

The Sunday-School.

FOURTH QUARTER, LESSON III.—Oct 18.

DAVID'S CONFESSION.

Psalm 51: 1-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*—Psa. 51: 10.

THE LESSON includes the whole Psalm; and David's sin described in 2 Sam. II, 12.

LEARN BY HEART.—All the Psalm, especially vs. 1, 2, 7, 10, 12, 17.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Author.*—David the king. *Date.*—Probably a little beyond the middle of his reign, B.C. 1034 or 996.

THE 51ST PSALM.—It is one of what are called the Seven Penitential Psalms.

The *Inscription* to the chief musician of David's great choir shows that the hymn was "for perpetual use in the service of song before the congregation of Israel. He had sinned before the nation; so he would have his repentance go forth before not the nation only, but the world."

DAVID'S FALL INTO SIN (see 2 Sam. II, 12).—*The Double Crime.* David's sin consisted of the two most heinous wrongs one person can commit against another,—adultery and murder. Moreover, it was a sin against God (2 Sam. 12: 9, 10; Psa. 51: 4.) It defied God's law, which David was bound to maintain. It dishonored God and religion before all the people.

The *Downward Steps.*—1. It is not at all probable that David fell without something in his life which prepared the way for his fall. Probably there was a relaxation of David's religious fervor and zeal.

2. David parleyed with temptation. After the first sin one step led to another, till David had done that at which he would have shuddered with abhorrence had the whole been presented to his vision at once.

3. This occurred in a period of idleness, increasing luxury and self-indulgence (2 Sam. 10: 7). "Satan tempts other men, but the idle man tempts Satan."

4. This took place after a long period of prosperity and unbroken success. Great popularity and success tend to give one an over-weening sense of his own importance.

How we Should Judge David's Guilt.

1. There is no apology for David's sin. It was a sin against light. He knew the commandments; he had received great spiritual enlightenment. He himself never apologizes for his sin. The Bible never apologizes for it. It is to be held up in eternal execration.

2. David's guilt must be seen in the light of his times if we are to judge his character aright. Most men of his time would have been little blamed, most kings would have had no compunction for the same deeds. Professor Briggs, in his famous inaugural address, says that "the ancient worthies, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David, and Solomon, were in a low state of moral advancement. They were not great sinners to their age."

3. While we hate the sin, let us remember that we must judge the man by his whole life. Nothing can be more unjust than to judge of a man by one act, and ignore all the rest of his life.

Nothing can be more unjust than to see and emphasize the sin and forget the repentance and the after life. "The sin was so black," says Van Dyke, "because of its contrast with the previous life and character of David. It was a black spot on white raiment. But let us not in any way diminish our feeling of the utter blackness of these greatest sins against God."

4. In judging David we must take into account his repentance, his open confession, and complete renunciation of the evil he had done. To undo as far as possible this evil, David took a course almost unparalleled in the history of kingly heroism. The king on his throne publicly acknowledges his sin before his subjects, and the temple services resound with his confession. No one sees David's character unless he places the repentance beside the sin.

FIRST STANZA.—Vs. 1-4. *Confession of Sin, and Prayer for Pardon.* For a year David said nothing about his sin. His kingdom continued prosperous. He thought that he could go on just as before.

1. But the knowledge that his sin was known put stings in his conscience.

2. David's previous life, his religious experience, his memory of all that God had done for him, would continually urge him to repentance.

3. There was also some danger arising from his conduct. It was the law that both the adulterer and adulteress should be put to death (Lev. 20: 10). And Bathsheba was the daughter of one of David's mighties, and the wife of another.

4. David's conscience was working all the time. "When I kept silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long."

5. When these silent influences had prepared the way, then God sent his faithful prophet Nathan. With great wisdom he spoke a parable to David which led the king indignantly to condemn another, till the prophet spoke the terrible words, *Thou art the Man.* It was a brave thing to do. Nathan showed David the consequences of his sin. His child should die, and trouble and disaster come upon him from his own household.

Have mercy. Pity, tenderness toward the guilty. Confessing all, and humbling himself before God, he pleads for mercy,—nothing else. In all godly sorrow there is hope. *According to thy loving kindness.* This is the outflow of God's loving heart, tenderer than a mother's love for her child. *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies.* If our sins be in number as the hairs of our head, God's mercies are as the stars of heaven. *Blot out.* Make that which is done as if it had not been done. *Wash me thoroughly.* The washing must be thorough, it must be repeated, therefore he cries, "Multiply to wash me." *Cleanse me,* as from the impurity of leprosy or other defiling disease. *For.* This word does not express the reason why God should forgive him, but the reason why he asks for forgiveness. *I acknowledge my transgressions.* Sin portrayed as crossing over into forbidden fields. *And my sin is ever before me.* He cannot forget what he had done. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.* Not that he had not sinned against man, but the sin was also against God, the sin against the purity

and the justice and love of God. *That thou mightest be justified (vindicated) when thou speakest,* as a judge giving sentence against sin. *Be clear when thou judgest.* Be regarded as pure and holy and right in the judgment. David wished all to know that God was good, no matter what came to himself.

SECOND STANZA.—Vs. 5-18. *Faith that God will Pardon and Cleanse from Sin.* Behold, I was shapen in iniquity. He had inherited a sinful nature. David does not excuse himself for this, but believes that God can deliver him from even this sinful nature. *Thou desirest truth.* Sincerity, a conformity to right, true holiness. *In the inward parts.* The most secret springs of thought and will. *In the hidden part.* The secret springs of conduct unseen by man. *Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.* The spiritual discernment, the fear of the Lord. *Purge me.* Expressing not merely prayer, but expectation. *With hyssop.* A bushy plant used by the priests for sprinkling in the ceremonial rites of pronouncing clean those who had been cleansed from uncleanness. O Lord, pronounce thou me clean, and I shall be clean with the inward and spiritual cleansing of which the outward rite was the symbol. *And I shall be whiter than snow,* which is absolute and perfect whiteness. *Make me to hear joy and gladness.* Make him hear the voice of forgiveness, which would give him double joy—"joy and gladness." *That the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.* The crushing of the bones is a strong figure, denoting complete prostration, mental and bodily.

THIRD STANZA.—Vs. 9-12. *Not only Forgiveness, but a New Life.* *Hide thy face from my sins.* Treat me as if I had not sinned. *Create.* The whole spiritual being of the man had, as it were, fallen into chaos. *Create in me a clean heart.* A pure heart, free from the taint and consciousness of sin. What David wanted was the change Christ called a new birth. *Renew.* The word renew a right spirit implies a previous possession of it. *A right spirit.* A steadfast spirit, one that is firm in faith, not easily swayed through its own weakness or the blasts of temptation. *Cast me not away from thy presence.* Throw me not away as worthless. *Take not thy holy spirit from me.* He knew well the effect of the withdrawal of God's Spirit from Saul. Against this David prayed. *Uphold me with thy free spirit.* Bestow upon me a spirit that is actual.

FOURTH STANZA.—Vs. 13-17. *The Natural Expression of the New Life.* Then (and not till then) will I teach. I would fain teach transgressors thy ways. Such a desire is one of the surest signs of spiritual repentance. *And sinners shall be converted (or return) unto thee.* Whenever saints are revived, then sinners will be converted. *My tongue shall sing aloud,* so that others can hear the joy. *Of thy righteousness.* God is righteous even in showing mercy. Christ came and died that God might be righteous and yet forgive the sinner. *Open thou my lips.* The lips closed by guilt are opened. Thus aided *my mouth shall show forth thy praise* So that there may be made known goodness and pardoning love. *For thou desirest not sacrifice* in itself, as a form, as taking the place of that which signifies. *The sacrifices of God,* those which give their value and significance to outward sacrifices, *are a broken spirit,* where pride and self-sufficiency are broken down and the heart is humble and penitent before God.

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