

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

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FIRST QUARTER. SUNDAY, January 2nd, 1876. - Saul Rejected. - 1 Samuel xv. 10-23. B. C. 1079.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 17-23.

GOLDEN TEXT. - "When he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected." Heb. xii. 17.

ANALYSIS. - I. The word of the Lord. Vs. 10, 11. II. Samuel's displeasure. Vs. 11. III. Saul Interviewed. Vs. 12-23.

DAILY READINGS. - Monday, 1 Sam. xv. Tuesday, Deut. xxv. 17-19. Wednesday, Psalm i. Thursday, Psalm cxix. 1-6. Friday, Deut. vi. Saturday, 1 John ii. 3-6. Sunday, Ps. li. 16, 17; Hos. vi. 6.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION. - Saul, chosen king B. C. 1095, has served Israel ten or fifteen years nobly and brilliantly. See 1 Sam. xi. 13, 14. His royal state has been organized on a scale of princely magnificence. He has hosts, and captains over them: body-guards and messengers; diadems and bracelets. He has a mighty and ever-present spear. 1 Sam. xviii. 10; xix. 9; xx. 33; xxvi. 11; 2 Sam. i. 6. Self-will and rashness appear to have been up to this time his chief faults; but to these he now adds disobedience, falsehood, and hypocrisy. He forgets that, though a human king, he is to render obedience to God's commands, as made known by Samuel, Vs. 1-3, contrasted with vs. 8, 9. He has similarly disobeyed before (1 Sam. xiii. 8-14), but now breaks down on a renewed test of obedience, offered in God's goodness as a last opportunity of winning back his already forfeited kingdom. But, like multitudes of unbelievers, he abuses the long-suffering of God. His vanity overcomes his fidelity, and the fate of his kingdom is sealed. The penalty, though not executed at once, is unchangeable. Ishbosheth, the youngest of his sons, survives his father's reign but seven years and a half, and the dynasty of Saul, lasting forty years (Acts xiii. 21), is doomed, and doomed forever.

EXPOSITION. - Verse 11. - It repenteth me. Spoken "after the manner of men." - Horne. "An affecting representation of God's sorrow for sin," as in Gen. vi. 6. - Taylor Lewis. "If it imply a change in the Divine mind, it must be in profound unison with the eternal purpose." - Murphy. "When man repents, his will is changed; when God repents, he wills a change." - Old Divine. In this connection see Num. xxiii. 19; 1 Sam. xv. 29; Is. lv. 8; my commandments, see vs. 3, and vs. 8, 9. It grieved Samuel - Heb., "was angry" - because Saul was to be set aside. Cf. Jon. iv. 1.

Verse 12. - Carmel. South of Judah. A place - i. e., a monument - on the line of Saul's return from the Amalekites.

Verse 13. - I have performed. Conscious guilt often hurries to avow its innocence. But what hypocrisy!

Verse 14. - What meaneth. See Num. xxxii. 23. So vain is the effort to deceive.

Verse 15. - The people spared. A miserable shift of responsibility. Cf. Gen. iii. 12. In the destruction of Amalek, Saul is careful to say, We destroyed; but in the sparing, the only censurable part, he says They - the people - did it. The rest - a sad compromise! Forgive me; I took all I wanted, and gave God the rest. Just like many now-a-days.

Verse 16. - And Samuel said. Seeing now the justice of God's judgments. To me this night - not here in Gilgal, but in Ramah, fifteen miles away.

Verse 17. - Wast little. See 1 Sam. ix. 21.

Verse 18. - The sinners. Reason for their wholesale destruction. See Deut. xxv. 17-19; Gen. xiii. 13.

Verse 20. - I have obeyed. But only in part; upon which see Matt. vi. 24. Have brought Agag, the king - in my captive train.

Verse 22. - And Samuel said. In most gentle speech. Hath the Lord, etc. - a wonderful truth, uttered in a time of Jewish ceremonialism, viz., that God asks the heart - the whole heart; the life - the whole life; and that nothing else, lamb of fold or gold of offer, brought to his altar, will suffice: that all ritualism, without the obedience of the whole heart, is an abomination in his sight. Cf. Ps. li. 16, 17; Eccles. v. 1; Hos. vi. 6.

Verse 23. - As the sin of witchcraft - which Saul had zealously rooted out, even

as he had the sin of idolatry, little thinking that disobedience is a greater sin than either of them. Chap. xxviii. 3.

QUESTIONS. - When was Saul chosen king? How long has he reigned? How many years in all did he reign? Though a human king, to whom is he to render obedience? Who was authorized to make known to him God's commands? What temptation overcame his fidelity? What was the penalty inflicted upon disobedience?

Verse 11. What is meant by "It repenteth me," as spoken by Jehovah? What Scriptures teach us that God is unchangeable? Ans. Mal. iii. 6; James i. 17; Num. xxiii. 19. In what sense was Samuel grieved? Why? What prophet was like him in this particular? Ans. Jonah iv. 1.

Verse 13. When men are in haste to assert their innocence, what is it apt to prove? What is better than a mere profession of piety? Is a profession therefore needless? Matt. x. 32.

Verse 14. Moses says (Num. xxi. 23) that our sins will surely "find us out." How does this verse prove his words to be true?

Verse 15. Is it noble or mean to shift the responsibility of our sins upon others? Of whom does Saul in this thing remind us? Gen. iii. 12. Will the faults of other people help us at the final judgment-day? Rom. xiv. 12. Does not one sin often make way for another?

"And he that does one sin at first, And lies to hide it, makes it two."

Verse 18. Had the destruction of the Amalekites been foretold? How was it justified?

Verse 20. Just what had God commanded Saul to do? Vs. 3. Just what had Saul done? Vs. 9. How, then, can he now say, "I have obeyed?"

Verse 22. What wonderful truth do we have here upon an Old Testament background? What makes it particularly wonderful in its utterance now? In what is ritualistic religion often sadly defective? Ans. In heart worship. Cf. John iv. 23, 24; 2 Tim. iii. 5. What did Jesus always do? John viii. 29.

Youths' Department.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT.

Noislessly the snow is falling On the garden walks outside; And the old ball fire is burning Merrily this Christmas tide - Ah, you smile! my Maggie, tell me - What bright thoughts you think the while - Dreaming of your lover, darling? Aye, I know what brought that smile!

Come and draw your chair beside me, Where the fire can glint and play On your face, which hides so shyly Wealth of loving light away; I will tell you of a Christmas, Twenty years ago to night, When I won a gift still growing Dearer, fairer, in my sight.

When I came along the footpath, Through the blinding sleet and snow, Up to where the narrow casements Cast outside a ruddy glow - Standing for a moment idly By the oaken window-sill, Here I saw a maiden sitting In the firelight fair and still.

Drooping head, with braids brown golden, Parted lips, and warm flushed cheek, Blue eyes, like your own, sweet Maggie, Where the light plays hide and seek - Well I knew the quiet figure, In her dark, soft, ruby gown, With a small hand like a lily, On its rich fold hanging down.

Then I smiled and entered softly, But she did not heed my tread, Till I came and stood beside her, Touching her bright braided head - "Marguerite," I stooped and whispered, "Lay that little band of thine, And the priceless gem within it, In this faithful clasp of mine."

I have loved you long, dear playmate - You have been my beacon light, And I come from far to ask you For this Christmas-gift to-night. Speaking thus, I stood and watched her, But she stirred not from her place Till a light like day-dawn, redly Rose upon her gentle face.

And with a pretty fluttering motion, Like a wild bird to its nest, Stole her hand to mine, and lay there Safely in its life-long rest - Marguerite, my pearl, I won it! How I blessed that Christmas night, When I found it waiting for me In the old hearth's dancing light!

Twenty years ago! I speak it With a smile, and with a tear, For I find it grow more precious, Day by day, and year by year; Though the snows of many winters May begin to touch me now, While my pearl gleams in my bosom, They can reach not heart or brow.

Well, my tale is almost ended, 'Tis her foot upon the stair - Bonnie Maggie, darling Maggie - With the mother's eyes and hair - Have you guessed it? She is coming With her step so light and swift; Go and kiss your mother sweet one, Her love was my Christmas gift.

THREE SUNBEAMS.

Three little sunbeams started out from behind a cloud one day to seek their fortunes. Playing along on their way, each thought of his future. Said one: "I will seek the waves of some river, or sea, and will spend my life in playing with the ripples, and frolicking with the fishes; and when I am weary and night comes on, I will go to sleep in the saffron heart of the water-lily. I will take light wherever I go, and all shall bless me. Happiness is the fortune I seek."

Another said, "I will be high, high up, where all shall climb to reach me. I shall fly to the peak of some lofty mountain-top, or I will grace the palace home of a king, and perhaps rest upon the coronet of gems worn by his beautiful queen. I will be admired. Poets shall sing my beauty, and all shall speak of me. Fame is the fortune I seek."

But the third sighed, saying nothing; yet she thought sadly to herself, "Ah, me! I am but a little beam of sunshine; what can I do? I too would love to play upon the ocean, or rest in the lily bed, or light the home of a king; yet wherever I may go, I will, at least, be content. I will love all things, and Peace shall be my fortune."

Down upon the bank of a beautiful river, a group of merry children stood with rods and lines. Happy little fishermen!

"How fortunate," thought a little sunbeam, "now I shall have joy indeed." But soon they complained of the sunlight. "We can catch nothing here," said they, "let us go down into the shade of the trees."

A snowy-winged sail-boat came gliding across the water. In it were seated two lovers. The lady's curls were like gold, her eyes bluer than the sparkling depths below.

"Ah! she will see me," said Sunbeam, dancing lightly from ripple to ripple watching her reflection in the water, thinking nothing in the world could be more lovely than herself. But the fair lady raised her hand to her eyes, exclaiming, "How pleasant! were it not for the sunlight. Let us hasten to the shade."

And once more Sunbeam was left sorrowful and humiliated. She sank down, down, upon the hard rocky bed of the river. None loved or admired her; she was forsaken and despised, and she wished herself once more among the clouds with her laughing sisters.

In the luxurious apartment of a magnificent palace a little sunbeam has found its way, lighting up frescoed ceiling and gleaming marble. Soon the energetic voice of the housekeeper is heard: "Annette, close the shutters and draw the curtains. It is strange that you are so careless. That sunlight will fade this crimson to white."

Poor little Sunbeam, shut out to shine upon hard walk and rough pavement! But what of the one who said: "I will be content?"

Up on the mountain-side she had found a bit of moss shivering in the cold and shadow. "Let me warm you," whispered Sunbeam, sending a cheering ray into the heart of the moss, which lifted up its head and grew warm and happy all day. Darting on, she shone into a narrow alley where sunlight rarely found its way, and slipping in through a hole in a neat but tattered curtain, found herself - in a basin of soap and water! Not a poetical home for our little Sunbeam! Do you remember her motto?

Three little children were receiving their daily bath; for in this humble lodging, neatness and order were not thought to be incompatible with poverty. But little Sunbeam's wonderful arrival caused sudden suspension of operations.

Such shouts of joy as sounded within those attic walls I am sure had never been heard there before. Cries of "See, see!" "Rainbows!" "On, look, quick!" And when an old pipe-stem had been procured, and the bubbles began dancing and chasing each other about the room, I think it safe to say that no happier children could have been found in that or any other city.

And it was only when, exhausted by excess of happiness they had fallen into a restful slumber, that Sunbeam softly withdrew. And soon fading away in the arms of "Twilight," she thought of her brief life and the happiness she had given, and said:

"Poor, simple little Sunbeam that I am, I have found not only my own fortune, but those of my sisters also. I have had love and admiration; and I am at peace with all the world, and am content." - Morning Star.

WHAT ROBBY SAW.

Birds know a great deal. They know how to find their food, and where to go for a change of climate. They know, too, how to build nests, and how to take care of their children. They are wise almost as soon as they are born.

But if you think birds cannot be taught anything besides the things that they know of their own accord, you are very much mistaken. They can be taught to do many funny tricks. I know a boy named Robby who has seen them, with his own eyes, do - what, do you think?

Why, he has seen two yellow canary-birds harnessed to a little bit of a coach, drawing it along in the liveliest way, with a canary bird for a driver and another canary for footman. Think of that; Yes, and he has seen these same birds do even more than this.

He has seen them act a play. I'll tell you about it.

First, one pretty little fellow, named Mr. Prim, came hopping in as lively as a cricket. Then came another pretty little yellow fellow, named Major Flit, and he had - A GUN! And - O, O! - what did Major Flit do but point his gun right at Mr. Prim and fire it off! Down fell Mr. Prim stark and stiff - his eyes shut tight, and his poor little toes curled under. But Major Flit was not sorry one bit for shooting poor Mr. Prim. He strutted about as if he had done something fine. Then another canary, named Corporal Gruff, came in, carrying two little pails of water. They were about as big as thimbles. He shook his head sadly as he looked at poor Mr. Prim lying so helpless and stiff. Then he hopped savagely up to Major Flit, and started at him, with an air that said:

"What does this mean, sir?"

Something dreadful might have happened then if, quick as a flash, Mr. Prim had not jumped up, as if to say:

"Ho! ho! you thought I was killed, did you? Well, I'm just as much alive as you are!"

Now the birds had been taught by their kind master to do all this. The gun would go off and make a flash, but it had no shot in it.

Robby dreamed that night of Mr. Prim, the Major and the Corporal; the Major had on soldier clothes, and Mr. Prim was shaving himself before a yellow looking-glass! Was not that a funny dream?

If you ever go to a show where there are performing birds, look out sharply for Mr. Prim, the Major, and Corporal Gruff - St. Nicholas, for December.

A SILK-LINED HOUSE.

I heard two little boys down by the brook, to-day, talking about their father's houses, and boasting how grand they were. Johnny said his house had a velvet carpet in the parlor, and lace curtains at the windows. Willie said his house had splendid glass chandeliers, that sparkled like diamonds; and the walls were beautifully painted. I thought I would like to tell them about a house very much more wonderful than those they lived in, because it is built by a small insect.

This house is made by a kind of spider that lives in California, and is called the Mason spider. His house is very marvellous for such a little fellow to make all by himself, without any hammer, or saw, or trowel, or axe, or nails, or plaster, or any such things as men use in building; and yet his mansion is fit for a little queen; for it is lined throughout with white silk.

This spider's house is nearly as large as a hen's egg, and is built on a sort of red clay, almost as handsome as the brown stone they are so proud of in New York City. It is cylindrical in shape. The top opens with a little trap-door, which is fastened with a hinge, and shuts of itself. The door and inside are lined with the most delicate white silk, finer than the costliest dress ever worn by a lady.

Mr. Spider builds his house in some crevice, or bore - a cylindrical hole in the clay, so that all is concealed from view except this tiny trap-door. When he sees an enemy approaching, he runs quickly to his silk lined house, swings open the little door, goes in, and as the door shuts tightly after him, holds firmly by placing his claws in two openings in the white silk lining of the door, just large enough to admit his little hands or feet, whichever you may choose to call them; and here, nestled in this luxurious retreat, he bids defiance to all intruders.

I heard all about this spider from a gentleman who had been to California, and had brought home one of these red clay,

silk-lined houses. He was showing it to some children as they were walking near me. I wish you all could have seen it. - Child's Paper.

A PLEASANT PRAYER-MEETING.

The Rev. Washington Gladden says, in the Vermont Chronicle: "In the first place, as we have already seen, the place in which the meeting is held has much to do with its pleasantness and profitableness. There are those whose faith is so robust that it can defy untoward circumstances; but it is not so with all; and a good prayer-meeting implies not only the spiritual quickening of a few, but the profiting of the whole assembly. The room ought to be warm in winter - always warm; so that the people shall have no misgivings when the bell rings as to whether they shall suffer if they answer its summons; it ought to be well ventilated at all seasons of the year.

"It is quite possible to have an excellent prayer-meeting in an ordinary lecture-room, with fixed pews; but that is not the best model of a prayer-room. A pleasant parlor, carpeted, with pictures on the walls, and chairs arranged in circles round the leader, is much better. What we want to secure is freedom and familiarity, and there is likely to be less constraint and less reserve in such a room as this than in one where the people sit in straight rows on immovable benches."

VEAL.

The golden calf which Aaron made was a valuable calf. It was doubtless a very beautiful calf. It was a docile, harmless calf. It was of the finest stock. We should rather have a loin steak of that calf than the best entire veal in the market. Probably it was worth twenty-five thousand dollars. There could be no moral, commercial, artistic or æsthetic objection to that calf. But Moses smashed it in righteous wrath, because the people put it to an unbecoming use. There is much of this sort of cattle in the world in our own day, and not a few of them in the church. Any form, symbol, standard, man, building, tradition - anything that is set up out of its proper relations to God, the Bible, the gospel - is a calf, which, if the Lord does not smash it, is because He may say, "Ephraim is joined to his idols. Let him alone." - Christian at Work.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

The Rev. Leigh Richmond was once conversing with a brother clergyman on the case of a poor man who had acted inconsistently with his religious profession. After some angry and severe remarks on the conduct of such persons, the gentleman with whom he was discussing the case concluded by saying:

"I have no notion of such pretences; I will have nothing to do with him."

"Nay, brother," replied Leigh Richmond, "let us be humble and moderate. Remember who has said, 'making a difference.' With opportunity on the one hand, and Satan at the other, and the grace of God at neither, where should you and I be?"

TRIAL OF MR. TONGUE.

Mr. Tongue was charged with being "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison," and in proof of the charge, the law book was produced, and a passage cited from James iii. 8. The defendant replied that if it were not for Mr. Heart, who lived at a little way below him, he should be as innocent as his neighbors; Mr. Nose and the Messrs. Eyes, and in support of his position, he cited a passage from the same law book, Matt. xv. 18. The Court decided that the defence was a sound one, and that nothing really good could be expected from Mr. Tongue until a radical change should take place in his neighbor Heart.

"Now, George, you must divide honorably with your brother Charles."

"What is 'honorably' mother?"

"It means you must give him the largest piece."

"Then, mother, I'd rather that Charley should divide it."

Help others, and you relieve yourself. Go out and drive away the cloud from that distressed friend's brow, and you will return with a lighter heart.

Where to go when short of money. Go to work.