

The Sunday-School.

THIRD QUARTER,
LESSON X.—Sept. 6.

DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN.

I SAMUEL 31: 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.*—Prov. 14: 12.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.*—B. C. 1055 (Ussher) or 1017 (Hastings' Bible Dictionary).

Place.—The slopes of Mt. Gilboa, and the country to the northwest.

Place in the History.—The close of Saul's reign, and the beginning of that of David.

David.—About 30 years old, still an exile among the Philistines.

THE LESSON includes I Sam. 28-31; 2 Sam. 1, and the parallel (I Chron. 10: 1-14).

LEARN BY HEART.—Matt. 23: 37; 2 Sam. 1: 23.

THE PHILISTINE INVASION.—The scene was in the rich plain of Esdraelon, the most fertile portion of Palestine. The Philistines march up through the plain in a northeasterly direction till they come to Shunem. Saul and his army continue their northward journey, enter the Esdraelon plain on its eastern side. Saul's army was thus four or five miles south of the Philistine army with a broad valley between them.

SAUL IN DESPAIR CONSULTS THE WITCH OF ENDOR.—I Sam. 28. Saul was cast down with discouragement (1) at the great numbers of the enemy and warlike equipment. (2) He could get no answer to his inquiries from God, neither by dreams, nor by prophets, nor by Urim (light), the method of inquiry through the high priest. (3) This silence of God awakened his conscience. (4) He knew that David was with the Philistines, and imagined that he would of course take part with them.

The Witch of Endor.—Saul sought some one "with a familiar spirit" to give him advice. All sorcerers or diviners were expelled from the kingdom by Saul, according to the command in Deut. 18: 10-12; Ex. 22: 18. One of these people had escaped Saul's officers and was living at Endor, on the other side of the hill where the Philistines were encamped. Saul went by night to see this diviner, and to obtain through her an interview with Samuel.

The Response.—What did she attempt on this occasion? Probably the ordinary and traditional hocus-pocus of a conjurer. It appears probable that her plan was, when the hollow was dark with the reek of the drugs so that nothing could be distinguished from without, to come forth where Saul remained with his two soldiers, and bid him put questions to the spirit which she would assure him was waiting inside to hear from him. . . . Like a ventriloquist of modern times, she would conduct the whole conversation, and trick Saul.

There are two possible interpretations of what followed.

First.—That the woman was interrupted and frightened by the actual appearance of Samuel, and that Samuel uttered the terrible words of condemnation against Saul.

Second.—That the whole scene was a deception on the part of the woman. She recognized Saul, and was glad to revenge upon him the evil he had done to her race. She made Saul think she

saw Samuel. Then she put in the prophet's mouth the doom which seemed probable. Saul listened to his doom, and weary and depressed, returned to his army. His repentance was too late.

THE BATTLE AND DEFEAT AT MT. GILBOA.—Vs. 1, 2, 7. The next morning the battle begun. *And the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines.* The Israelites fought bravely, but they could not withstand the charges of the Philistines. *Followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; the three sons who were with him in the battle.* Saul had another son, Ishbosheth, who was not there. *Slew Jonathan.* No doubt it was better thus for himself and for the kingdom, and saved many difficulties and complications.

From v. 7 we learn that the Israelites were driven out of their towns in this region, and the Philistines occupied the territory. The royal family fled for their lives. In their flight the nurse let fall Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, then a child of 5 years of age. 'He was lamed for life.'

THE DEATH OF SAUL AND JONATHAN. Vs. 2-10. *The battle went sore against Saul.* He bravely maintained his ground for some time. *And the archers hit him.* Got him in range. *And he was sore wounded of the archers.* He was in despair. His army was gone, his son slain, he himself was wounded and God was not with him. *Then said Saul unto his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword . . . lest these uncircumcised (Philistines) . . . abuse me.* Mock him, torture him. He must die anyway, and he would rather die by one thrust of the sword than by slow tortures. *But his armor-bearer would not; for he was afraid.* It would be worse than death to kill the man he was appointed to defend. *Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.* Planting the hilt in the ground, he fell upon the point. *And . . . his armor-bearer . . . fell likewise upon his sword and died with him.* Being answerable for the king's life, he feared punishment. *So Saul died.* The young Amalekite, who brought the news to David, declared that he killed him (2 Sam. 1: 6-10), but evidently he lied in hope of reward. *And all his men.* His personal staff and all of his sons who were in the battle. *On the other side of the valley.* The valley of Jezreel. *On the other side Jordan.* The panic spread even to the eastern side of the Jordan. *And they cut off his head.* To send as a trophy and proof of their victory. *Stripped off his armor and sent into the land . . . to publish it in the house of their idols.* His arms were sent round in festive processions to the Philistine cities, and finally deposited in the temple of Ashteroth. This was done to honor their idols as the author of the victory. *They fastened his body to the wall.* Together with the bodies of his sons, that all passers-by might join in exulting over the defeat of Israel. *Wall of Beth-shan.* This was within sight of the battlefield where Saul gained his first great victory over Nahash.

A VALIANT ACT OF GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE.—Vs. 11-13. *And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard they remembered the feat of arms by which Saul delivered them from the Ammonites. All the valiant men.* It required brave men to take the bodies of Saul and his sons from under the very eyes of the Philistines. *Went all night.* The

city was ten miles distant, and the deed must be done while the soldiers were asleep. *And burnt them there.* The reason for their thus acting is clear. The flesh was no doubt in a state of putrefaction. The bones were reverently taken away. The bones of Saul and Jonathan were subsequently removed, by David's order, to their ancestral sepulcher.

THE SONG OF THE BOW.—The battle of Gilboa was probably fought on the same day that David gained his great victory over the Amalekites. Three days after his return home the news of the disaster to Saul reached him. The story of its reception is recorded in 2 Sam. 1: 1-16. Then David wrote a noble elegy, called "The Song of the Bow," which was taught to the children of Judah. The elegy is given in 2 Sam. 1: 19-27.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF SAUL.—First. *The Bright Beginning.*—Few lives have begun with brighter hopes, more splendid possibilities.

Second. *The Testing Season.*—In the earlier part of his reign Saul was subjected to two great tests, and failed in both cases. The first was when he offered the sacrifices himself, instead of waiting for Samuel (I Sam. 13: 1-14). The second was when he disobeyed God's direct command (I Sam. 15: 1-31). He was led several times to the verge of repentance but the change was of the feelings only, not of the heart. He was warned again and again, but with no permanent results.

Third. *Working Out His Destiny.*—When Saul forsook God, an evil spirit took the place in his heart of the Spirit of God. We see no signs of God's doing anything directly to hasten Saul's doom. He was left to work out the natural results of an evil heart, and a life guided by passion and selfishness, without the help and direction of God. He spent his force in envy and passion instead of in managing his kingdom. "He ate of the fruit of his own way, and was filled with his own devices."

Fourth. *The Source of his Failure* was the want of obedience and faith. He who rebels against God mars his own character. The miserable later years of Saul are an example of the sorrows that ever dog sin; and, as he lies there on Gilboa, the terrible saying recurs to our memory: "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

FAITH.

There is a plant in Jamaica called the life-plant because it is almost impossible to kill it. When a leaf is cut off and hung up by a string, it sends out white thread-like shoots, gathers moisture from the air, and begins to grow new leaves. Even when pressed and packed away in a botanist's herbarium, it has been known to grow out beyond the leaves of a book in which it was pressed. You can kill it by the heat of a hot iron, by boiling water, or mashing it to pulp, but by no gentler means. Faith is more vital than this plant. The fires of persecution and the crushing of stocks only give it new life and beauty. It is triumphant over all conditions.

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It makes a good deal of difference whether you take hold of God or God takes hold of you. Said a father: "My little girl, today, refused to let me take hold of her hand, when we were walking together. She thought she could go alone; but when we came to a place which was slippery, she took hold, first of my little finger, and then, as it grew more icy, of my whole hand. As we went on, and it was growing worse, she let go entirely, and said, 'Papa, take hold of me.' She knew I was strong, and that she could not fall unless I fell. 'Now,' said he, 'I have been slipping, slipping for the last eleven years, and the reason is that I have not put my hand into the hand of God. I have been trying to take hold of him, but not asking him to take hold of me. As long as he has hold of my hand, I can't fall. He would have to be dethroned first. If our hands are placed in his whose throne is in heaven, we never can fall down into hell.'"—D. L. Moody.

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