

## David's Friend—Jonathan.

DECEMBER 9.

1 SAMUEL XX : 33-42.

*Golden Text, Proverbs 18 : 24.*

HERE are three representative men, each with widely different traits of character. (1) SAUL. In his earlier years there is much to admire in him. He was good-looking, clever, energetic, brave, with that *dash* about him that always fascinates: modest, yet dignified and generous. But he was the type of a man spoiled by prosperity; he could not carry a full cup. Before he was two years on the throne he disregarded the conditions on which he was to hold office, ch. 13 : 9-14. He degenerated rapidly, and became a headstrong and cruel despot. His irascibility was perhaps constitutional, for he was a Benjamite, Gen. 49 : 27, and the idea that another was to supplant him must have preyed upon a mind like his. He forfeited his crown, and his life, through wilful disobedience to the authority of God. (2) DAVID—the expression that he was a man after God's "own heart," ch. 13 : 14; Acts 13 : 22, applies to his character generally. He had many splendid qualities of both head and heart, but he was far from perfect. The redeeming quality in his case was that he was deeply sensible of his sins and short-comings. That he sincerely repented of them is clearly shewn in the 51st Psalm, which is often called *the Sinner's Guide*. (3) JONATHAN appears before us as a peacemaker, v. 2, and one of the most unselfish of men. Although himself the heir-apparent to the throne, with rare magnanimity he concedes David's divine right, and his own willingness to be ranked his inferior, ch. 23 : 17. It is possible that he may have lacked some of the qualities at that time specially requisite and necessary for holding the reins of government. Vs. 33, 34, exhibit Saul's ungovernable temper, and show in the case of Jonathan, how even the best of men may forget themselves under the pressure of great provocation, Prov. 16 : 32. He left the table with deep concern for David's safety; yet retaining a sense of the honour due to his father. Vs. 35-39. By previous arrangement, Jonathan went next morning to the field where David lay concealed, and, by the means described, gave him to understand that it would be unsafe for him to expose himself to his father's frenzy, that his best course would be to leave the Court altogether. V. 40. *His artillery*—his bow and quiver. V. 41. David showed respect for Jonathan's rank in true oriental fashion. What an affecting scene! Only once again did they meet, ch. 23 : 16. V. 42. *Go in peace*—equivalent to our "good bye" (God be with you). The secret of this "wonderful" love was their common love to God. The greater our love to Christ, the more we love one another, John 13 : 35; 1 Jn. 4 : 7, 8. Jonathan gives David the most solemn assurance of his abiding friendship. Prov. 18 : 24. Such a friend is God, Ps. 27 : 10; Isa. 43 : 2. But, on the other hand, if we forsake Him, He will forsake us, 2 Chron. 15 : 2. Jesus is our best friend, Rom. 5 : 8.

## David Sparing his Enemy.

DECEMBER 16.

1 SAMUEL XXIV : 1-17.

*Golden Text, Matthew 5 : 44.*

AFTER parting with Jonathan David became an exile for several years until the death of Saul. During that time there gathered round him a motley band of 600 men, chs. 22 : 2; 23 : 13, who accompanied him from place to place, finding shelter amid the rocky fastnesses of Moab and Philistia, or in the mountains of Judea. To understand how David felt during this strange crisis in his history we must read such Psalms as the 7th, 57th, 58th and the 142nd—"A prayer when he was in the cave." A sudden incursion of the Philistines had diverted Saul's attention for a little, but as soon as that was over he is on David's track again. Vs. 1-3. *Engedi*—(fountain of the kid) a small town on the west shore of the Dead Sea. 3000 men—the flower of his army, now set out on an inglorious expedition—to capture a fugitive band of 600, skulking among the rocks where only chamois and goats had their home, and in caves fit only to shelter sheep in a storm. V. 4. God had never made any promise of delivering Saul into David's hands, but his men construed what God did say in ch. 15 : 28 as authority for David to be avenged on his enemy. Saul had thrown his outer garment on one side ere he lay down, which made it easy for David to cut off the skirt. Vs. 5, 6. David was too magnanimous to take him at unawares, and too conscientious to lift his hand against "The Lord's anointed." He resolved to do right and leave results with God. V. 7. David shewed true strength in not only restraining his own natural impulses, but in restraining his followers also from violence. Vs. 8-11. It was a bold thing to follow Saul and to address him as he did. It is always the wiser course, however, to reason with those who would injure us than to contend against them. V. 12. *The Lord judge*—Here is the solution of the contrast in these two men's lives. Both were divinely chosen and anointed; both had their good qualities; both were sinners and great sinners, but Saul had rejected God, ch. 15 : 23, while David acknowledged Him at every step. It was "the Lord" who induced him to spare Saul's life, and it is to "the Lord" that he looks for deliverance, v. 15. V. 14. It was inconsistent with the dignity of the King of Israel to lead an army against a helpless individual like David. *A flea*—"one flea," in the Hebrew. Language could not express greater humility. V. 16. Saul's better nature for a moment asserts itself, but alas that it was so evanescent! Now, and again, ch. 26 : 21, he reached the point of conviction, but he never repented. His conscience was touched, but he stilled its remonstrance. V. 17. The pith of the lesson is in the golden text. The great duty taught is that that of overcoming evil with good, Rom. 12 : 20.