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Third Quarter.

Lesson VII. Aug. 18. 1 Samuel 15: 10-23.

SAUL REJECTED BY THE LORD.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.—1 Sam. 15: 23.

EXPLANATORY.

I. SAUL'S ADVANTAGES AND POSSIBILITIES, (1) Saul was the anointed of God, chosen by Him as the best person under the circumstances to rule His people. (2) He was under God's guidance. He could learn God's will through Samuel and be guided into the wisest and best plans. (3) He had military talent, and was endowed for his work as king by the Spirit of God (10: 6–9). (4) God gave him victory over his enemies as an earnest of greater victories (11: 11; 14: 12–23, 47, 48).

II. SAUL'S PROBATION; THE FIRST TEST. 13: 2–15. (*Two years after Saul began to reign*, 13: 1.) The Philistines held strongholds among the Israelites, through which they were enabled to keep the people in partial subjection, and make raids upon the harvest fields. One of these garrisons was at Geba, on the southern side of the rocky pass of Michmash, only three miles from Saul's capital at Gibeah. Jonathan, Saul's son, a brave as well as noble young man, attacked this garrison and conquered it. This daring act aroused the whole Philistine nation, who assembled in great numbers, with 3,000 (30,000 is probably a copyist's error) chariots and 6,000 horsemen—two to each chariot. Saul assembled the Israelites at Gibeah, but they were poorly armed (only Saul and Jonathan having swords) and were so terrified by the military array of the Philistines that many deserted and hid in caves and thickets or fled across the Jordan, while those who remained trembled with fear. Neither king nor people dared make a move without the sanction of God. Samuel had agreed to come within seven days and offer sacrifices and make known the will of God. Six days had gone, and the seventh day was passing; yet no Samuel appeared. To a commander like Saul, who saw that the enemy might swoop down them like an eagle from his eyrie at any hour, that every moment's delay weakened his own forces, and strengthed the enemy, such a delay was almost intolerable. The temptation was very strong to be his own priest, to offer the offerings, contrary to God's law and his agreement with Samuel, and press into action. He yielded to the temptation at the last moment, and had offered the burnt offerings, when the venerable prophet appeared on the scene. Saul had failed in the hour of trial. He did not trust God. He openly before all the people disobeyed a clear commandment of God.

III. SAUL'S PROBATION: THE SECOND TEST. 1–9. God gave Saul one more opportunity.

On the southern borders of Israel dwelt one of their most harassing and unconquerable enemies, "the Amalekites, a fierce, untamable race of wanderers, who roamed at large through those deserts which lie between Southern Judea and the Egyptian frontier. They were descended from Esau's grandson, Amalek." Samuel brought a commandment of the Lord to Saul that he should declare war against the Amalekites, and utterly destroy them and all their possessions.

THE JUSTICE AND MERCY IN THIS COMMAND. (1) Israel could have no peace and prosperity so long as these marauders devastated their borders. (2) They had shown by a long course of enmity that they would not change their conduct. (3) "The cup of iniquity in this people was filled up. Its national existence, if prolonged, would simply have worked mischief to the commonwealth of nations. (4) The kingdom of God could not extend according to God's promise, unless these people were either peaceful or out of existence. They would not be peaceful; therefore they must pass out of existence.

THE DIFFICULT COMMAND; WHY GIVEN. The riches of the wandering Amalekites consisted largely in their flocks and herds oxen, sheep, camels, and asses. Not one of these was to be retained by the Israelites as spoil.

THE GREAT TEMPTATION. It was very hard for both king and people to let slip out of their hands such vast wealth, which they could retain as well as not. The command seemed unreasonable and hard. The test of Saul's obedience and faith, therefore, must have been far stronger than it now seems to a cursory reader. But he had the plain command of God for a help, and his future happiness and prosperity for an inducement to withstand the temptation.

IV. SAUL'S FAILURE. 10, 11. Saul led 210,000 Israelites against the Amalekites and nearly annihilated them; but he spared their king, probably to grace his triumph on his return; and with his consent the people brought home alive for their farms the best of the cattle and sheep, destroying only the vile and refuse.

10. *Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel:* probably at Ramah. Before Saul had returned the Lord made known the fact of his disobedience.

11. *It repenteth me.* His repentance is not to be understood as though He who foreknows all things *regretted* his action; nor is it a sign of mutability. A change in the attitude of man to God necessarily involves a corresponding change in the attitude of God to man. *And it grieved Samuel.* Literally, *it burned (in him).* The Rev. Ver. translates, *and Samuel was wroth.* (1) Because Saul was so utterly foolish as to throw away every good God offered him. (2) Because of the effect of such an example upon the morals and religion of the country. (3) Because disobedience made it impossible to prosper the country. *And he cried unto the Lord all night.* As Moses had done more than 400 years before (Ex. 32: 11–13). So Christ wept over Jerusalem (Matt. 23: 37). He prays that Saul may be forgiven; that the threatened danger may be averted; that God will bring good in some way out of this great evil. Samuel chose the true course of all the children of God; and God answered his prayer in spirit, by substituting the nobler David in place of Saul.

THE FEELING OF THE GOOD TOWARD THE WICKED. (1) Never a feeling of hatred. (2) Indignation at the evil they bring upon the world. (3) Grief that they should do so wickedly. (4) An earnest desire that they should turn from their evil ways. (5) If this fails then a willingness to let justice take its course.

V. SAMUEL'S REPROOF. 12. *And Samuel rose early to meet Saul.* He went southerly, in the direction from which Saul must return from his war with Amalek. *Saul came to Carmel.* Not Mt. Carmel, but a city about seven miles south-southeast of Hebron, through which Saul would naturally return. *And, behold, he set him up a place:* a monument. Literally, *a hand; a stone pointing to his great victory. And is gone about:* taken another road than that by which Samuel had come. *And gone down to Gilgal.* In the same place where Saul's kingdom had been confirmed it was to be taken from him; and where the warning of the consequences of disobedience had been uttered (13: 13, 14), the sentence on disobedience was to be pronounced.

13. *And Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord.* A form of salutation. *I have performed the commandment of the Lord.* He had been abroad for that purpose, and had obeyed in part. He had destroyed Amalek; and yet he added falsehood and hypocrisy to disobedience.

14. *What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep?* "Saul is convicted of falsehood by the voices of the animals which he has spared, contrary to God's command. Samuel's mode of citing them against him has an air of holy humor and cutting irony."

VOICES OF NATURE TESTIFYING AGAINST SIN. The world is full of voices testifying against sin. (1) By conscience and the moral nature; (2) the Holy Spirit; (3) the Word of God; (4) the providence of God; (5) the laws of nature, and their effects when broken.

VI. SAUL'S EXCUSES. Saul makes five points in excuse of his conduct. FIRST, he did not obey in the main. He went on the expedition as commanded, and almost exterminated the enemy. SECOND, he thought that he had improved on God's plans, and saved much for the good cause that would otherwise have been wholly wasted. THIRD, the people were to blame and not himself.

15. *For the people spared the best of the sheep,* etc. Every word uttered by Saul seems to indicate the breaking down of his moral character. There is something thoroughly mean in his attempt to shift the responsibility of what was done, from his own kingly shoulders to those of the people.

FOURTH. They broke the command for the Lord's own sake. *To sacrifice unto the Lord thy God.* The falsehood and hypocrisy of these words lay upon the very surface. It is not at all probable that this was anything more than an excuse. They would atone for sparing the wealth for themselves, by devoting a part.

NOTE the "*Thy* God," Samuel's God. Saul would appease Samuel's indignation by showing him that what he had done had been done partly for Samuel's own sake.

FIFTH. *And the rest we,* etc. Note the *we,* here, but *thy* in clause before. Saul claims a part of the virtue of the obedience, but throws the blame of the disobedience wholly upon the people.

VII. SAUL'S EXCUSES UTTERLY VAIN. 16. *Stay.* Either the king was turning away from an interview that was full of bitterness to him, and Samuel bid him to remain; or, the words means, Cease your useless excuses, for you only make things worse. *I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me.* Samuel had nothing to say from himself. His word had power and authority because it was God's word. So ever with the teacher.

17. *And Samuel said,* etc. Samuel reminds the king that he owed his exaltation and power wholly to the God whom he had disobeyed.

18. *Destroy the sinners the Amalekites.* Here is indicated the reason why the Amalekites were destroyed.

19. *Didst fly upon the spoil.* The "*fly*" expresses eagerness, passionate craving. Covetousness here, as well as the pride shown in verse 12, led to the sin of disobedience.

20. *Yea, I have obeyed.* Saul still persists in justifying his conduct. He is not yet convicted of his sin nor led to repentance. *Agag the king.* Agag was probably an hereditary official title among the Amalekites, like Pharaoh among the Egyptians, and Cæsar among the Romans.

22. *And Samuel said.* In this answer it would seem that the Spirit of the Lord descended upon Samuel, and that he here gave utterance to one of those rapt expressions which now and again in the course of each these Hebrew prophets' lives these famous men were commissioned by the Divine power to give out to their fellows. This verse and the next are in poetic form. *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying,* etc. For all the sacrifices and ceremonies of religion are to aid and promote obedience, not to be made a substitute for it. *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.* There is an absolute repugnance between love to Him and despising His commands.

23. *Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft,* etc. "Opposition to the will of God is as bad as divination by the help of evil spirits, which is tantamount to apostacy from God:" *and stubborness:* obstinate resistance to Him; is no better than *iniquity* (or *idolatry*, as in Rev. Ver.) *and idolatry.* Disobedience is in fact idolatry, because it elevates self will into a god.

VIII. THE FRUITS OF SAUL'S SIN. *Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord.* Because thou hast shown thyself utterly unfit to be king of God's people, whose only hope of prosperity lay in obedience to God. *He hath also rejected thee from being king.* Just as the leader rejects from his orchestra the musician who will not keep time and tune; as the general rejects the officer who will not obey orders.

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Wooden Swearing.

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