who ravaged his home at Ziklag. Three days after his return home (2 Sam. 1: 2) the news of the disaster to Saul reached him. Then David wrote a noble elegy, called "The Song of the Bow," which was taught to the children of Judah (2 Sam. 1: 18) not "the use of the bow," as in the old version, but "The Song of the Bow."

The elegy is given in 2 Sam. 1: 19-27. "How are the mighty fallen," is a kind of refrain.

Note the noble and forgiving spirit of David.

VII. LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF SAUL. (1) FAVORING CIRCUMSTANCES AND POSSIBILITIES OF HIS YOUTH. (1) His earlier life was spent in comparative quiet and seclusion. (2) Saul was a warrior, and (see Deut. 17: 18-20) to write out a copy of the law, thus becoming thoroughly acquainted with it. (3) Saul received the special influences of the Spirit (1 Sam. 10: 6). (5) Saul had the opportunity of becoming a noble, large-hearted, useful man.

(II) HIS PROBABLY. In the earlier part of his reign Saul was subjected to two great tests, and failed in both cases. The first was early in his career, when he offered the sacrifices himself, instead of waiting for Samuel (1 Sam. 13: 1-14). The second was a few years afterwards, when he disobeyed God's direct command (1 Sam. 15: 1-31). Saul had long, and fair, and repeated trials, and rejected God in each of them.

(III) WORKING OUT HIS DESTINY. When Saul forsook God, then God necessarily forsook him, and an evil spirit took the place in his heart of the Spirit of God. He spent his time in hunting David, instead of overcoming his enemies. He spent his force in envy and passion, instead of in managing his kingdom. "He ate of the fruit of his own way, and was filled with envy" (Prov. 1: 31).

(IV) THE SOURCE OF HIS FAILURES. In his rejection of God as his King and Guide. It was the want of obedience and faith.

(V) A CONTRAST. David was far from faultless. He was guilty of not a few breaches of command. Except his rejection of God, no worse sin was recorded of Saul than David. What then was the difference? It was that David's heart was right. Saul's heart was wrong. The whole lives of Saul's life flowed in the wrong direction, with eddies flowing right; while David's whole life flowed in the right direction, with occasional eddies in the wrong.

Sweetening Bitter Things. When God's people had just entered upon their wilderness journeyings they came upon a very inviting fountain. Thirsting eagerly to it in their burning thirst they were provoked to find that the water was too bitter for either man or beast. So the disappointing spring was named "Marah," or the water of bitterness. The sons of gratitude for deliverance from Pharaoh give place to the murmuring grayers, who ask "where do we drink?" This scene is often repeated in the experiences of God's people. Right in the midst of joys and successes and of high hopes, we sometimes come suddenly upon a Marah of the most distasteful disappointment. We bemoan the bitter waters which favor our plan or project. Perhaps, for example, we had made our arrangements for a pleasant tour; but the day for our departure found us on a bed of sickness, and the hardest dose to swallow was the disappointment. But presently we began to remember that we had been favored to be at home, and even in that sick room. It laid right on our road to Canaan, and our heavenward Guide had led us there. We talked with our own hearts in that sick room, we thought over our past lives, we tasted anew the compasses of providence, which favored us, we found out how much our friends loved us and how much God loved us. So as God opened the eyes of Moses to see a certain tree whose branches sweetened the fountain of Marah, he also opened our eyes to certain truths which sweetened the bitter waters which favored us. By the time that the unwellcome sickness was over we were ready to confess that it had been better for us to be shut up with Jesus awhile than to take the voyage to Europe or the journey to California. God was wiser than we; as Jamie Deans said: "He knew better for our good than we ken ourselves."—Rev. T. L. Ogilvie.

"Purgatory Bullets." An excited Irishman lately rushed into a Boston drugstore, having a broken-up appearance generally. "Be jabbers," he yelled, "I'm all wrong entirely. I want some stuff to straighten me out. Some of them 'Purgatory Bullets' will fix me, I'm thinkin'." "What d'ye tax for them?" "What do you mean?" I asked the clerk. "Purgatory Bullets," or "something" looks that, they call them," replied the man. "Shure I'm in purgatory already, with headache, and liver complaint, and bad stomach, and the devil knows what all." The clerk passed out a vial of Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Purgative Pellets, and Pat went off contented. These little Pellets cure all derangements of liver, stomach and bowels. Sugar-coated, little larger than mustard seeds, and pleasant to take. Druggists.

The Anchor of the Soul. He that has anchored himself to Christ may be calm in sorrow and triumphant over temptation. Whatever winds may blow he may ride safe there, and however frowning may be the iron-bound rocks a cable's length off there, if he has cast out this anchor at the stern he may quietly wait for the day in the assurance that no shipwreck is possible for him. Your hope will be the ally of all dignity, patience, victory, will steady the soul and make it participant, in some measure, of its own steadfastness and security.

And just as sailors sometimes send the anchor down, so they may have a fixed point towards which to warp themselves,

so, if our anchor is that Christ who has passed into the heavens, he will draw us, in due time, whither he himself has gone. A calm, steady hope, fixed upon the anchored Christ, our fore-runner, and the pattern of what we shall be if we trust him, will make us steadfast and victorious in all our sorrows, business, changes, and temptations. Without it life is indeed as "futile then as frail," and our only "hope of answer" to its torturing problems, or of "redress" of its manifold pains is "behind the veil, behind the veil." Such a hope knits us to the true stay of our souls, and is a cord not easily broken. As for men's hopes fixed on earth, they are fragile and fitful as the spider's web, which, these early autumn mornings, twinkles dwey in every breeze, and are gone by mid-day.—Rev. Alexander MacLaren, D. D.

Who His Own Self Bore Our Sins. Some time ago a war raged in India between the English and a native monarch, named Tippoo Sahib. On one occasion several English officers were taken prisoners, among them one named Baird. One day a native officer brought in fetters to be put on each of the prisoners, the wounded and crippled Baird had been severely wounded, and was suffering from pain and weakness. A gray-haired officer said to the native official: "You do not think of putting chains upon that wounded young man?"

"There are just as many pairs of fetters as there are captives," was the answer, "and every pair must be worn."

"Then," said the officer, "put two pairs on me. I will wear his as well as my own."

The end of the story is that Baird lived to regain his freedom, lived to take that very city, but the generous friend died in prison. He wore two pairs of fetters. But what if he had worn the fetters for all in the prison? What if, instead of being a captive himself, he had been free and great, and quitted a glorious palace to live in their loathsome dungeon, to wear their chains, to bear their stripes, to suffer and die in their stead, that they might go free? Such a thing has been done. For all who receive the grace of God's Son, the chains are struck off and the prison is thrown wide open.—Edward Judson, D. D.

Does the Earth Really Move? Science says that it does, but we cannot help wondering sometimes if there isn't some mistake about it, when we see how stubbornly certain old fogies cling to their rusty and antiquated ideas. It was believed once that consumption was incurable, and although it has been clearly demonstrated that it is not, thousands of old-time physicians close their eyes and put their hands to their ears and refuse to abandon the theory. But for all that the world moves on, and Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery continues to rescue sufferers from consumption's grasp. It is a sure cure for all dreaded diseases, if taken in time. All scrofulous diseases—and consumption is included in the last—yield to it.

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