



LESSON IV.—JULY 26.

Saul Rejected as King.

I. Samuel xv., 13-23.

Golden Text.

To obey is better than sacrifice. I. Samuel xv., 22.

Home Readings.

Monday, July 20.—I. Sam. xv., 10-23.
 Tuesday, July 21.—I. Sam. xv., 24-31.
 Wednesday, July 22.—I. Sam. xv., 1-9.
 Thursday, July 23.—I. Sam. xiii., 5-14.
 Friday, July 24.—Micah vi., 1-8.
 Saturday, July 25.—Is. i., 22-33.
 Sunday, July 26.—Ps. li., 1-19.

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

13. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord.

14. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

15. And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

16. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

17. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?

18. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

19. Wherefore didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord?

20. And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

21. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal.

22. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

Ten or fifteen years elapsed between the events of last week's lesson and the present one. It takes only a few moments to read the passage between the lesson of a week ago and this one, yet in those verses you will see how Saul's impatience, fear, and lack of faith led him to offer a sacrifice, which none but a man of priestly rank had a right to offer.

On that occasion Samuel the prophet rebuked him, and foretold that the kingdom should not continue under his house, but said that the Lord had sought another to be 'captain over his people.'

Again Saul showed poor judgment in forbidding his soldiers to eat at a time when they greatly needed nourishment in order to carry on an important battle, and, but for the vigorous protest of the

people, he would have slain his own son, a brave soldier, who did not know of the command not to eat.

Saul's reign was one of constant warfare with the enemies of Israel. Among them were the Amalekites. They were a powerful wandering people in the region south of Palestine. If you turn to the account of the journey of Israel from Egypt, and their settlement in the Promised Land, you will discover that the Amalekites gave the people constant trouble during those times, attacking them upon the way, and joining their enemies after they had entered their new home.

But for several hundred years after Israel had first encountered the Amalekites, the nation had been too busy with the work of settling the country and dealing with enemies nearer at hand, to undertake a war against a powerful people as far away as the Amalekites. The vengeance of God was thus held in check until the time of Saul, then God sent Samuel to commission King Saul to go out against the Amalekites and utterly destroy them. They were to slay every living person, and all the cattle and other animals that belonged to the Amalekites.

Thus God was to deal with the enemies of his chosen people. If you read the history of Israel even down to our own time, you will discover that God has never prospered a nation that has oppressed the Jews. The day of vengeance may be long delayed, as in this case, but it surely comes. There are millions of Jews in the world to-day, and they are a distinct and separate people, but many a nation that oppressed them has vanished from the earth.

But Saul again proved unwise and disobedient, for he saved Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive, and allowed the people to save alive the best of the animals that belonged to the Amalekites. Saul seems to have had great physical courage, but little moral strength. He could attack enemies in battle but could not resist temptation to disobey God.

Then God sent Samuel again to Saul to rebuke him for his disobedience, and here our present lesson opens.

'I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' 13:—When Samuel reached Gilgal, Saul went out to meet him, and greeted him with a blessing, and the declaration that he had performed the Lord's commandment. This was untrue. It would almost seem that Saul forgot that Samuel was a prophet, and that he would know whether the king had really obeyed or not. He had more than once shown Saul that he had more than human knowledge of events. But Saul greets him with a smooth politeness and makes this statement, as though this settled everything. The Amalekites have been put out of the way and this troublesome matter is settled. What can I do for the Lord next?

'What meaneth this bleating?' etc. 14:—But Samuel punctures Saul's complacent assertion by a question that makes all dodging useless. The sheep and oxen, that the people have taken contrary to God's will, lift their voices to witness against the king.

'To sacrifice unto the Lord thy God.' 15:—Saul, in response to Samuel's stern and searching question attempts to leave himself out of the case by telling Samuel what 'the people' have done. It was a lame excuse. Saul was the divinely appointed leader of the people, and was responsible for their actions. It seems absurd, also, to say that they took these animals in order to sacrifice them to the Lord, for animals used in sacrifice were to be taken from their own property and not from some enemy, so that they would mean a personal gift, and a personal self denial for God! But Saul, having begun a course of disobedience, had reached the point where he seemed unable to understand how God looked into his soul. This is true of men to-day; they become blinded by their own wickedness.

'I will tell thee what the Lord hath said,' 16:—Suddenly Samuel puts a stop to Saul's miserable excuses, and over against his hypocritical explanations proceeds to set

forth what God says. After telling what God said about Saul, verse 11, of this chapter, says, 'And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night.' This all night communion had prepared the prophet to face the guilty king, just as all night prayer has prepared many a man to face his Maker or to meet some serious emergency in his life. The God who heard Samuel that night hears his earnest servants now.

'The Lord anointed thee king over Israel.' 17:—It was the Lord who had done this for him; the same Lord whom he had disobeyed.

'Go and utterly destroy,' 18:—Next Samuel recalls the commission laid upon Saul, when God sent him against the Amalekites, reminding him that he was to utterly destroy them. They were not to stop until their ancient enemies were 'consumed.' God is not content with partial obedience.

'Wherefore then didst thou not obey?' etc., 19:—The commandment was repeated by Samuel, and then comes the hard question for Saul, Why did you not obey?

'Yea, I have obeyed,' 20, 22:—Saul attempts a smooth reply. He had obeyed, he says, he went where God sent him; he took the king of the enemy and destroyed them. He mentions the taking of the king alive as though that were one of the things commanded, weaving his obedience and disobedience into a cunningly attempted excuse. Then he again refers to what 'the people' saw fit to do, as though it were no concern of his. Notice his references to 'the Lord thy God,' as though he felt that he was no longer a servant of God. Disobedience leads to separation from God.

'To obey is better than sacrifice.'—Verse 22 is one of the great verses of the Bible. It lays down a great principle. Outward form is useless without heart obedience.

'He hath also rejected thee,' 23:—Indifference to God's commands is no light thing in his eyes. Unrepented of and unforgiven it leads to rejection of a soul by its Lord.

C. E. Topic

Sunday, July 26.—Topic—A mission study of South America. Luke ii., 25-32.

Junior C. E. Topic

DRUNKENNESS.

Monday, July 20.—Who causes it? Hab. ii., 15.

Tuesday, July 21.—How it hurts. Isa. xxviii., 7.

Wednesday, July 22.—Destroys kings. Prov. xxxi., 4, 5.

Thursday, July 23.—Robs of wit. Ps. cvii., 27.

Friday, July 24.—Warnings against. Luke xxi., 34.

Saturday, July 25.—Shuts out heaven. I. Cor. vi., 9, 10.

Sunday, July 26.—Topic—God's judgment on the drunkard. Isa. v., 11, 12, 20-23.

The Teacher.

Is it needless to point out that only a Christian can properly teach the Christian faith? I fear not. Some superintendents and committees of selection are too prone to be satisfied with other qualifications in the absence of this, the great determining condition. To do this is to stultify a great work. Religion is not something that can be taught by an outsider; the teacher is not a professor or lecturer, expounding a system of thought in which he may, or may not be, a believer; he is the personal bearer of a message from God to the children; he should be chosen for this task, first and foremost, because he has himself experienced the saving grace of God in his own heart. While certain intellectual gifts are necessary to a successful teacher, the primal thing is that he must be a believer, full of earnest faith in the Gospel, and eager to be used as a medium for its transmission to others. It is the presence or absence of this 'missionary quality' which ultimately determines the success or failure of a teacher with his class.—The Rev. B. Griffith Jones.