

**THE PROPHETS
AND KINGS**

*The Bible for
School and Home*

by J. Paterson Smyth

The Book of Genesis

Moses and the Exodus

Joshua and the Judges

The Prophets and Kings

*When the Christ Came:
The Highlands of Galilee*

*When the Christ Came:
The Road to Jerusalem*

St. Matthew

St. Mark

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AND KINGS**

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J. Paterson Smyth

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I

This series of books is intended for two classes of teachers:

1. *For Teachers in Week Day and Sunday Schools.* For these each book is divided into complete lessons. The lesson will demand preparation. Where feasible there should be diligent use of commentaries and of any books indicated in the notes. *As a general rule* I think the teacher should not bring the book at all to his class if he is capable of doing without it. He should make copious notes of the subject. The lesson should be thoroughly studied and digested beforehand, with all the additional aids at his disposal, and it should come forth at the class warm and fresh from his own heart and brain. But I would lay down no rigid rule about the use of the Lesson Book. To some it may be a burden to keep the details of a long lesson in the memory; and, provided the subject has been very carefully studied, the Lesson Book, with its salient points carefully marked in coloured pencil, may be a considerable help. Let each do what seems best in his particular case, only taking care to satisfy his conscience that it is not done through

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laziness, and that he can really do best for his class by the plan which he adopts.

2. *For Parents* who would use it in teaching their children at home. They need only small portions, brief little lessons of about ten minutes each night. For these each chapter is divided into short sections. I should advise that on the first night only the Scripture indicated should be read, with some passing remarks and questions to give a grip of the story. That is enough. Then night after night go on with the teaching, taking as much or as little as one sees fit.

I have not written out the teaching in full as a series of readings which could be read over to the child without effort or thought. With this book in hand a very little preparation and adaptation will enable one to make the lesson more interesting and more personal and to hold the child's attention by questioning. Try to get his interest. Try to make him talk. Make the lesson conversational. Don't preach.

II

HINTS FOR TEACHING

An ancient Roman orator once laid down for his pupils the three-fold aim of a teacher:

1. *Placere* (to interest).
2. *Docere* (to teach).
3. *Movere* (to move).

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1. To interest the audience (in order to teach them).
2. To teach them (in order to move them).
3. To move them to action.

On these three words of his I hang a few suggestions on the teaching of this set of Lessons.

1. Placere (to interest)

I want especially to insist on attention to this rule. Some teachers seem to think that to interest the pupils is a minor matter. It is not a minor matter and the pupils will very soon let you know it. Believe me, it is no waste of time to spend hours during the week in planning to excite their interest to the utmost. Most of the complaints of inattention would cease at once if the teacher would give more study to rousing their interest. After all, there is little use in knowing the facts of your subject, and being anxious about the souls of the pupils, if all the time that you are teaching, these pupils are yawning and taking no interest in what you say. I know some have more aptitude for teaching than others. Yet, after considerable experience of teachers whose lesson was a weariness to the flesh, and of teachers who never lost attention for a moment, I am convinced, on the whole, that the power to interest largely depends on the previous preparation.

Therefore do not content yourself with merely studying the teaching of this series. Read widely and freely. Read not only commentaries, but books that will

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give local interest and colour—books that will throw valuable sidelights on your sketch.

But more than reading is necessary. You know the meaning of the expression, "*Put yourself in his place.*" Practise that in every Bible story, using your imagination, living in the scene, experiencing, as far as you can, every feeling of the actors. To some this is no effort at all. They feel their cheeks flushing and their eyes growing moist as they project themselves involuntarily into the scene before them. But though it be easier to some than to others, it is in some degree possible to all, and the interest of the lesson largely depends on it. I have done my best in these books to help the teacher in this respect. But no man can help another much. Success will depend entirely on the effort to "put yourself in his place."

In reading the Bible chapter corresponding to each lesson, I suggest that the teacher should read part of the chapter, rather than let the pupils tire themselves by "reading round." My experience is that this "reading round" is a fruitful source of listlessness. When his verse is read, the pupil can let his mind wander till his turn comes again, and so he loses all interest. I have tried, with success, varying the monotony. I would let them read the first round of verses in order; then I would make them read out of the regular order, as I called their names; and sometimes, if the lesson were long, I would again and again interrupt by reading a group of verses myself, making remarks as I went on. To lose their interest is fatal.

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I have indicated also in the lessons that you should not unnecessarily give information yourself. Try to question it *into* them. If you tell them facts which they have just read, they grow weary. If you ask a question, and then answer it yourself when they miss it, you cannot keep their attention. Send your questions around in every sort of order, or want of order. Try to puzzle them—try to surprise them. Vary the form of the question, if not answered, and always feel it to be a defeat if you ultimately fail in getting the answer you want.

2. *Docere (to teach)*

You interest the pupil in order that you may *teach*. Therefore teach definitely the Lesson that is set you. Do not be content with interesting him. Do not be content either with drawing spiritual teaching. Teach the facts before you. Be sure that God has inspired the narration of them for some good purpose.

When you are dealing with Old Testament characters, do not try to shirk or to condone evil in them. They were not faultless saints. They were men like ourselves, whom God was helping and bearing with, as He helps and bears with us, and the interest of the story largely depends on the pupil realizing this.

In the Old Testament books of this series you will find very full chapters written on the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the election of Jacob, the Sun standing still, the slaughter of Canaanites, and other such subjects. In connection with these I want to say something that

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especially concerns teachers. Your pupils, now or later, can hardly avoid coming in contact with the flippant scepticism so common nowadays, which makes jests at the story of the sun standing still, and talks of the folly of believing that all humanity was condemned because Eve ate an apple thousands of years ago. This flippant tone is "in the air." They will meet with it in their companions, in the novels of the day, in popular magazine articles on their tables at home. You have, many of you, met with it yourselves; you know how disturbing it is; and you probably know, too, that much of its influence on people arises from the narrow and unwise teaching of the Bible in their youth. Now you have no right to ignore this in your teaching of the Bible. You need not talk of Bible difficulties and their answers. You need not refer to them at all. But teach the truth that will take the sting out of these difficulties when presented in after-life.

To do this requires trouble and thought. We have learned much in the last fifty years that has thrown new light for us on the meaning of some parts of the Bible; which has, at any rate, made doubtful some of our old interpretations of it. We must not ignore this. There are certain traditional theories which some of us still insist on teaching as God's infallible truth, whereas they are really only human opinions about it, which may possibly be mistaken. As long as they are taught as human opinions, even if we are wrong, the mistake will do no harm. But if things are taught as God's infallible truth, to be believed on peril of doubting God's Word, it may do grave mischief, if in after-life the pupil find

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them seriously disputed, or perhaps false. A shallow, unthinking man, finding part of his teaching false, which has been associated in his mind with the most solemn sanctions of religion, is in danger of letting the whole go. Thus many of our young people drift into hazy doubt about the Bible. Then we get troubled about their beliefs, and give them books of Christian evidences to win them back by explaining that what was taught them in childhood was not *quite* correct, and needs now to be modified by a broader and slightly different view. But we go on as before with the younger generation, and expose them in their turn to the same difficulties.

Does it not strike you that, instead of this continual planning to win men back from unbelief, it might be worth while to try the other method of not exposing them to unbelief? Give them the more careful and intelligent teaching at first, and so prepare them to meet the difficulties by-and-by.

I have no wish to advocate any so-called "advanced" teaching. Much of such teaching I gravely object to. But there are truths of which there is no question amongst thoughtful people, which somehow are very seldom taught to the young, though ignorance about them in after-life leads to grave doubt and misunderstanding. Take, for example, the gradual, progressive nature of God's teaching in Scripture, which makes the Old Testament teaching as a whole lower than that of the New. This is certainly no doubtful question, and the knowledge of it is necessary for an intelligent study of

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Scripture. I have dealt with it where necessary in some of the books of this series.

I think, too, our teaching on what may seem to us doubtful questions should be more fearless and candid. If there are two different views each held by able and devout men, do not teach your own as the infallibly true one, and ignore or condemn the other. For example, do not insist that the order of creation must be accurately given in the first chapter of Genesis. You may think so; but many great scholars, with as deep a reverence for the Bible as you have, think that inspired writers were circumscribed by the science of their time. Do not be too positive that the story of the Fall *must be* an exactly literal narrative of facts. If you believe that it is I suppose you must tell your pupil so. But do not be afraid to tell him also that there are good and holy and scholarly men who think of it as a great old-world allegory, like the parable of the Prodigal Son, to teach in easy popular form profound lessons about sin. Endeavor in your Bible teaching “to be thoroughly truthful: to assert nothing as certain which is not certain, nothing as probable which is not probable, and nothing as more probable than it is.” Let the pupil see that there are some things that we cannot be quite sure about, and let him gather insensibly from your teaching the conviction that truth, above all things, is to be loved and sought, and that religion has never anything to fear from discovering the truth. If we could but get this healthy, manly, common-sense attitude adopted now in teaching the Bible to young people, we should, with

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God's blessing, have in the new generation a stronger and more intelligent faith.

3. *Movere (to move)*

All your teaching is useless unless it have this object: to move the heart, to rouse the affections toward the love of God, and the will toward the effort after the blessed life. You interest in order to teach. You teach in order to move. *That* is the supreme object. Here the teacher must be left largely to his own resources. One suggestion I offer: don't preach. At any rate, don't preach much lest you lose grip of your pupils. You have their attention all right while their minds are occupied by a carefully prepared lesson; but wait till you close your Bible, and, assuming a long face, begin, "And now, boys," etc. and straightway they know what is coming, and you have lost them in a moment.

Do not change your tone at the application of your lesson. Try to keep the teaching still conversational. Try still in this more spiritual part of your teaching to question into them what you want them to learn. Appeal to the judgment and to the conscience. I can scarce give a better example than that of our Lord in teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. He first interested His pupil by putting His lesson in an attractive form, and then He did not append to it a long, tedious moral. He simply asked the man before Him, "Which of these three *thinkest thou?*"—i.e., "What do you think about it?" The interest was still kept up. The man, pleased at the appeal to his judgment, replied promptly, "He that

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showed mercy on him;” and on the instant came the quick rejoinder, “Go, and do thou likewise.” Thus the lesson ends. Try to work on that model.

Now, while forbidding preaching to your pupils, may I be permitted a little preaching myself? This series of lessons is intended for Sunday schools as well as week-day schools. It is of Sunday-school teachers I am thinking in what I am now about to say. I cannot escape the solemn feeling of the responsibility of every teacher for the children in his care. Some of these children have little or no religious influence exerted on them for the whole week except in this one hour with you. Do not make light of this work. Do not get to think, with good-natured optimism, that all the nice, pleasant children in your class are pretty sure to be Christ’s soldiers and servants by-and-by. Alas! for the crowds of these nice, pleasant children, who, in later life, wander away from Christ into the ranks of evil. Do not take this danger lightly. Be anxious; be prayerful; be terribly in earnest, that the one hour in the week given you to use be wisely and faithfully used.

But, on the other hand, be very hopeful too, because of the love of God. He will not judge you hardly. Remember that He will bless very feeble work, if it be your best. Remember that He cares infinitely more for the children’s welfare than you do, and, therefore, by His grace, much of the teaching about which you are despondent may bring forth good fruit in the days to come. Do you know the lines about “The Noisy Seven”?—

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“I wonder if he remembers—

Our sainted teacher in heaven—
The class in the old grey schoolhouse,
Known as the ‘Noisy Seven’?

“I wonder if he remembers

How restless we used to be.
Or thinks we forget the lesson
Of Christ and Gethsemane?

“I wish I could tell the story

As he used to tell it then;
I’m sure that, with Heaven’s blessing,
It would reach the hearts of men.

“I often wish I could tell him,

Though we caused him so much pain
By our thoughtless, boyish frolic,
His lessons were not in vain.

“I’d like to tell him how Willie,

The merriest of us all,
From the field of Balaclava
Went home at the Master’s call.

“I’d like to tell him how Ronald,

So brimming with mirth and fun,
Now tells the heathen of India
The tale of the Crucified One.

“I’d like to tell him how Robert,

And Jamie, and George, and ‘Ray,’
Are honoured in the Church of God—
The foremost men of their day.

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“I’d like, yes, I’d like to tell him
 What his lesson did for me;
And how I am trying to follow
 The Christ of Gethsemane.

“Perhaps he knows it already,
 For Willie has told him, maybe,
That we are all coming, coming
 Through Christ of Gethsemane.

“How many besides I know not
 Will gather at last in heaven,
The fruit of that faithful sowing,
 But the sheaves are already seven.”

PREFATORY NOTE

Uphilas, their bishop, when translating the Old Testament for the Goths long ago, omitted altogether the four books of Samuel and Kings lest the stories of battle should stimulate too much the fierce spirit of the barbarians. In facing the task before me now I could almost wish that it were possible to imitate Bishop Uphilas, though for a very different reason.

For what is one to do with this vast mass of sacred literature, nearly thirty books, more than three-fourths of the whole Old Testament, that is covered by the story of the Prophets and Kings? How can one deal with it in a single Book of Lessons? One might perhaps tell of the kings alone, but it would be of little value leaving out their prophets.

Besides, I want to make the prophets stand out in their places, each in his own environment, each under his own kings—to make the pupil acquainted with them and interested in them as men, in the hope that he may thus be more induced to acquaint himself and interest himself in some of their writings and also be more likely to understand what they had in their minds. The prophets, except Isaiah, are very little read. Groups of sermons and speeches taken out of their setting in time

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and place with little or no indication as to author or environment are not likely to be interesting.

Now this is a very large undertaking. Covering so wide a field, lessons in detail are clearly impossible. After full consideration I have decided to treat the whole subject in bold, broad outline, omitting all but the salient features and trying to keep the personal interest by making it into a series of biographies.

The teacher will need very careful preparation. One difficulty he will find is that instead of giving, as in previous volumes, one chapter or section of Scripture to be dealt with I have sometimes had to dip into several chapters for one lesson. These he must study carefully beforehand. I should suggest that either before or after telling the story he should select from the Scripture portions indicated as much as the class will bear without weariness. I do not think it at all desirable to tell the stories merely as I have given them, without fastening them on to the words of Scripture. He must use his own discretion as to whether it is better to do this Scripture reading before or after the story.

One other suggestion. If he has really interested his class and made them talk, he will often find it difficult to get his lesson finished in the time. Therefore, if not bound by programme, I should advise him not to hurry. One of these lessons might often expand into two. The whole subject covers such a large expanse of Scripture that it is well worth taking plenty of time.

LESSON I

SAUL'S CORONATION

The Necessary Parts of

1 Samuel IX., XI., XIV., XV.

We have now come to the fourth volume of the Old Testament story. We have gone through the events of Genesis, then the remaining Pentateuch history as it centred around the life of Moses; then came the wild rough days of the reign of the Judges and now we are to follow the fortunes of Israel in the days of the Prophets and Kings. I wonder if you have by this time found out the use of learning all this ancient history. Is it of any more use than the learning of American or English history? Do you think God was more behind the Jewish history than behind these? I do not. I think God is equally behind all history. As much behind the Norman Conquest and the Spanish Armada and the American Revolution as behind any historical event in Old Testament story. The only difference that I can see is that God showed Himself in the one history, that He might teach men to look for Him in the other histories.

The Israelite history had inspired historians, not always very wise or very clever, but with a deep insight into the ways of God, whereas the modern history is often told only by mere essayists and newspaper writers, and secular historians, who only tell of the incidental and outward appearances and occurrences, and have not learned the deep insight which sees God behind all. If our study of God working behind the scenes of Jewish history teaches us to look for Him also behind the scenes of all other history, I think it will have been worth doing.

§ 1. *The Lost Asses*

We begin at the ninth chapter of 1 Samuel, when our last book—the “Story of the Judges”—closes. That story told us, how in the days of Samuel, the “last of the Judges,” Israel had demanded of God a king. And you remember how in the last scene of that story, the curtain fell on the old prophet quietly returning to Ramah, waiting on the hill of God till the king should come.

* * * * *

About ten years have passed, ten waiting years, when the curtain rises again on a very ordinary scene. A drove of asses gone astray on the mountains and a young farmer’s son with his dark Edomite servant¹ setting off to find them. A goodly youth was this young farmer’s son, “among the children of Israel there was not

¹The Jewish Talmud says that he was the afterwards famous or infamous Doeg the Edomite.

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a goodlier person.” But except for his fine appearance there seemed nothing especially to notice in him or his story here. It seems quite an ordinary story. He consulted with his servant whether they should climb the hill to Ramah. He talked to the girls going to the village well. He heard of a prophet holding a religious ceremony in the village, and he thought perhaps this prophet might be able by some magical power to tell him about the asses. Does it not seem just like an ordinary newspaper account of ordinary chance things happening? It chanced that the asses went astray one day and that Saul and not another went off to seek them. It chanced that on that day the people of Ramah many miles away invited Samuel to offer sacrifice. It chanced that Saul took that very direction, that he met the girls at the well, that he took their advice and went up to Ramah, little dreaming who was before him—little dreaming that God was sending him, and that the unknown “seer” on the hill was Israel’s great prophet, looking out with his dim, old eyes for the king who should be.

God was behind all those chances. One wonders if He is behind all chances, such curious things happen to us sometimes “by chance.” By chance we went by this or that tram or train. By chance we met this or that person—and sometimes we find that our whole after life was affected by that chance. A girl meets a friend who changes her whole life course, a man meets a girl who afterwards becomes his wife. Does anything happen by chance? I don’t know. All this life of ours is solemn and mysterious and wonderful, and God is behind and over it all.

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Now picture to yourself that scene at the gate of the little town—Saul coming carelessly up the hill seeking his asses, and the old prophet watching him with an admiration and wonder and growing excitement as the feeling deepened in his heart that this splendid young countryman is the coming king. I think he fell in love with him right straight away. I think in spite of all Saul's faults the old man loved him tenderly all his days, more than he ever loved David. We read afterwards how he watched over him, and prayed for him, and mourned for him when he went wrong. It is very touching this tenderness of Samuel for the man who was coming to remove him from being chief in Israel. And the thought of all that makes us watch with deeper interest the first meeting of the two.

What a wonderful day that was for Saul when he learned for the first time that God had a life plan for him, a great, glorious, beautiful life plan—when Samuel talked alone with him of the great future, and anointed him king in the name of the Lord—when the wondering youth returned to his farm keeping the great secret hidden in his heart. And more wonderful still when he met the band of young prophets singing to Jehovah, and immediately the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, and God gave him another heart. God gave him another heart! What do you understand by that? Surely that was to make him nobler and fuller for his great life work. Already his heart was full of wonder and excitement, but now all in a moment there came on him a new feeling, a consciousness of thoughts and desires altogether different, higher, grander, nobler. Does God do all

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this in our day? Yes, just the same—to the young girl kneeling at her first Communion, to the young college student on his ordination day—to the man suddenly converted from a life of sin—to the young husband and wife on the day of their marriage—new hopes and thoughts and desires for good come to prepare them for their future life work. Often they disappoint God in spite of it as Saul did. But that does not make God's help less real.

§ 2. *God Save the King!*

Chapter x. 17, etc. Now a few months afterwards we have a brilliant picture on the plains at Mizpeh. Samuel's message has gone out through the land, and all the warriors of Israel have come together, and the plain is dotted over with tents, and bright with the standards of the tribes, and all the people are keenly excited, for they all come for the election of their king. They do not know who it is to be. They gather around the prophet and hear God's word, and with solemn sense of God's presence they begin the ceremony of drawing lots.

First all the tribes assemble, and the lot falls on the tribe of Benjamin, and the people solemnly feel that God is guiding them. Then the other tribes stand back and watch the families of Benjamin assemble. The family of Matri is chosen. Then the excitement grows deeper as the lot drawing goes on till at last the rumour spreads rapidly through the camp that Saul the son of Kish is marked out by the lot as God's chosen King of Israel. "Who is this Saul?" "What is he like?" Of course

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every one was full of curiosity. But he had hidden himself, too modest perhaps, or perhaps too much afraid of this great responsibility. At last they found him. It was a thrilling moment when Samuel led him forth. I want you to use your imagination and let your eyes rest on him, as he first appears before the people on his Coronation Day at Mizpeh—this handsome, athletic young giant in the full pride of his youth and strength. In stately presence he stood before them every inch a king. “Amongst the children of Israel, there was not a goodlier person, from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.” No wonder the desire of Israel should be upon him in these rude, heroic days, when strength of limb and splendid appearances were the great passport to success. No wonder the crowd burst into enthusiasm when they saw him, and shouted together in loud, glad acclaim, “God save the King!” How the heart of Saul would stir within him at the cry. Ah! it was a grand start in life that God had given that young king. Alas that he did not use it well!

§ 3. *The Fiery Cross*

Chapter xi. Again the scene changes. We are in Gibeah of Saul, the young king’s native village, and we find the king back at the plough-tail again! These are wild, desolate times for Israel. No time for palaces and crowns and royal splendour with the fierce tribes of Ammon and Amalek and Philistia closing in around them, and holding the chief fortresses in the land. Like Shamgar and Gideon in the judges’ days, like

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Cincinnatus at Rome working on his farm, like King Alfred in England in the shepherd's hut, the king of Israel is at the plough-tail biding his time.

And now his time is come. It is evening, and he is driving back his team of oxen when suddenly he is startled by the deep wailing of a crowd, "What means it?" he asked. And the people tell him, "The Ammonites have surrounded our friends in Jabesh, there is no escape. They are about to put out the right eyes of the men." Then "the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and his anger was kindled greatly." Don't you like that expression? All fierce, righteous indignation for the sake of others is the work of God's spirit. The schoolboy who for the sake of some smaller boy thrashes the bully of the school is doing God's work. It is only selfish anger and fighting for slights done to yourself that are sin. In a moment Saul has struck down the bullocks of his team, and is cutting their bleeding-flesh in little pieces before the people. "Take these pieces North and South and East and West to every village and every town. Tell them, if you are not at the trysting-place with the king when he starts for Jabesh thus shall it be done to your cattle too." Is not it a stirring picture—the fierce anger of the young king and the new hope of the downtrodden people—the messengers with the bleeding flesh, speeding over the hills of Benjamin like the runners of Roderick Dhu with the fiery cross in the *Lady of the Lake*, a picture of righteous wrath and unselfish help, that was good for them all.

Of course they swept the Ammonites before them. There is no such stimulus to victory as rage about

another's wrong. And it is a beautiful conclusion to the victory, that, when the army wanted to kill the men who had despised him at his coronation, Saul nobly replied, "Not a single man of them shall die, for God has been to-day fighting for Israel!"

§ 4. *The Centre of Life*

The scene changes again—and again—and again. But we cannot follow all the changing fortunes of Israel. You see Israel was like England in the times of the Danes, or like Spain in the Moorish days with the enemy holding the fastnesses all through the land. Moab and Ammon oppressed them on the east, Edom and Amalek on the south, and, in the very heart of the land, the big, stupid Philistines whom Samson used to fight and mock, and ridicule. There was no lack of wars, and of romantic adventures like that of Jonathan and his armour-bearer scaling the tower (*ch. xiv.*). But we have to get the whole life of Saul into two chapters, and we are concerned with Saul's character and the lessons of his life more than with the fights and skirmishes of the tribes.

Up to this time it looks as if all were going well with him. God had called him to a high position, given him great opportunities, splendid endowments, attractive gifts of body and mind, and over all the great gift of His Holy Spirit to lift up and ennoble his life. With such a start one would think he could not go wrong. Yet the Bible seems to teach us that something else is needed, something down deep in the inner nature of the man

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himself. God wants greatly to bless us, but He must leave our wills free. He cannot just pull strings to make us act like marionettes upon the stage. Our great dignity is that we have at the centre of our being our power to decide, so that the man with the grand start in life can lose it, and the poor struggler with very few advantages can rise to a noble life with the help of God which is around him. That is where Saul's life touches our own. That is what makes his story so solemn and sad. For he was just like many of ourselves, not a monster, but an ordinary, middling sort of man. I don't think he really cared very much about God, or longed above everything else to please Him, and to be good. And all the advantages and opportunities, and gifts and endowment that God gave him could not make up for that. What a man feels and desires with regard to God is the one important thing. Up to this Saul had shown up well. But that does not always mean that things are right within. When no sharp test comes—when there is happiness and comfort, and freedom from temptation—many people show up well; but the testing is bound to come some time.

§ 5. *The Rejection of Saul*

The first evil recorded of him (*ch.* xiii.) is not very easy to understand. We do not really know in what his sin consisted. We are told that Saul and his men were out on the battlefield waiting for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices, and bless the army. That because Samuel did not come in time, Saul offered the sacrifice himself. The wrong seems to have been in the spirit of the act,

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not merely in usurping the priestly office. David offered sacrifices without any blame. Judging from the whole story one feels that Saul must have acted irreverently or disobeyed some definite command (see *v.* 13). Imagine a King in our day in like circumstances, after waiting vainly for a clergyman, rising up at last in irreverent impatience to consecrate the Holy Communion himself, as a matter of form to be gone through, or a superstitious rite that might bring good luck to the army. If Saul did anything like this it would indicate a very wrong attitude towards God. And as you watch Samuel's fierce anger and solemn denunciation of the act, you must see that this act was in some way a clear proof of Saul's wilfulness and disobedience.

Chapter *xiv.* tells an incident that puts Saul back into the ignorant superstition of Jephthah's time. To ensure victory he makes a vow to kill whoever shall taste of food, and because Jonathan, who did not know this, tasted some honey he wanted to kill him. It looks a little like the beginning of that half insane spirit of his later life.

Chapter *xv.* tells of his next open disobedience. It is difficult to speak of it briefly, since it tells of a thing that puzzles us, the destruction of a whole tribe, commanded it is said by God. We have already more than once considered this difficulty before. You remember that God's teaching of the world was gradual, as men could bear it. Stern, righteous men inspired to hate and loathe the horrible abominations around them declared the will of God as far as they could see it. It does not follow that they were always right. Perhaps God did desire the

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destruction of the Amalekites. They were very impure, wicked people. Perhaps you will say that they were very ignorant, too, and that it was hard that they should be cut off in their ignorance and sin. If so, remember that they lived still after death, and were still in the hands of God in that new life, and that the judge of all the earth will do right, there as well as here. Don't forget that the men of the old world were as children in the great gradual school of God, that it was only at the coming of our Lord that the full light came. Therefore if we want to judge of any Old Testament command, we must always bring it to the light of our Lord's fuller teaching in the Gospels.

But at any rate Saul and the people believed that the destruction of wicked Amalek was God's will for them. And they knew that they were forbidden to win booty for themselves. They were God's crusaders, consecrated to an awful mission of judgment to sweep away the abominations polluting the earth. But they must not make profit out of it. That would spoil the grandeur and holiness of their terrible task. They must not touch the spoil. This was the command that Saul deliberately broke. He spared the king and the best of the cattle. Not for mercy, for he had destroyed all the refuse and useless, and had killed the common people, young and old.

He was evidently pleased with himself, and set up for himself a monument at Carmel (xv. 12). But one day on the homeward march his heart grew suddenly troubled, as the grim old prophet Samuel appeared

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suddenly in the camp. Nervously, with suspicious haste, he hurries to tell him:—

“I have obeyed the commandment of the Lord.”

But he trembles at the sternness of the face before him.

“What meaneth then this bleating of sheep, and lowing of oxen in mine ears?”

“Oh! the people have done that, to sacrifice unto the Lord.” Then the king stands silent. He knows well what is coming from that stern, upright judge, who never sought even a shoe latchet for himself. Like a lightning flash the quick judgment fell.

“Behold! to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.”

Ah! things had got very bad since that day, perhaps twenty years ago, when he had presented that splendid young king to the people at Mizpeh. Probably in many other ways not recorded he had seen the wrong attitude of the heart of Saul. Now he was so utterly grieved and disappointed, that he went away and refused to see Saul any more till the day of his death—till the day when his spirit came back from Hades to confirm the king's doom. Do you think Samuel was too stern? Ah! look at him, that dear old man returning to his lonely house at Ramah, more miserable about it all than Saul himself. He could not forget him, nor the early days, nor the noble qualities that he once possessed.

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Continually the cry of intercession went up from the hill of Ramah for that wayward king whom he so dearly loved (xv. 34, 35). Don't you think it must be a faint reflection of the pain in God's heart when any of us goes from Him into evil.

(At beginning or end of this lesson read 1 Samuel, parts of chap. ix., xi., xiv., xv.)

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON I

Why should this study of Jewish history be of any more value than that of any other history?

How did Saul first meet Samuel?

Describe his election and coronation.

Tell some of his acts of disobedience.

What is your opinion about the slaughter of the Amalekites?