

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

General Statement.

The summary of David's wars and victories contained in chapter 8 and the chapter from which today's lesson is taken shows his wonderful military genius. At the beginning of his reign he found Israel sorely pressed by enemies. The standing army was therefore raised to three hundred thousand experienced soldiers, besides a band of six hundred heroes noted for deeds of personal valor. His generals were unrivaled for military skill and bravery. An account of three of his great campaigns, prior to the engagement with the Ammonites, is given. These were against the Amalekites, Philistines, and Moabites. In each case David's cause was just. Israel was not the offending party, but on the contrary had suffered in material prosperity through incursions which rendered life and property insecure, which inflicted severe cruelties, and which endangered national existence. David's wars were the wars of the Lord. Wherever his sway was extended foul idolatries and the rule of brute force were swept aside and a reverent and enlightened government set up in their stead. The war with the King of Ammon was brought on by an abominable affront, greatly aggravated by the kindly disposition of David toward the son of his old friend. By hiring mercenaries from Aram—ancient Syria—for five hundred thousand pounds' weight of silver, King Hanan was able to bring into the field an army of thirty thousand men. The scene of the battle was near to the city of Medeba, in the mountains of Moab, east of the northern end of the Dead Sea. David's general was the courageous and crafty Joab. A severe conflict resulted in victory for the cause of Israel, which was soon followed by other victories decisive against all foes. As a result, now for the first time the promise made to Abraham that his posterity should possess all the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates was fulfilled. Rich spoils were taken from the conquered foes. These included gold shields and exceeding much copper, and all manner of vessels of gold and silver and brass. These treasures were dedicated to God to be used in Solomon's temple. Out of the brass taken from the Syrians Solomon afterward made the great brazen sea and the pillars of brass (1 Chron. 18, 8, 11). The interests of mankind were therefore in some measure involved in the cause espoused by David. While we deprecate war, it is possible for us, too, to get things that are now the instruments of unrighteousness consecrated to the service of God, and also help to extend the kingdom of God by our temporal gains.

Verse 8. Children of Ammon came out.

From Rabbath, their capital city, to the open country. **Put the battle in array.** Not daring to advance into hostile territory they took an advantageous position and awaited attack. **Zoba.** In the northeast, near the Euphrates. **Rehob.** In Asher, in northern Galilee. **Ishtob.** Literally, *Men of Tob*, a district southeast of the Sea of Galilee. **Maacah.** Beyond the waters of Merom. **By themselves in the field.** They had not been able to join the Ammonites before Joab appeared. "The field" was the treeless prairie surrounding Medeba. This was an Israelite town lying in the tribe of Reuben, four miles southeast of Heshbon. It is mentioned on the Moabite stone as having been recaptured by Mesha, and in the time of Isaiah was a Moabite sanctuary (Isa. 15, 2).

9. Front of the battle was against him.

His position was between Rabbath and Medeba, with the Ammonites in front and the Syrians behind. Hence he had to fight both armies at the same time. The natural advantages were with the enemy, as the Ammonites had their city to fall back into, and the Syrians a plain well fitted for cavalry and chariots. **Choice men.** His choice of the picked men to attack the Syrians and his taking command of this division in person indicate that the mercenary troops were the most formidable part of the Ammonite force. (1) *We may be so sur-*

rounded by difficulties that no way of escape seems possible.

10. Hand of Abishai his brother. Abishai was the eldest of the three sons of Zeruiah, David's sister, and brother to Joab and Asahel. He was captain of the second three of David's mighty men.

11. Syrians be too strong. If Joab's assault on the Syrians failed, Abishai could hardly turn away from the Ammonites without ruining his entire division of the army. The understanding may have been not to attack both armies at the same time.

12. Be of good courage. The peril of their position demanded extraordinary bravery. **Play the men.** The part of valiant men. **The cities of our God.** The people, the land, and the cities were God's. If the cities fell into heathen hands they would be given over to the worship of heathen gods. The city of Medeba, for which they now fought, was still in possession of the Reubenites, but was besieged by the Syrians. Justice, patriotism, love of family, and self-love urged these men to unusual valor. **That which seemeth him good.** An expression of trust combined with resignation to God's will. (2) *When we contend for what is God's, we may well have courage.*

13. They fled before him. They that are hired to fight have usually a great care to save themselves, with light regard for the cause for which they fight.