

The Sunday-School.

FOURTH QUARTER,
LESSON V.—Nov. 1.

DAVID AND ABSALOM.

2 Samuel 15: 1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Honour thy father and mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.—Ex. 20: 12.

THE COURSE OF THE HISTORY.—It is somewhat difficult to determine the order and dates of the events during the years that followed David's fall and repentance. If we take the forty years of v. 7 to be correct, the rebellion of Absalom must be placed in the last year or two of David's reign, and the events of 2 Samuel 21: 1-14; 24: 1-25 occur during the period while Absalom was plotting against his father. If, as most scholars think, the forty is a mistake of some copyist for four, then the rebellion occurred about eight years earlier, in the thirty-second year of David's reign.

THE DOUBLE CURRENT IN DAVID'S LIFE.—Throughout the twelve years covered by this lesson we see the double working of the two sides of David's life.

1. The working of the evil leaven which David's sin brought into his life. The sin must be rebuked and branded as evil, even while the royal penitent is forgiven, lest men take, from even the divine forgiveness, encouragement to sin. The lesson today records some of the effects of David's sin.

2. On the other hand, more good than evil flowed from David's life. The great good in his life, and his repentance, bore fruits of paradise. David was mellowing and sweetening under his discipline.

ABSALOM.—Absalom was the son of Maach, the daughter of the king of Geshur. He was renowned for his personal appearance, and for his marvelous head of hair. He was, also, vain, crafty and ambitious.

The Circumstances in Which he Grew Up. (1) His mother was the daughter of a heathen king, and she brought heathen influences with her. (2) He grew up under the evil influences of polygamy. The whole atmosphere was impure and sensual. (3) During all his early life David was so busy with the great affairs of the kingdom that he gave but small attention to the training of his family. (4) Just as he was reaching manhood the dreadful example of his father's sin was set before him, and the scandal of the court defiled his young imaginations. (5) On the other hand, the boys knew their father's bitter repentance. The greatest part by far of his father's life and example was on the side of virtue, courage, and religion. (6) He had the full power of choice as to which influences he would accept, and he chose the evil. Out of this wrong choice, unrepented of, grew his crimes.

He Murders his Older Brother. Amnon, David's oldest son and heir of his throne, committed a most dastardly crime against his half-sister. Absalom, Tamar's brother, made himself the avenger of blood, and slew Amnon.

The Exile. The assassination of the prince shocked the community, and Absalom fled to the court of his maternal grandfather Talmai, king of Geshur, in Syria. He continued in exile 3 years. David began to long for his son. Absalom was brought back to Jerusalem, but for two years more he was a semi-exile. At length, however, there was a reconciliation.

FOUR YEARS OF PLOTTING AGAINST HIS FATHER.—Vs. 1-6. Motives. 1. His desire to become king. His unfitness to reign was well known to David, and, under divine counsel, arrangements were already in progress for the succession of his brother Solomon, then a little boy.

2. A sense of injustice. As an exile for three years, and out of favour for two more in Jerusalem, he had a feeling of being wronged.

3. More than likely he was in antagonism to his father's religion. Absalom was half heathenish and wholly worldly, and he would hate a religion whose moral precepts were a condemnation of all he was and did.

The Situation. Unless there had been an unrest among the people and a widespread dissatisfaction, the success of Absalom's revolution would have been impossible.

Absalom's Methods. In the soil prepared by dissatisfaction, Absalom sowed the seeds of treason and rebellion in two ways:

1. By a princely magnificence. And it came to pass after this. After the apparent reconciliation of Absalom to his father. Prepared him chariots and horses. Imitating foreign kings, he introduced the startling novelty of a chariot and horses, hitherto unknown in the city, and equipped fifty men to run before it. All this made an impression on the people that here was something kingly.

2. By the wiles of a selfish politician. Absalom rose up early. In the east public business is always transacted in the morning. And stood beside the way of the gate. By the side of the road leading to the gate of the king's palace, where he sat to transact business. Any man that had a controversy. Better a suit. See, thy matters, etc. He artfully flatters each suitor by pronouncing a favorable decision on his case. There is no man deputed of the king. He implies that David was neglecting his duty in not providing judges. Oh that I were made judge in the land. I would remedy these evils and do justice to all. Put forth his hand, etc. It was a great condescension in one so magnificent to express his affection by a kiss. Stole the hearts. Robbed his father of the people's affection and transferred it to himself.

THE OPEN REBELLION.—Vs. 7-12. And it came to pass after forty years of David's reign; or the forty is an error for four, according to Josephus and some ancient versions, in which case the meaning is, after four years of this plotting. Let me go and pay my vow. To blind eyes of his father he became very religious in appearance. In Hebron. His birthplace, and hence a natural place for paying his vow. I will serve the Lord. Offer a sacrifice. But Absalom sent spies. Secret emissaries had been sent out to prepare all the disaffected ones for revolt. As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet. Absalom arranged a succession of trumpeters from south to north, so that he could be proclaimed by a telegraph of sound, on the same day through all the land. Absalom reigneth in Hebron. So the first news the people would have of the rebellion would be that it was an accomplished fact. Two hundred men . . . that were called. Invited to the sacrificial feast as Absalom's guests. They knew not anything. This shows the extreme secrecy with which the con-

spiracy was conducted. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel. David's chief counselor, and a man of marvelous sagacity (2 Sam. 16: 23). Absalom doubtless knew that he was disaffected with David. The Gilonite. Belonging to Giloh.

PRACTICAL LESSONS.—I. It is entirely wrong to judge of David's later life solely by the troubles that came upon him in these later days.

2. Contrast the youthful training of Absalom with that of David as connected with their characters and careers.

3. Bad and early training amid evil influences is a terrible misfortune.

4. It is a great evil for the head of a family to be so absorbed in business, public or private, that he neglects the training of his children.

5. It is always a question how much of the evil in wayward children comes from bad influences around them, and how much from their own choice. For there are around all many good influences, and each one chooses which path he will take.

6. Contrast the sin of David with the sin of Absalom. David repented and returned to righteousness. Absalom kept on in his evil ways to the bitter end.



LED BY EXAMPLE.

From Japan comes the story of an exposition of Christianity from a man who obtained a Bible which he read with much interest. When he had finished he said: "This is a fine thing in theory, but I wonder how it would work in practice?"

On the train on which he was traveling he noticed a lady who, he was told, was a Christian. He watched her attentively to see how she would act, and said: "If I can see anything in her conduct like this Book, I will believe it."

Before the day was over he had seen so many little acts of unselfishness on her part and so much thoughtfulness and consideration for the comfort of her fellow passengers that he was deeply impressed, and the result of that railway ride was that he went to his home determined to make the Bible the guide of his whole life, and become a true and consistent Christian.

It may be that we are in the same position as the Japanese Christian; that our every word and deed are watched by some one who is leaning toward the Christian life, but who is still in doubt. Is it not a solemn thought? Surely, we should be ever on the watch lest we should prove stumbling-blocks in the path of such a one.



SOLEMN CHARGE.

If you are a preacher, magnify the royal ordinance of preaching. Do not minify preaching and magnify ceremonials. Preach a modern gospel, but the everlasting and only gospel, with no additions nor subtractions. Do not deliver cheap editorials and hashed magazine articles. You need not be scholastic or artistic, and you should not be metaphysical. Science is for experts, but the gospel is for sinners. You are an oracle, rather than an artist. A gospel sermon is not an oration. God wants holy men more than brainy men in preaching, and heart more than art in worship.

The greatest thing in the world is the soul. The greatest evil is sin. The greatest work is salvation. The only remedy for sin is the gospel, and the

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Death and life are in the power of the tongue; and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof. Prov. 18: 21.

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He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life. Prov. 13: 3.

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A wholesome tongue is a tree of life. Prov. 15: 4.