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LIVES OF
SAMUEL, SAUL, AND DAVID

Examinations in Religious Knowledge for
Church Training Colleges

LIVES
OF
SAMUEL, SAUL, AND DAVID

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NOTE

For notes on the text and for a fuller statement of some topics included in the following lessons the writer ventures to refer to his 'Aids to the Study of the Books of Samuel' (Wells Gardner, Darton & Co.). The following books will also be found useful:

'The Speaker's Commentary.'

Ellicott's 'Old Testament Commentary for English Readers.'

'The Books of Samuel,' by Professor Kirkpatrick, in 'Cambridge Bible for Schools.'

Volumes of 'Men of the Bible' Series.

Geikie's 'The Bible by Modern Light,' Vol. III.

Articles in Smith's 'Dictionary of the Bible.'

Useful and inexpensive Bible Atlases, indispensable to the study of the historical books of Holy Scripture, are published by S.P.C.K. and W. & A. K. Johnston.

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LIFE OF SAMUEL

I.

HIS BIRTH, CHILDHOOD, AND CALL.

READ 1 Samuel i.-iii. Cf. St. Luke i. 46-55.

Birth and Parentage.—Samuel was the son of Elkanah, a Levite, who dwelt at *Ramathaim*, or *Ramah*, in the tribe of Ephraim. The circumstances of his birth are narrated in 1 Samuel i. Elkanah's wife Hannah was childless, and Elkanah had taken a second wife, Peninnah, who had borne him children. The childless Hannah was still the best beloved of her husband, but her life was embittered by the taunts of her rival, who had received the gift of children which had been withheld from her. Elkanah gave Hannah "a worthy portion" (*i.e.* a *double* portion)—some special gift indicative of his affection and sympathy, and connected this gift with their yearly visit to the Tabernacle of the Lord in Shiloh, probably at the celebration of the Passover.

Shiloh, in the tribe of Ephraim, was the religious centre of the nation at this time, and here dwelt Eli, the priest and judge of Israel. On the occasion of the visit to Shiloh referred to in this chapter (1 Samuel i. 7, 8), Hannah seems to have been more than usually distressed by the insults of Peninnah, and her tears and abstinence from food elicited the sympathetic notice of her husband. On the conclusion of the sacrificial meal Hannah remained praying in the neighbourhood of the Tabernacle; her prayer

was that the reproach of her childless condition might be taken away from her; to this prayer she added a vow that, if a male child were given to her, he should be consecrated to the Lord all the days of his life, and should also be pledged as a lifelong Nazarite. By this vow she dedicated her future child to perpetual service in the Tabernacle; the service to which, as a Levite, he would be bound, was only occasional, and extending over a few years of life. The Nazarite vow would bind him to abstain from all intoxicating drinks, to allow his hair to grow, and to avoid all ceremonial defilement.

The visible intensity of Hannah's devotion, and the fact that only her lips moved and no prayer found audible expression, attracted the notice of Eli sitting on a throne, or chair of state, outside the Tabernacle. He at first regarded her excited manner as a sign of drunkenness, and harshly reproved her; but her meek and pathetic reply convinced him that his suspicions were unfounded, and he dismissed her with a blessing;—"Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him."

Hannah returned to her home, comforted by her communion with God and by the sympathy of His priest. Her prayer was granted in the birth of a son, whom she named Samuel (*heard of God*), "because" (as she said) "I have asked him of the Lord."

The Childhood of Samuel. His Dedication to God.—For the first two or three years of his life, till he was able to do without his mother's care, the child remained in the home at Ramah. Then once more the thankful mother made her pilgrimage to Shiloh, and fulfilled the vow she had made on her previous visit by the dedication of her child to the Lord. At the same time, she reminded Eli of the occasion when he had seen her before, and told him what was the prayer she had offered, and how it had been answered.

The Song of Hannah.—Hannah expressed the overflowing joy and gladness of her heart in the sacred song found at the beginning of chapter ii. In this she thankfully acknowledges the blessing bestowed upon her in the birth of her child, the removal of the reproach under which she had suffered, and the requital of the adversary whose insults she

had borne; such exaltation of the lowly and depression of the proud is in accordance with God's customary method ("He bringeth low and lifteth up"). The song of Hannah was not only a thanksgiving for a personal blessing, but it was also a prophecy of blessings to come upon all mankind; its leading thought is echoed in the *Magnificat* (the Song of the Blessed Virgin Mary), in which the mother of our Lord gives thanks to Him "Who hath put down the mighty from their seat and hath exalted the humble and meek." No doubt this song of Hannah had been committed to memory by the Virgia of Nazareth, and furnished the material from which she composed the great Christian hymn in thanksgiving for the Incarnation of the Son of God. Of Hannah's song Bishop Wordsworth wrote, "It is an utterance of the Holy Ghost moving within her, and making her maternal joy in the birth of Samuel to overflow in outpourings of thankfulness to God for those greater blessings in Christ, of which that birth was an earnest and a pledge" (Comm. on 1 Samuel ii.).

The child Samuel was left at Shiloh, where at an early age he was employed in the sacred services of the Tabernacle, and wore a distinctive dress (the *ephod*, and the *little coat* yearly brought by his mother) which indicated his appointment to some kind of priestly office.

The Sin of Eli's Sons.—In contrast with the innocence and piety of the child Samuel the shameless wickedness of Eli's sons stands out in dark colours. Though they inherited the office of priesthood, they discredited their sacred profession by most shocking sins; they robbed God by appropriating to themselves portions of the sacrificial victims which should have been consumed as burnt offerings, they claimed other portions before the time when they would have rightly fallen to their share, and they led into grievous sin the women who were occupied in the duties of attendance or service in the Tabernacle. Eli showed a culpable want of strength and decision in dealing with these scandalous priests; it would have been within his power to depose them from the exercise of their office, but instead he contented himself with a mild remonstrance, which utterly failed to produce an impression on their hardened hearts (ii. 23-25).

Because of this neglect of duty in "honouring his sons

before God," Eli received an impressive warning through a prophet divinely sent to him. His sin should be punished by the deposition of his family from the priesthood which they had dishonoured; and, as a sign of this coming doom, the two sacrilegious priests, Hophni and Phinehas, should meet their death together in one day. At the same time it was foretold that a "faithful priest" should be raised up who would in all respects fulfil the Divine will which the house of Eli had failed to perform (ii. 35). This prophecy may refer to Samuel, who, though not of the family of Aaron, seems to have exercised the priestly office by a direct Divine appointment; or it may refer to Zadok, the "faithful priest" of David's time, who was descended from the elder son of Aaron (Eleazar), not from the younger (Ithamar), as Eli was. It may have a remoter reference to our blessed Lord, Who was made "an High Priest after the order of Melchisedec" (Hebrews v. 10).

The First Divine Revelation to Samuel.—At a later period God spoke directly to Samuel when, according to Jewish tradition, he was twelve years old. As he was sleeping in one of the chambers of the Tabernacle he heard a voice calling him by name. He thought the call came from Eli, and hastily ran to the chamber occupied by the aged priest, but was told that the call had not come from him. A second time he heard the call, and acted as he had done before; but when the call came a third time, and he responded to it in like manner, "Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child," and bade him, in the event of a further call, to reply, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Then the voice was heard once more, and was recognised as the voice of God; the guileless child was made to hear a message like that which had before been delivered to Eli by the mouth of the prophet; the iniquities of Eli's house, the wickedness of his sons, and his own neglect of duty in passing lightly over their sin—these were noted by God, and would bring speedy punishment on the offenders. Samuel naturally shrank from the painful task of delivering such a message of woe to the venerable priest, but Eli insisted on hearing all, and received the sentence pronounced against his house with the acknowledgment of its justice: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

Thus God, revealing Himself to Samuel, resumed those direct

communications with men which had been for some time rare or altogether suspended ["The word of the Lord was precious in those days, there was no open vision," iii. 2]. He continued to dwell in Shiloh as long as Eli's rule lasted, and received further communications from God, so that all Israel recognised his selection to be a prophet of the Lord, and the people were thus prepared to accept him at a later date as the counsellor and director of the nation.

II.

WARS WITH THE PHILISTINES.—DEFEAT OF THE ISRAELITES AT APHEK, AND CAPTURE OF THE ARK.—DEATH OF ELI.

READ 1 Samuel iv.

Wars with the Philistines.—Samuel remained at Shiloh, exercising his prophetic gift, and gradually extending his influence amongst the people (iv. 1). Eli meantime retained the office of Judge and nominal head of the nation. During this period the Israelites engaged in battle against their enemies the Philistines. These were a people dwelling in the south-west corner of the country, on the sea-coast, who had remained unsubdued in the general conquest of the land by Joshua; they were numerous and powerful enough to be divided into five lordships, named after their towns, Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath, and Ekron (vi. 17). They had been foes of Israel in the times of the earlier Judges—Shamgar and Samson having been specially raised up by God to deliver the Israelites from their oppression.

It would seem (iv. 2) that on this occasion the Israelites took the initiative in attacking the Philistines, but they were defeated with the loss of 4,000 men. The battle was fought at a place which afterwards received the name of Ebenezer, situated "between Mizpeh and Shen" (vii. 12), probably not far from Jerusalem.

Perplexed by this defeat, the elders of the people suggested that the Ark of the Covenant should be sent for from Shiloh, where it was deposited; this was the sacred chest, containing the Tables of the Law, whose place was in the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle; its golden cover was the Mercy Seat, on which

rested the Shechinah, the visible sign of God's presence. It was thought that the bringing of this sacred symbol into the camp would bring also the support of the Lord of Hosts to fight for His people, and would inspire courage into the defeated troops. What was proposed by the elders was carried out. The Philistines were at first stricken with terror at the thought that "God had come into the camp," but they plucked up courage, and were in the end victorious. Thirty thousand warriors of the Israelites were slain, amongst them Hophni and Phinehas, the two unworthy sons of Eli. The Ark of God also was taken by the Philistines. The bringing the Ark into the camp was not an act of faith in God, but, being performed by irreligious and profane men, it was an act of superstition, the use of a sacred symbol as a mere charm to help them to victory; thus it brought with it no help or blessing.

The Death of Eli.—The news of the defeat of the Israelites and the capture of the Ark was carried to Shiloh by "a man of Benjamin"; according to a Jewish tradition this was Saul, who was afterwards to play so important a part in the history of his country. Eli, now ninety-eight years old, sat on his official seat or throne by the gate of Shiloh anxiously awaiting news of the battle. The messenger, with rent clothes, and earth on his head (in sign of grief), reported in the city the national disaster, and in answer to Eli's inquiry told him in detail the lamentable story—the defeat and slaughter of the people, the death of Hophni and Phinehas, and the capture of the Ark. It was the last that proved the death-blow of the aged priest: "when he made mention of the Ark of God, he fell from the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake." Thus tragically and ingloriously ended his judgeship of forty years. He had shown blameworthy negligence and indecision in dealing with the wicked conduct of his sons, and this brought evil upon them and upon his country; but he manifested a gentle and sympathetic disposition in the benediction which he pronounced on Hannah (i. 17); he showed kindness to Samuel in his childhood, and exhibited no sign of envy or ill-will when the young prophet was preferred before him; in his death he showed his love for God and his affectionate regard for the sacred Ark as the symbol of God's presence with His people.

The disaster that befell Israel brought also the death of the wife of Phinehas, who on her death-bed gave to her new-born child the name of Ichabod (*where is the glory?*), thus indicating that in the taking of the Ark by the Philistines *the glory had departed from Israel* (iv. 22).

The Philistines, having gained this decisive victory, probably destroyed the sacred city Shiloh (see Psalm lxxviii. 60-64; cf. Jeremiah xxvi. 9). The Ark remained in the country of the Philistines for seven months, during which time it brought trouble upon the people; it was then removed to Bethshemesh, where a great number of the inhabitants were stricken with death, because, with profane curiosity, they looked into the Ark: afterwards it was transferred to Kirjath-jearim, and placed in charge of Abinadab and his son Eleazar.

III.

REVIVAL OF TRUE RELIGION IN ISRAEL.—VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES.—DESIRE FOR A KING.—SAUL.

READ 1 Samuel vii., viii., ix. 1-24.

Revival of Religion under the Influence of Samuel.—For a period of twenty years after their victory at Aphek the Philistines maintained their ascendancy over Israel. During this time Samuel exercised his office as a prophet. The people had lapsed into idolatry—the worship of Baalim and Ashtaroth*—and had thereby forfeited the favour and protection of Jehovah. Samuel exhorted them to put away these “strange gods” and turn to the Lord. By his fervid appeals the prophet roused the conscience of the nation, so that “the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.”

Battle of Ebenezer.—At the close of the twenty years Samuel convened a general assembly of the people at Mizpah. This meeting was intended to bring to a head the national repentance, and to confirm their resolutions of amendment; they “drew water, and poured it out before the Lord,” thus symbolising the

* *Baalim* is the plural of Baal, and *Ashtaroth* of Astarte, these being Phœnician deities, the objects of Israelite idolatry.

temporal and spiritual distress in which they were at the time;—“Behold we are before Thee like water that has been poured out” (2 Samuel xiv. 14). They further expressed their penitence by fasting and confession of sin.

Such a gathering of the people roused the suspicions of the Philistines, who supposed that it portended some warlike action, and took steps to counteract an anticipated attack. The children of Israel were alarmed by the hostile movement of the Philistines and threw themselves on the protection of Samuel, whom they now recognised as succeeding to the military leadership which had been exercised by previous judges. Samuel offered sacrifice and prayers for the people; at the moment when he was engaged in these sacred services the Philistines began their attack. But the Lord was now with Israel, and a violent thunderstorm aided the resistance of the people to the attack of their enemies. The Philistines were utterly defeated and routed. Samuel set up a stone in the neighbourhood of Mizpeh and called it by the name *Ebenezer* (*Stones of Help*), in pious recognition of the succour Divinely brought;—“Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” The victory was a decisive one, and though the Philistines from time to time made attacks upon the Israelites, they seem never to have regained the absolute ascendancy which they acquired in the times of the earlier Judges.

Samuel as Judge.—Now that the people were relieved from the pressure of foreign foes, Samuel devoted himself to the work of internal reform. For this purpose he made a yearly circuit of the territory that came under his judgeship, visiting the sacred sites, Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and returning to Ramah; this last was his native place, and here he “built an altar,” converting it into a sanctuary in place of the desolated Shiloh.

The Later Life of Samuel—In his later years Samuel associated his sons Joel and Abiah with him in the judgeship—they exercising at Beersheba the functions which he exercised in the towns further north. But these sons were unworthy of their father; he at a later period was able to challenge the people to bring against him any charge of partiality or injustice. “Of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?” (xii. 3); his sons, on the contrary, “took bribes and perverted judgment.”

The old age of Samuel and the unworthiness of his sons gave occasion for a popular demand for a king. The government of the country had hitherto been a *Theocracy*—i.e. government directly by God—Moses and Joshua and the Judges being only ministers appointed to ascertain the Divine will and to carry out the Divine commands. The people now desired to have a permanent king as neighbouring nations had, and their elders conveyed their request to the aged prophet. Such a request appeared to Samuel to imply not only a want of confidence in himself, but also want of loyalty towards their invisible King. He laid the matter before God, and was bidden to accede to the request of the people, but at the same time to warn them of the character that would be developed in one on whom they bestowed the kingly office. This Samuel did; he pointed out the insolence, the tyranny, the rapacity which would characterise an absolute monarchy, and warned them that a time would come when they would repent of their choice. The people, however, undeterred by these warnings, persisted in their desire for a king to rule over them and to fight their battles; and Samuel was again instructed to hearken to their voice. The elders were dismissed to their homes to await the course of events in which God would manifest His purpose.

Saul.—The sacred narrative now proceeds to tell of the person destined to fulfil the national demand for a king, and the circumstances which brought him to the notice of Samuel. Saul was the son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who is described as “a mighty man of power”—i.e. one possessing means and influence, which gave him a position amongst men. Saul was himself endowed with those natural characteristics which attract notice and excite admiration; he was “a choice young man and a goodly,” in the prime of life and manly beauty, rising head and shoulders above all his fellows.

The circumstances which brought him to Samuel indicate the pastoral simplicity of the life in which he had been brought up. He was in quest of his father's asses, which had strayed; after seeking them in various quarters he came to the neighbourhood of Samuel's house at Ramah; here he was bidden to inquire of Samuel as to his loss. He found the prophet preparing to offer sacrifice at the “high place,” and was invited to join in the

sacrifice, and afterwards to participate in the sacrificial feast. Samuel, in the course of these proceedings, showed that Saul's coming had not been unexpected; he treated him with ceremonious respect, and he indicated the great future that awaited him in the words, "On whom is the desire of all Israel? Is it not on thee and on thy father's house?" Such a greeting from one in Samuel's position perplexed the modest son of Kish, who seems to have entertained no ambitious thoughts. "Am not I a Benjamite," he said, "of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore, then, speakest thou so to me?"

LIFE OF SAUL

I.

THE APPOINTMENT OF SAUL AS KING.

READ 1 Samuel ix. 25-27, and x.

Saul Designated as King.—After sharing in the sacrificial feast Saul spent the night with the prophet at Ramah. In the early morning of the following day Samuel, with marked courtesy, prepared to conduct him some distance on his way. Then, having sent on his servant in advance, Samuel announced to Saul what he had gathered to be the Divine purpose concerning him—that he was destined to be the ruler and chief of the people. In confirmation of this, he poured on his head the sacred anointing oil, with the words, “The Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance.”

The appointment thus made and ratified by the prophet of God was to remain secret for the present; but three signs were prophetically given to assure Saul himself of the reality of his call:—

(i.) At a place precisely fixed by the prophet, Saul should meet two men bringing the tidings that the asses he had gone to seek were found, and that Kish's anxiety was now for the safety of his son.

(ii.) At a further stage in his journey he should meet three worshippers going up to the sanctuary at Bethel, who should

salute him and give him two loaves from the sacrificial offerings which they had prepared for an oblation to God, thus recognising the sacredness of the office to which he was called.

(iii.) At the "Hill of God"—Gibeah, Saul's native place—he should meet a "company of prophets" coming down from the high place, preceded by musicians, apparently in solemn procession after the performance of some sacred rite. The prophets should prophesy, and their sacred fervour should so infect Saul that he should "prophesy with them, and be turned into another man."

Samuel, moreover, referred to a future meeting at Gilgal, when he would be ready to support the newly appointed king with the sacred rites and burnt-offerings and peace-offerings.

Saul then continued his journey alone, and the predicted signs all happened as foretold by the prophet. His exhibition of prophetic gifts caused wonder amongst the prophets whom he met in the neighbourhood of his home, and gave occasion to the saying, *Is Saul also among the prophets?*—a saying used when a man exhibits gifts or accomplishments which no one before had dreamt of his possessing. In connection with this period of his life it is said that *God gave him another heart, and that the Spirit of God came upon him.* He received, that is, an inward witness of the truth of the call which Samuel had announced to him; and he acquired aspirations and dispositions suited to the high office which he was destined to hold.

Saul on his return home was questioned as to what had occurred to him during his absence: he told of the circumstances which brought him to Samuel, and of the assurance as to the safety of the asses, by which his mind had been set at rest; but he said nothing of "the kingdom" to which Samuel had told him he was called.

Saul Chosen by the People.—Samuel then summoned the people to a great convention at Mizpeh. He upbraided them with their rejection of God, who had delivered them out of Egypt and from the various foreign foes by whom they had been oppressed: at the same time he intimated to them that their desire for a king, though ill-advised and indicating an ungrateful spirit, would yet be complied with. The choice was made by the casting of lots, divinely overruled to carry out what God had before made known to be His purpose. The lot first indicated that the one to be

chosen was of the tribe of Benjamin; then that he was to be of the family of Matri; then that he was to be of the house of Kish; and finally Saul himself was marked out as the chosen leader and monarch of the people.

Saul, knowing beforehand what the issue would be, had modestly withdrawn himself from the assembly of the tribes, and it was only by a further inquiry of the Lord that his hiding-place was disclosed. Then he was brought, and stood amongst the people, towering above them all; and Samuel confirmed his election in the words, "See ye him whom *the Lord hath chosen*, that there is none like him among all the people?" His subjects acknowledged him with the jubilant cry, *God save the king*.

Samuel thereupon sketched the outline of their new form of government, and inscribed it in a book as a permanent record of the constitution under which the people were now to live; this was "laid up before the Lord" by the side of the Ark at Kirjath-jearim. Samuel afterwards dismissed the assembly, and Saul returned to his home at Gibeah, waiting for circumstances which should call him to exercise his kingly office for the good of the nation. There accompanied him to his home "a band of men, whose hearts God had touched," some who were fired with zeal for the national glory, and inspired with attachment to the newly appointed king; these would constitute in after times his body-guard and personal attendants. On the other hand, some malcontents, spoken of as "children of Belial" (*worthless men*) refused him their homage, and the presents which should have been given as a formal recognition of his kingship.

Questions.

1. How is the child-life of Samuel in the Tabernacle described? Give an account of the communication made to him by God at this time.
2. Give an account of the first Battle of Ebenezer, and the events consequent upon it.
3. State what you know of Saul up to the time of his appointment as king.

4. Annotate, with reference to the context :—

- (a) "The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed."
 (b) "I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in My heart and in My mind."
 (c) "She named the child Ichabod."
 (d) "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

II.

SAUL'S REIGN.—HIS SYN AGAINST GOD.

READ 1 Samuel xi., xii., xiii. 1-15.

Saul's Recognition as King.—Samuel's Abdication of His Office as Judge.—Saul was called forth from his retirement to lead his people against Nahash, king of the Ammonites. This king had made an attack upon Jabesh-gilead (in the tribe of Manasseh), and would only accept the proffered submission of the inhabitants on the condition that their right eyes should be thrust out as a reproach to the people of Israel. Saul was roused by a recital of the trouble threatened to his fellow-countrymen; "the Spirit of God" came upon him, and he gathered to his command an army of 330,000 men, with which he utterly defeated the Ammonites. After this Saul was again recognised as king by popular acclamation in a national assemblage held at Gilgal.

On this occasion Samuel laid aside the office of judge which he had held for a period of forty years. He took an impressive farewell of the people, reminding them of God's past mercies, asserting his own integrity in the office he had held, and promising that under the new form of government he would pray for them (as a priest), and, as a prophet, would teach them the good and right way.

It may be convenient here to notice the several periods in the life of Samuel* :—

First Period (twelve years).—The child life in the Tabernacle service, under the guardianship of Eli.

* See Dean Spence's note in Elliott's "Commentary for English Readers."

Second Period (about fifteen to twenty years).—From the time of his call to be a prophet till the death of Eli. During this time he continued to dwell at Shiloh.

Third Period (twenty years), during which he was going up and down amongst the people correcting their idolatry and rousing them to religious reform.

Fourth Period (about twenty years), following the victory at Ebenezer.—During this time he was the settled judge and ruler of the nation under the Divine King.

Fifth Period.—When he had laid aside the government in things secular, though remaining the religious leader and guide both of the king (Saul) and people.

Saul's First Transgression of the Divine Command.—The sacred narrative goes on to tell us of the sin by which Saul forfeited the Divine favour, and which led to his loss of the kingdom. This was in connection with a fresh rising of the Philistines, who were apparently endeavouring to recover the ground they had lost in the battle of Ebenezer. In the first place Saul selected from the whole people an army of 3,000 men, thinking this force adequate to meet any attack that might be made by the Philistines. A thousand of these troops of Israel were under the command of Jonathan, and gained a victory over the Philistine garrison in Geba.

Saul, thinking this an opportunity for striking a decisive blow against the Philistines, spread the news of the victory throughout the whole land, and gathered the fighting men of the nation at Gilgal. The Philistines, on the other hand, made their preparations to meet the force collected against them: they raised an army "as the sand which is on the sea-shore in multitude," and fully equipped for war. The Israelites were terrified by the magnitude of the forces arrayed against them; of Saul's army some deserted and fled beyond Jordan, while those who remained were fearful and faint-hearted.

Seven days Saul waited in Gilgal with his diminishing and panic-stricken forces; this appears to have been a compliance with the command given to him by Samuel some years before, at the time when he was first told of his call to the kingship;—"Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice

sacrifices of peace offerings; *seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do*" (x. 8). This command, given so long before with a prophetic foresight of the circumstances, was destined to try Saul's faith. It is characteristic of him that *up to a certain point* he is obedient; "he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed," but here his faith failed; the people were still dispersing in dread of the Philistines, and, before the seventh day had expired, Saul himself offered the burnt offering which would, he hoped, serve to rouse the drooping courage of his troops.

At the moment when the sacrifice was completed the prophet appeared. Saul excused himself for his violation of the Divine command by the urgent and perilous character of the circumstances; he was alarmed at the defection of the people, and feared an attack from the Philistines; to encourage himself and his people by a religious observance he had performed the sacred rite. Samuel reproved Saul for his disobedience to a Divine command, by which he had shown his reliance on strategy and worldly wisdom rather than on the support of the eternal God. This showed his unfitness for the high office to which he had been called; and as a penalty for this the kingship should not continue in his family, God having already designated another, "a man after His own heart," to be captain over His people.

Saul's Sin.—This does not seem to have consisted in any usurpation of priestly functions in offering sacrifices—such as was at a later date exhibited by King Uzziah (2 Chron. xxvi. 16-21); though it is said that Saul "offered the burnt offering," there is no reason against the supposition that he did it by the hands of the appointed priest. But Saul evidently regarded the sacrifice not so much as an act of service towards God, but rather as a mere formal observance which would satisfy the religious feelings, and assuage the fears, of the people. The command to which we have referred (x. 8) seemed to indicate that Saul was not to enter upon any important business without the presence of the prophet, who was still in some respects God's representative and vicegerent. Saul, proposing to engage with the Philistines in the absence of Samuel, showed an indifference to the Divine Presence guaranteed by the presence of His prophet, a reliance on "the arm of flesh" rather than on "the arm of the Lord."

The same spirit was exhibited by Saul at a later period in this same campaign against the Philistines; see xiv. 18, 19. Saul was engaged in a most solemn religious observance, inquiring of the priest before the Ark as to the course of action he should adopt; but the indications of a panic in the opposing hosts of the Philistines gave him a hope of immediate success, and he bade the priest "withdraw thine hand"—i.e. cease from the act of religious observance by which he was seeking to ascertain God's will; as in the previous case he set at naught God's command rather than risk an impending danger, so here he showed himself indifferent to God's guidance when an opportunity of success presented itself.

III.

SAUL'S SECOND ACT OF DISOBEDIENCE.—HIS REJECTION FROM THE KINGSHIP.

READ 1 Samuel xv.

Saul and the Amalekites.—Saul's obedience was further tested by a command to destroy the Amalekites. These people were descended from Esau, and inhabited the desert south of Judæa extending to the frontier of Egypt. They had attacked the Israelites on their coming out of Egypt, and were defeated by the prowess of Joshua supported by the prayers of Moses (see Exodus xvii.) On this occasion the utter destruction of the Amalekites was decreed by God: "The Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book . . . for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." This Divine command was recalled by Moses in his parting injunctions to the people: "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt. . . . Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven: thou shalt not forget it" (Deuteronomy xxv. 17-19).

Saul having become settled in his kingdom, the time was appropriate for the execution of the Divine decree. Samuel was

the instrument employed for communicating God's command to Saul: having reminded him of the circumstances by which he was called to the kingdom, he bade him undertake the war of extermination against these enemies of God's people: they and all that belonged to them were to be utterly destroyed.

Saul levied a great force of over 200,000 men, and was completely successful in his campaign. He carried out God's command so far as it accorded with his own wishes and feelings; he utterly destroyed all the people, but he made an exception in the case of their king, Agag, whom he kept alive, perhaps, to give dignity to his triumph on his return from the war. Moreover, from covetousness and an unwillingness to sacrifice valuable possessions, Saul and the people spared the best of the cattle and only destroyed the vile and refuse.

The Rejection of Saul.—Such half-hearted and imperfect obedience was highly displeasing to God. Saul by his conduct indicated his intention to govern the kingdom on principles of mere worldly prudence and human statesmanship, not as the viceroy of the Lord of Hosts. The Divine displeasure was expressed in the word spoken to Samuel: "It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments" (1 Samuel xv. 11). Samuel was deeply affected by this saying, which virtually involved the deposition of Saul from the kingdom; he was captivated, as others seem to have been, by the many splendid qualities exhibited by Saul; this gave occasion for personal grief, and at the same time he was troubled and anxious as to the future of his country. Having spent the night in supplication to God, he on the morrow went to meet the victorious king.

Saul received the prophet in the first instance with a cordial and respectful greeting, "Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But Samuel reproved his self-satisfaction (whether pretended or real) with an inquiry as to the "bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the oxen," which had been spared from the destruction of Amalek, in defiance of the Divine command. Saul meanly lays the blame of the neglected duty on *the people*; he alleges that these choicest of the flocks and herds had been spared for a religious purpose, to be offered in

sacrifice to God; at the same time he claims for himself a full share in the destruction of the rest. In reply, Samuel reminds him of his elevation to the monarchy by a Divine call, and points out the definiteness of the instruction given to him as to the total extermination of the Amalekites, and his failure to carry out that commission. Saul once more attempts to excuse himself, and alleges again his purpose of sacrificing the captured spoil to God; but Samuel contemptuously rejects such vain excuses, and asserts the paramount duty of obedience to an express command,—To obey is better than sacrifice. He then solemnly announces Saul's deposition from his office, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being king."

Saul now admits his guilt, but again partly shifts the blame on to the people, whose voice, pleading for the saving of the spoil, he professed himself unable to resist. He sues for pardon, and begs Samuel to join him in prayer. At first the prophet refused, and repeated the sentence of the king's deposition. Saul seizing his robe to detain him, the robe is rent, and this is taken as a sign that God had rent the kingdom from Saul and given it to one worthier of the high place. Saul repeats his confession of sin, but shows that his real motive in wishing to detain Samuel is not to obtain his prayers, but to retain honour for himself amongst the people, that he may not be discredited, that is, by an open breach with the venerable prophet. Samuel, having made his protest, consented to remain and share in the public service of Thanksgiving. When the service was completed Samuel himself carried out the execution of the Divine command which Saul had neglected to perform. Sending for Agag, who came "delicately" (*i.e.* cheerfully), with no anticipation of the doom that awaited him, the aged prophet hewed him limb from limb "before the Lord in Gilgal." From this time all official communications between prophet and king came to an end. "Samuel came no more to see Saul till the day of his death." Saul was left to himself to work out his doom, without either counsel or hindrance from the prophet of the Lord. The narrative closes with words of deep dejection: "Samuel mourned for Saul; and the Lord repented that He had made Saul king over Israel."

The words just quoted, "The Lord *repented* that He had

made Saul king," may be compared with an earlier verse of the chapter, in which God is represented as saying, "It *repenteth Me* that I have set up Saul to be king." With reference to these expressions, a great commentator has written as follows: "God does not feel the pain of remorse, nor is He ever deceived, so as to desire to correct anything in which He has erred. But as a man desires to make a change when he repents, so when God is said in Scripture to repent, we may expect a change from Him. He changed Saul's kingdom when it is said He repented of making him king" (Bishop Wordsworth). The other side of the truth is set forth in verse 29, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man, that He should repent." Cf. James i. 17, "with Whom" [God] "is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

LIVES OF SAUL AND DAVID

I.

DAVID'S CALL TO THE KINGDOM.—HIS INTRODUCTION TO SAUL.

READ 1 Samuel xvi.

David Anointed to be King.—Saul had been rejected of God, but his deposition did not immediately take effect. All official communication between himself and Samuel had come to an end, but the prophet did not cease to lament over the declension of the monarch, whose early life had been full of promise for his country. Samuel, however, was bidden to rouse himself from his grief, and, at whatever cost to his personal feelings, to proceed with the selection of another to fill Saul's place.

For this purpose he was Divinely directed to the house of Jesse at Bethlehem—a place hitherto apparently of little note—but interesting for all time as the birthplace of David, and still more as that of "David's greater Son." The errand on which Samuel was sent was perilous to himself; for Saul's subsequent actions show us that he would have been little likely to spare even the venerable prophet, had he been detected in the act of bringing forward one whom Saul would regard as a rival claimant to his throne.

Samuel's visit to Bethlehem was ostensibly for the purpose of offering a sacrifice, to which he invited Jesse and his sons, as being the chief people of the village. [Compare with this the sacrifice performed by Samuel at Ramah on the occasion of Saul's call to the kingdom, chap. ix.] In compliance with the prophet's invitation, Jesse, accompanied by seven of his sons, presented

himself at the sacrificial feast. Samuel carefully scrutinised each of the sons of Jesse, with the view of finding the one designated by the word which God had spoken to him. The eldest, Eliab, commended himself to Samuel by his height of stature and physical beauty—qualities like those which had first elicited his admiration for Saul; but he was mistaken in supposing that the tall and handsome first-born of the house was destined to be the Lord's anointed; "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." In like manner Abinadab and Shammah and the remainder of the seven were passed in review before Samuel, but none of these was marked out as the one chosen of God.

Samuel, perplexed by his apparent failure to find what he had come to seek, asked Jesse if the seven he had seen constituted the whole of his family. Jesse, thus questioned, revealed the fact that there was still a younger son, who was employed in tending the sheep; his youth and humble estimation in the family had perhaps caused him to be left out of account. At the prophet's bidding the shepherd boy was sent for, and in him Samuel found the one who, by an unmistakable utterance of the voice of God, was marked out as the future king. Thus David was "taken from among the sheepfolds to rule God's people Israel" (Psalm lxxviii. 70).* "Samuel took the horn of [sacred] oil," which he had brought with him by God's direction, "and anointed him in the midst of his brethren, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward."

This anointing may not have been understood by all present to signify all that it was intended to signify. Its real meaning may have been communicated secretly to David himself. It is said that Samuel returned to Ramah, and it is possible that David accompanied him. If this be so, he must have returned to his father's house at Bethlehem before the next incident recorded in his life.

* David's pastoral life gave him that familiarity with Nature in its various moods which is exhibited in the Psalms—*e.g.* Psalm xix., "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." Psalm xxiii., "The Lord is my Shepherd," could only have been penned by one who was familiar with the scenery and surroundings of an Eastern shepherd's life.

David's Introduction to Saul.—We read that “The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” This “evil spirit” appears to have manifested its presence in the form of melancholia, or deep depression, with occasional outbursts of fierce rage bordering on madness. It is said to be “from the Lord” because it was the Divinely appointed visitation on Saul for his sins. Under these circumstances the attendants on the court of the king advised that one should be sought, “a cunning player on an harp,” to disperse the melancholy and calm the rage of the royal sufferer. David, the son of Jesse, was pointed out as one who had the desired skill, and who, moreover, was “a mighty valiant man, and a man of war,* and prudent in matters, and a comely person,” and who was also favoured in that “the Lord was with him.” David was accordingly summoned to the court; the bright freshness of the country youth won the heart of the moody monarch; Saul loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer, and was permanently attached to the royal bodyguard. At the same time, he used his skill in music to drive away the king's depression and gloom.

David was no doubt drawn to the king by that same personal charm in the monarch which had captivated Samuel.† He entertained no disloyal thoughts towards his sovereign, but was content and happy to render him such service as lay in his power, leaving it to God to work out his destiny at the time that should seem good to Him.

* We are surprised at this description of David, considering the circumstances of his early life. But from his own story told to Saul (xvii. 34-36) we obtain an idea of his personal prowess. The courage which he displayed in his encounter with the lion and the bear that attacked his flock would no doubt find occasions of exercise against other foes. He may have won his reputation for strength in war in some encounter with the Philistines or other marauders.

† Browning's poem “Saul” is a wonderfully grand description of David's introduction to Saul.

II.

DAVID'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOLIATH.

READ 1 Samuel xvii.

David's Encounter with Goliath.—David returned home from attendance on the court of Saul, perhaps because his personal services to the king were no longer needed (xvii. 15). But he was brought out from his retirement by circumstances which called for service of quite a different kind. The Philistines again gathered their forces on an elevated position in the south-west of Judah, some nine or ten miles from Bethlehem, David's home. Saul and the Israelite army were ranged on an opposite height, the Valley of Elah lying between them.

Prominent amongst the Philistine host was their champion Goliath of Gath, a warrior of gigantic stature, descended from the giant race of the Anakim whose appearance had struck terror into the hearts of the spies sent by Moses to explore the Land of Promise (Numbers xiii. 33). Day by day for forty days Goliath came out into the open space between the opposing armies, and challenged the Israelites to produce one to meet him in single combat and thus decide the issue of the war between the two peoples. His challenge long failed to find acceptance. We can hardly understand how it was that Saul, who had shown such courage and resolution in previous engagements, should have suffered the armies of Israel to be thus flouted and scorned; it can only be explained by what is said in an earlier chapter, that "the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul" (xvi. 14).

Amongst the Israelite soldiers were the three eldest sons of Jesse, Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah. David was sent from his home to carry provisions to his brothers: the time of his arrival happened to coincide with the daily marshalling of the two opposing forces, and David eagerly made his way to the front to see, and possibly to join in, the fray. Here he heard the daily repeated vaunt of the Philistine champion, and he heard also the proclamation of royal rewards offered to the man who should enter the lists and prevail against this proud boaster. David expressed to one after another his amazement that Goliath's im-

pious challenge should go unmet, and his own personal contempt for one who "defied the armies of the living God."

These words of David came to the ears of Saul, and secured for him an interview with the king, in which he expressed his readiness to go and fight the Philistine. Saul was naturally disinclined at first to stake the fortunes of his country on the doubtful success of one who was still young, and who had given little evidence of military prowess. But David narrated an incident of his shepherd life in which he had slain a lion and a bear that threatened his flock, and expressed his confidence that God, who had protected him on that occasion, would also deliver him out of the hand of the "uncircumcised Philistine." Saul thereupon sent him forth with the words, "Go, and the Lord be with thee."

David refused the armour of Saul, and took only his staff, his sling, and five stones in his shepherd's wallet. Thus equipped, "a youth, ruddy and of a fair countenance," he provoked the contemptuous rage of the veteran and powerful Philistine. But David, "strong in the Lord of hosts," did not shrink from the encounter; a stone from his sling pierced the forehead of Goliath, and then with the giant's own sword David cut off the head of his enemy.

The Philistines, panic-stricken through the death of their champion, fled in hot haste; the children of Israel, recovering their courage, pursued their enemies and defeated them, and afterwards spoiled their tents. David carried the head of Goliath to Jerusalem as a trophy of his victory, and laid up Goliath's armour at his home in Bethlehem; hence it seems to have been removed to the dwelling of the priests at Nob (xxi. 9), where it was enshrined amongst the sacred furniture of the Tabernacle.

David's courage in encountering the Philistine giant caused Saul to inquire as to his parentage. Abner, the king's uncle and the captain of his army, was unable to give the information asked for, but afterwards, on David's return from the conflict, Saul ascertained particulars of David's family. We are surprised that Saul failed to recognise David throughout the incidents recorded in this chapter, remembering the service which David had rendered to him at an earlier period, and especially what is stated in

xvi 21: "David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer." It is possible that Saul's mental condition on the occasions when David played before him was not such as to enable him to retain a recollection of the youth; and it is likely, too, that David's appearance may have changed considerably with his advance in age. The affection which it is said that Saul conceived for David, and David's appointment as the armour-bearer of the king, may relate to a time subsequent to David's victory over Goliath, though they have been mentioned by anticipation in connection with earlier incidents.

Questions.

1. What was Saul's first recorded act of disobedience after his accession to the throne? Show that his offence indicated a want of real religious feeling.

2. What was Saul's second transgression? How did he excuse himself for it? In what words was he reproved by Samuel?

3. Give an account of the selection of David as king, and sketch briefly the two incidents by which he was made known to Saul.

4. Annotate, with reference to the context:—

(a) "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent."

(b) "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul."

(c) "I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them."

(d) "The battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

III.

DAVID AND JONATHAN.—DAVID'S RUPTURE WITH SAUL.—HIS EXILE.

READ portions of 1 Samuel xviii.—xxii.

David's Relations to Saul and Jonathan.—David's achievements in the war with the Philistines had two important consequences for him:—

(a) They brought about his introduction to Jonathan, the son

of Saul, and gave occasion for a friendship of the closest and most intimate character. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel xviii. 1). Jonathan was true to this friendship throughout his life, and braved the anger of his father in the cause of his friend. He recognised in David the future ruler of Israel, who should occupy the position which Saul had forfeited by his disobedience (xx. 14-17). With reference to Jonathan, Dean Spence writes: "The character of the princely son of Saul is one of the most beautiful in the Old Testament story. . . . The long and steady friendship of Jonathan no doubt had a powerful and enduring influence on the after life of the greatest of the Hebrew sovereigns. The words, the unselfish, beautiful love, and, above all, the splendid example of the ill-fated son of Saul may well have given their colouring to many of the noblest utterances in David's Psalms, and to not a few of the most heroic deeds in David's life."

(b) The renown and popularity which accrued to David from his victories over the Philistines brought upon him the jealous anger and ill-will of Saul. The women of Israel met Saul on his return from the war, and greeted him with songs of victory, the refrain of which was, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (xviii. 7). This ascription of superiority to David roused the envy of Saul; he saw in it an indication that David was the one destined to take his place, in accordance with Samuel's prediction—"What can he have more but the kingdom?" "And Saul eyed David from that day and forward"—*i.e.* looked askance at him and viewed him with dislike and suspicion.

Again David is employed to exercise his skill as a musician for the relief of the king's rage; but Saul is maddened rather than soothed, and twice attempts the life of the man to whom he and his kingdom owed so much. David is then sent away from court and given a military command, in which he wins golden opinions from the people. Saul failed to fulfil his promise of giving his elder daughter Merab in marriage to David, but instead proposed that he should marry his younger daughter Michal. He required, however, as a condition of the marriage, that David should bring evidence of having slain a hundred Philistines; this condition he imposed with the hope that the brave warrior might

lose his own life in his endeavour to fulfil the king's requirement. David, fearless of danger, slew two hundred Philistines, and Michal became his wife.

Once more David is brought to the court through the influence of his friend Jonathan, and again he gains victories over the old enemies of his country—the Philistines. But Saul, under the influence of jealous frenzy, attempts his life by throwing a javelin at him; and when David has escaped this danger Saul sends his emissaries to murder him in his house, and he only escapes through the strategy of his wife. After this David seeks refuge with Samuel at Naioth, and is followed by Saul seeking his life.

Amidst all this Jonathan remains firm and unaltered in his friendship for David, though his loyalty to his friend brought him under the displeasure of his father, and on one occasion nearly cost him his life. David is at length convinced that there is no possibility of his maintaining friendly relations with Saul, and from this time till the death of Saul he is a fugitive, wandering from place to place, and in continual peril of his life.

David at Nob.—David first betook himself to Nob, a city of the priests, in the tribe of Benjamin, where dwelt the high priest Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli. David feigned to have been employed by the king on a secret mission, and so gained the goodwill and help of the priest. The only provision which Ahimelech could give to David was the sacred bread, *the Shewbread*, which was, in accordance with the Mosaic law, reserved for the consumption of the priests alone, but David and his companions, being in extremities for want of food, were allowed to partake of it—with the stipulation that they were free from ceremonial defilement. The priest also gave to David the sword of Goliath, which, as we noticed before (p. 31), had been laid up in the Tabernacle as a venerable trophy of victory.

David's visit was noted by an Edomite, Doeg, one of the servants of Saul, and was afterwards reported to the king. Saul was enraged that the priest should have afforded sustenance and aid to his enemy. Ahimelech protested that if he had done wrong he had done it unknowingly, and that he had regarded it as only a part of his duty to the king to succour his son-in-law;

but, in spite of these protestations, Saul ordered his servants to fall upon the priests, and when they refused to stain their hands in such a sacrilegious massacre he assigned the task to the heathen Doeg, who had no scruples in executing it.

One son only of Ahimelech, **Abiathar**, escaped from the carnage and fled to David. David was deeply moved to hear of the sad fate which he had unwittingly brought upon those who had befriended him at Nob, and willingly gave shelter and protection to Abiathar, who succeeded to the office of high priest, and continued David's most loyal servant throughout his reign.*

Reference in the *New Testament*.—Our Lord referred to David and his men eating the shewbread in a controversy with the Pharisees touching the observance of the Sabbath:

“Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him.

“How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests” (St. Matthew xii. 3, 4.)

David set aside a ceremonial law in the interests of humanity when he and his companions were famishing, and so, our Lord implies, the rule as to Sabbath observance must give place to the higher law of charity. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

IV.

DAVID A FUGITIVE FROM SAUL.—HIS MAGNANIMITY IN TWICE SPARING SAUL'S LIFE.

READ 1 Samuel xxi. 10–15; xxiv. and xxvi.

David's Wanderings.—David, after his visit to Nob, took refuge amongst his old enemies, the Philistines, with Achish, the King of Gath, his safety being secured by a pretence of madness.

* The only exception to this was his taking the side of Adonijah against Solomon, whom David had nominated as his successor (1 Kings ii.). On this account he was deposed from the priesthood by Solomon, who thus accomplished the sentence on the house of Eli mentioned on p. 10.

Thence he fled to the Cave of Adullam in the south of the country, where he was joined by a band of 400 men; these were outlaws, self-banished either because of their misdeeds or because of their dissatisfaction with Saul's government. David, having placed his parents under the protection of the King of Moab, next took refuge in the Forest of Hareth. It was at this time that the assassination of Ahimelech and the priests and people of Nob described in the last lesson took place.

In his hiding-place in the Forest of Hareth David heard that the town of Keilah (in the Shephelah or low-lying district of Judah) was attacked by Philistine marauders, and, with the Divine sanction, he went to the deliverance of the people, and gained a decisive victory over the Philistines. It was at Keilah that David was joined by Abiathar, who had escaped (as has been said before) from the slaughter at Nob. Saul congratulated himself on the circumstances which had brought David from his place of safety in the Forest of Hareth and shut him up within a walled city; David found, too, that the people of Keilah, unmindful of the deliverance he had won for them from the Philistines, were prepared to give him up to Saul. He accordingly made good his escape from Keilah, and next took refuge in the Wilderness of Ziph.

Here he was followed by Saul, who maintained a continuous search for him. Jonathan had a secret interview with his friend, and encouraged him with assurances of the future that awaited him when his kingdom should be established in place of that of Saul; the two friends parted with assurances of mutual fidelity, but, as it appears from the subsequent narrative, they were destined never to meet again in life. The Ziphites, like the people of Keilah, were now planning to deliver up David to Saul; David found safety in retreat further south, to the Wilderness of Maon. Hither, too, Saul pursued him, but was drawn away from the pursuit by an incursion of the Philistines. In the meantime David found a securer refuge in strongholds in the Wilderness of Engedi, "a lofty plateau, upon the tops of cliffs some 2,000 feet above the Dead Sea."

David Spares Saul's Life.—Saul, after his engagement with the Philistines, resumed his quest of David, taking with him a force of 3,000 chosen men. At this time David had the opportunity

Second Period (about fifteen to twenty years).—From the time of his call to be a prophet till the death of Eli. During this time he continued to dwell at Shiloh.

Third Period (twenty years), during which he was going up and down amongst the people correcting their idolatry and rousing them to religious reform.

Fourth Period (about twenty years), following the victory at Ebenezer.—During this time he was the settled judge and ruler of the nation under the Divine King.

Fifth Period.—When he had laid aside the government in things secular, though remaining the religious leader and guide both of the king (Saul) and people.

Saul's First Transgression of the Divine Command.—The sacred narrative goes on to tell us of the sin by which Saul forfeited the Divine favour, and which led to his loss of the kingdom. This was in connection with a fresh rising of the Philistines, who were apparently endeavouring to recover the ground they had lost in the battle of Ebenezer. In the first place Saul selected from the whole people an army of 3,000 men, thinking this force adequate to meet any attack that might be made by the Philistines. A thousand of these troops of Israel were under the command of Jonathan, and gained a victory over the Philistine garrison in Geba.

Saul, thinking this an opportunity for striking a decisive blow against the Philistines, spread the news of the victory throughout the whole land, and gathered the fighting men of the nation at Gilgal. The Philistines, on the other hand, made their preparations to meet the force collected against them: they raised an army "as the sand which is on the sea-shore in multitude," and fully equipped for war. The Israelites were terrified by the magnitude of the forces arrayed against them; of Saul's army some deserted and fled beyond Jordan, while those who remained were fearful and faint-hearted.

Seven days Saul waited in Gilgal with his diminishing and panic-stricken forces; this appears to have been a compliance with the command given to him by Samuel some years before, at the time when he was first told of his call to the kingship;—"Thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and behold I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice

Thence he fled to the Cave of Adullam in the south of the country, where he was joined by a band of 400 men; these were outlaws, self-banished either because of their misdeeds or because of their dissatisfaction with Saul's government. David, having placed his parents under the protection of the King of Moab, next took refuge in the Forest of Hareth. It was at this time that the assassination of Ahimelech and the priests and people of Nob described in the last lesson took place.

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David Spares Saul's Life.—Saul, after his engagement with the Philistines, resumed his quest of David, taking with him a force of 3,000 chosen men. At this time David had the opportunity

sistently acted; he was at the same time absolutely unselfish in his relations with the people, and strictly upright in his administration [see 1 Samuel xii. 3-5].

Samuel was the true founder of the prophetic order—see Acts iii. 24;—"All the prophets *from Samuel* and those that follow after . . ." He established at Ramah a "School of the Prophets," where men—known as "the sons of the Prophets"—were trained to be the religious teachers of the nation.

David, Abigail, and Nabal.—An incident recorded in chapter xxv. shows the relation in which David stood to the land-owners and petty chieftains of the country of his wanderings. In the wilderness of Paran, to the south of Judah, lived a man named Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, of the tribe of Judah. He was the owner of large flocks, and had willingly accepted the protection of David and his troops from the predatory raids of neighbouring tribes. Relying on this service, and on the friendly relations which his followers had maintained with Nabal's herdsmen, David sent his men at sheepshearing time, which was usually a time of festivity and hospitality, to ask for some gift from his wealthy neighbour. This request, however, Nabal churlishly refused, and added to his refusal words of insult reflecting on David's unknown origin, and on the known fact that he had "broken away" from his master Saul. David, incensed by this insolent and ungracious treatment on the part of one whom he had befriended, vowed vengeance on the house of Nabal, and for this purpose armed his followers, who numbered four hundred men.

But Nabal's niggardly and ungenerous conduct became known to his wife Abigail, who was also informed of the claims which David and his men had established to better treatment. She was of quite a different disposition from her husband; his character was indicated by his name, Nabal, which means "fool," and by the appellation which both his servants and his wife gave him, "a son of Belial"—*i. e.* a vile and worthless fellow; she, on the contrary, was "a woman of a good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." Her "good understanding" showed itself in the prompt measures which she took to appease the wrath of the enraged chieftain, who had a force at his disposal sufficient for the destruction of Nabal's house. Taking with her

a liberal present, she went in person to turn aside his anger. Apparently she met him and his troops on their way to carry out David's purpose of revenge; prostrating herself before him, she refuses to believe that he will execute so sanguinary a design; rather her coming is to be regarded as an obstacle placed by God in his path to prevent him from the shedding of blood, which would have been a burden on his conscience in after-time. She offers her present and sues for forgiveness; at the same time she expresses her assurance of the ultimate victory to be attained by David over the enemies by whom he is at present persecuted;—"The soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall He sling out, as out of the middle of a sling." David was touched by this eloquent and forcible appeal, and, abandoning his purpose of vengeance, sent Abigail in peace to her home.

Abigail, returning, found Nabal revelling and intoxicated at the sheepshearing festival. She did not tell him at once of the peril he had so narrowly escaped, but on the morning after his drunken carouse he heard of the danger that had threatened him, and "his heart died within him, and he became as a stone." From this paralysis he never recovered, but died ten days later. David, hearing of his death, thankfully acknowledged the Providence which had inflicted punishment upon Nabal, while restraining himself from bloodshed.

David Marries Abigail and Ahinoam.—David afterwards took to wife Abigail, who had commended herself to him by her prudence and wisdom, and also by her faith in his future destiny. At some period after this David also took to wife Ahinoam of Jezreel; his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, had been given to another. These unions which David contracted were violations of God's primal institution of marriage, and brought trouble in their train; their disastrous effects may be witnessed in the dissensions and strifes by which at a later period the family of David was rent asunder.

David's Final Wanderings.—David's wanderings in the Wilderness of Ziph, when the opportunity of ridding himself of his adversary Saul was offered to him and refused, have been noticed in a previous lesson. After that he again took refuge with Achish, king of Gath, who gave him Ziklag to dwell in, and was

enlisted by this Philistine king in a campaign against his own countrymen; he was sent back, however, in deference to the suspicions of some of the Philistines. On his return he found that Ziklag had been plundered by the Amalekites, and Abigail and Ahinoam carried off, together with much spoil. Under Divine direction he went in pursuit of the raiders and recovered both their prisoners and their booty. It was to Ziklag that news was brought to David of the death of Saul.

VI.

SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR.—THE DEATH OF SAUL AND HIS SONS.

READ 1 Samuel xxviii. and xxxi.

Renewed War between the Israelites and the Philistines.—While David was resident amongst the Philistines (as stated in the last lesson), the Philistines made ready for a new campaign against the Israelites. The scene of action was not as aforesaid in the Philistine territory, but in the centre of the country—in the Plain of Jezreel, or Esdraelon. Here the Philistines were drawn up at Shunem, and the Israelites a few miles away on the heights of Mount Gilboa. It was in this campaign (as has been previously said) that David was asked by his host Achish to join the Philistines in making war upon his own countrymen.

Saul's Perplexity and Resort to the Witch of Endor.—In view of this attack by his old enemies all Saul's former courage seems to have deserted him. His prophet, teacher, and guide, Samuel, was dead. By his outrage at Nob (see p. 35) Saul had driven away the priest Abiathar, who had in his possession the sacred ephod with the breastplate (the *Urim* and *Thummim*) by which the will of God might have been ascertained. The king was thus cut off from the ordinary means of receiving Divine communications. He had, moreover, "put away those that had familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land"; but in his perplexity he was driven to resort to one of these pretenders to supernatural knowledge, who had escaped his sentence of extermination. This was the Witch of Endor, "a woman that had a familiar

spirit," residing at Endor, some ten miles away from the Israelite encampment. To her Saul betook himself, having to pass in his journey perilously near to the Philistine camp. The woman at first feared that her visitor might be an informer, who would bring upon her the penalties denounced by Saul upon those who followed her black art; but, having exacted an oath from him, she consented to do his bidding, which was that she should call up Samuel to answer his inquiries. The woman succeeded in her incantation beyond her expectation, and, in some mysterious way which we cannot interpret, the form of the aged prophet was disclosed to her mental vision; at the same time she recognised in her visitor King Saul himself.

Samuel, thus called up from the unseen world, submitted himself to Saul's interrogation. The broken-spirited king bewailed his hard lot, attacked by his enemies and deserted by God. The prophet reminded him that his misfortunes were of his own causing; he was paying the penalty of his disobedience to the Divine command in the war with Amalek; the woe then denounced was coming upon him; his kingdom, of which he had proved himself unworthy, was to be transferred to David. In the battle on the following day the Israelites would be utterly defeated; Saul and his sons would lose their lives, and pass into that unseen world to which Samuel himself belonged.

Saul, hearing this terrible announcement, fell prostrate in a swoon, and was only revived by the kind attentions of the woman and of his servants. Then he returned to his troops on Mount Gilboa, dispirited by the consciousness of the doom about to fall both upon himself and upon his country.

Battle of Mount Gilboa.—The results corresponded with the prediction of Samuel. The Israelites were worsted in the battle, and retreated upon Mount Gilboa. Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons, were slain, and Saul himself was grievously wounded. Fearing lest he should fall into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, he begged his armour-bearer to put him to death, and so save him from ill-usage by his enemies; when his attendant refused to do this, Saul took the sword from his hands and fell upon it, thus compassing his own death. His armour-bearer followed his example and died with him. The Israelites, panic-stricken by the death of their king and his sons,

fled from the neighbouring cities, which fell into the hands of the Philistines.

On the day after the battle the bodies of Saul and his sons were found amongst the slain; their heads were cut off, and their bodies stripped of their armour, and these were sent as trophies through the cities of the Philistines. The armour of Saul was finally deposited in the temple of Astarte (at Askelon), and his headless body and those of his sons were fastened to the wall of Bethshan, a Canaanitish city in the tribe of Manasseh. But the remains of the great king and his sons were not allowed to remain exposed to this ignominy; the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead rescued the bodies from the hands of their enemies, and having burnt away the decomposed flesh, they buried the bones under a tree at Jabesh. Thus they gratefully acknowledged the deliverance which Saul had wrought for them against the Ammonites in the early years of his reign (1 Samuel xi.); they further showed respect to the memory of their deliverer by a fast extending over seven days.

Questions.

1. What circumstances called forth Saul's ill-will to David? On what occasions, and by what acts, did David show the groundlessness of Saul's suspicions?

2. "Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered?" Narrate the incident referred to in these words spoken by our Lord. For what purpose was the incident cited? Show that it proved the point for which our Lord referred to it.

3. Discuss the character of Saul, and say what lessons may be drawn from the story of his life.

4. Annotate, with reference to the context:—

(a) "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

(b) "The soul of my Lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God."

(c) "The Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."

(d) "To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me."

LIFE OF DAVID

I.

DAVID'S LAMENTATION OVER SAUL AND JONATHAN—DAVID'S SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM, AND THE EXTENSION OF HIS RULE OVER THE WHOLE COUNTRY.

READ 2 Samuel i.-v.

David receives the News of the Death of Saul and Jonathan.—The news of the Israelite disaster at Mount Gilboa and of the death of Saul and Jonathan was brought to David at Ziklag. The bringer of the tidings was an Amalekite, who came with signs of mourning, professing himself to be a fugitive from the camp of Israel. He first offered homage to David, thus recognising him as king, and then reported what had befallen in the battle three days before. In answer to further inquiries from David, the Amalekite stated that Saul, being wounded and hard-pressed by his foes, had begged him to slay him, and that he had complied with this request; moreover, he brought with him Saul's crown and bracelet as an offering to David.

The Amalekite's story is inconsistent with the historic narrative of Saul's death given in 1 Samuel xxxi. He must, however, have been on the field of battle, as was shown by his possession

of the crown and bracelet; his own share in Saul's death he apparently invented in the hope of thereby winning favour and reward from Saul's successor. But his news was received in a manner very different from what he anticipated; David, as a patriot, bewailed the disaster of his country, and, as a friend, he mourned the death of his friends Saul and Jonathan; he and his companions rent their clothes in sign of grief, and "mourned, and wept, and fasted until even." This tribute having been paid to the memory of his brave countrymen, David commanded his attendants to put to death the Amalekite,* who, on his own confession, whether true or false, had "slain the Lord's Anointed."

David's Lament.—The "sweet Psalmist of Israel" celebrated the death of his friends in a pathetic poem, which was inscribed in the *book of Jasher* (probably a collection of national and patriotic odes—see Joshua x. 13). This poem was known by the name of *The Bow*,† because of the reference to the "*bow of Jonathan*" (2 Samuel i. 22), and also because of its martial character. With a view to inspiring lessons of patriotism, and also to keep alive the memory of his friends, David commanded that this song should be learned by the children of Judah.

The ode commemorates the fall of the mighty warriors who had been the glory of Israel. It pleads that the sad tidings of Israel's disasters should not be published in the cities of the Philistines, to furnish grounds of triumph and rejoicing to those ancient enemies of his country. It invokes barrenness and desolation on the mountains of Gilboa, which had witnessed so dire a slaughter. It recalls the prowess and victories of the mighty warriors, "lovely and pleasant in their lives," and "in their death not divided." It summons to mourning the daughters of Israel, for whom Saul's victories had purchased jewellery and fair apparel. It closes with a pathetic outburst of affectionate

* The Amalekite was one of the race vanquished by Saul (1 Samuel xv.); he was serving now in the army of Israel, perhaps by enforced service. In the death of Saul he would see the downfall of an old enemy of his nation, and in this would find personal reason for rejoicing.

† See 2 Samuel i. 18 (R. V.), "He bade them teach the children of Judah *the Song of the Bow*."

mourning for the friend who had been so true to him through all his misfortunes :—

*I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me :
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.**

David's Accession to the Throne.—Chapters ii. to v. narrate the successive steps by which David became established on the throne to which he had been called by the Divine voice speaking through Samuel. These may be briefly summarised :—

David, under Divine direction, moved from Ziklag to Hebron, which became his temporary capital. Here he was joined by the men of Judah, and anointed as king over the southern tribes. At this period he sent a message to the people of *Jabesh-Gilead*, gratefully acknowledging the kindness which they had shown in rescuing and burying the body of Saul.

Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, was set up as a rival monarch to David, under the influence of Abner, Saul's cousin. He made his capital at Mahanaim, on the east of Jordan. Abner, making an incursion into the neighbourhood of David's territory, was encountered by Joab, who was in command of David's forces, at Gibeon, in the tribe of Benjamin. Twelve men were chosen on each side, and a combat between these was proposed to decide the issue between the two forces. The combatants engaged with such fury that all were killed. A battle followed in which Abner's forces were defeated. In this engagement Abner being pursued by Asahel (the brother of Joab and nephew of David) turned back upon him and slew him; this gave rise to bitter enmity between Abner and the sons of Zeruiah. Abner then retreated to Mahanaim, and Joab returned to Hebron.

The house of Saul, represented by Ishbosheth, was entirely dependent upon the support of Abner for such fragment of power as it possessed. But an estrangement was caused between Ishbosheth and Abner. Thereupon Abner opened negotiations with David, and not only pledged himself to his service, but

* The arrangement, which is that of the Revised Version, shows the metrical character of the composition.

took measures to bring over to him also the chiefs of Israel. In the course of these negotiations Abner paid a visit to David accompanied only by a small escort of twenty men. After their interview David sent him away in peace. But Joab, who was engaged in some warlike expedition at the time of Abner's visit, heard of it on his return; eager to avenge the death of his brother Asahel, he sent messengers to bring back Abner, and slew him in cold blood. David bitterly grieved over this act of treachery, and fasted all day out of respect for Abner; "Know ye not," he said to the people, "that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"

Ishbosheth's rival sovereignty, deprived of the support of the powerful Abner, tottered to its fall; and he was assassinated by two of his officers, Baanah and Rechab, the sons of Rimmon. The murderers brought the head of Ishbosheth to David, congratulating him on this evidence of the downfall of the house of Saul, "his enemy who had sought his life." But David had no sympathy with treachery, and he ordered the assassins to be put to death, dealing with them as he had previously done with the Amalekite who claimed to have been the instrument of Saul's death. The only survivor of the house of Saul was Mephibosheth, who was lame through an accident in his infancy, and was thus incapacitated for rule.

The tribes of Israel then proffered their allegiance to David, and he became the king of a united nation, having previously held sway for seven and a half years over the tribe of Judah at Hebron. He now took Jerusalem (hitherto held by the Jebusites), which acquired the name of "the City of David," and made it his capital. His sovereignty was recognised by his neighbour Hiram, king of Tyre, who sent the cedars grown in his country, as well as workmen to build a palace for David. A decisive victory over the Philistines at Baal-Perazim in the Valley of Rephaim confirmed the stability of his kingdom.

II.

THE BRINGING OF THE ARK TO JERUSALEM—DAVID'S DESIRE
TO BUILD A TEMPLE TO ENSHRINE THE ARK.

READ 2 Samuel vi., vii. ; cf. 1 Chronicles xiii., xv.—xvii.

The Ark brought to Jerusalem.—The Ark of the Covenant captured by the Philistines at the battle of Aphek, was subsequently restored and placed at Kirjath-jearim [see p. 13]. Here it remained for many years ; but David, having taken Jerusalem and designing to make this the capital of his kingdom, purposed to bring there the Ark, as the visible sign of God's presence. Its removal was attended with much ceremonial, in which David himself took part. But instead of being carried on the shoulders of the Levites, as was prescribed in the Law (Numbers vii. 9), the Ark was placed on a new cart, driven by Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab. This violation of the prescribed ritual led to an alarming catastrophe ; the Ark was shaken in its carriage, and, thinking it to be in danger of falling, Uzzah put forth his hand to steady it ; for this irreverence he was stricken with death. The incident affords a solemn warning of the need of scrupulous reverence and awe in the treatment of holy things. Terrified by this misadventure, David did not at once carry out his purpose of conveying the Ark to his capital, but deposited it temporarily in the house of Obed-edom, where it remained for three months.

The sacred symbol brought blessings upon Obed-edom and his household, and David, hearing of this, renewed the attempt to convey the Ark to Jerusalem. This time it was carried by hand, as the law directed, and each stage in its progress was celebrated with sacrifices. David, attired in a sacred robe (the linen ephod), accompanied the procession with jubilant dancing, and thus, with the sound of trumpets and shouting, and attended by "all the house of Israel," the Ark was deposited in its place, in a temporary tabernacle* constructed by David for

* The question may be asked—Why did not David bring the Tabernacle, as well as the Ark, to Jerusalem, and so restore the Ark to the place which it was originally appointed to occupy?

its reception. Further sacrifices, burnt-offerings, and peace-offerings celebrated the settlement of the Ark on Mount Zion; and David, having "blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts," dismissed them to their homes, with gifts of food and wine for the due observance of the festival.

Psalm xxiv. is thought to have been written for the services of this memorable day.

*Lift up your heads, O ye gates ;
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ;
And the King of Glory shall come in,*

refers to the entrance of the sacred symbol of the Divine Presence within the gates of Zion. The psalm is one of the special psalms for Ascension Day—the entrance of the Ark within the walls of Zion being a type of the entrance of Christ, the King of Glory, into heaven. Psalm cxxxii. ("Lord, remember David") also refers to David's keen desire to transfer the Ark to Zion—"to find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." This latter psalm was probably composed for a later occasion, when Solomon transferred the Ark to its fitting habitation in the Temple which he had built:—

*Arise, O Lord, into Thy resting-place,
Thou and the Ark of Thy Strength.*

David, returning home to "bless his household," in continuation of the public services in which he had been engaged, was met by the jeering insults of his wife Michal, who congratulated him ironically on the want of royal dignity which he had shown

The Tabernacle was at Gibeon (1 Chronicles xvi. 39), ministered to by Zadok, a priest of the elder branch of the family of Aaron (house of Eleazar), who had come over to David at Hebron after the death of Saul. Abiathar (of the house of Ithamar) had espoused the cause of David at an earlier period, after the massacre of the priests at Nob [see p. 31], and had exercised his office as priest during the time of David's wanderings. David would feel it impolitic, as well as ungrateful, to supersede either of these by the other, and an arrangement for the time seems to have been sanctioned, by which Abiathar served the Ark at Jerusalem, while Zadok continued his ministrations in the Tabernacle at Gibeon. Abiathar was deposed in the reign of Solomon, and the High Priesthood was continued in the family of Zadok.

in participating with the humblest of his subjects in the services and rejoicings of the day. Apparently she had not forgotten that David had displaced her own family from the throne, and the affection with which she regarded him in youth may have been estranged (see 1 Samuel xxv. 44; cf. 2 Samuel iii. 13-16). David answered her with bitter words, reminding her that the deposition of her father was in accordance with God's decree.

David's Desire to Build a Temple.—At some later period in his reign, "When the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies," David desired to build a Temple for the Lord in place of the temporary tabernacle in which the Ark was for the present enshrined; it seemed to him unfitting that he should "dwell in an house of cedar" while the Ark of God "dwelt within curtains." This thought he communicated to Nathan, who is mentioned here for the first time as a prophet and counsellor of the king. Nathan at first looked upon the proposal with favour, but in the night following his interview with the king the word of the Lord came to him, signifying that David's design did not meet with God's approval. Nathan was bidden to assure David of God's favour towards him and his family, but the honour of "building an house for the Lord" was to be reserved for his successor. When this was communicated to David, he sought the presence of God in the temporary tabernacle where the Ark was placed. There he acknowledged the goodness that God had shown to him in the past, and dwelt on the promises of the future made to his house; at the same time he prayed for the fulfilment of these promises and for an abiding blessing upon his house (2 Samuel vii. 18-29).

This incident is referred to in St. Stephen's speech before the Council of the Jews (Acts vii. 46, 47). "David found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house."

III.

DAVID'S WARS—HIS KINDNESS TO MEPHIBOSHETH—HIS SIN
AND PENITENCE.

READ 2 Samuel viii. and x. (in parts), ix., xi., and xii.

David's Wars.—Chapters viii. and x. of the Second Book of Samuel are occupied with a narrative of David's wars against the enemies of his country :—

(i.) With the Philistines. These were utterly defeated, and their stronghold, Gath, was taken (cf. 1 Chronicles xviii. 1).

(ii.) With the Moabites. These also were utterly defeated; two-thirds of the people were put to death, and the remainder were reduced to subjection and made tributary.

(iii.) With the Ammonites, who obtained help from the Syrians and Edomites. In all these wars he was victorious, and gained thereby both military renown and accession of territory.

Joab, the son of Zeruiah, David's nephew, held the chief military command, and established a position which gave him a chief voice in the affairs of the kingdom. Under him were his brother Abishai, and Benaiah.

Mephibosheth.—David, mindful of his covenant of friendship with Jonathan (1 Samuel xx. 14-17), sought out his son Mephibosheth, who had been living in obscurity since the downfall of the house of Saul. He had been hurried away from the court when tidings came of the disaster that had befallen Saul and Jonathan; in this hasty flight he was dropped by his nurse, and bore the result of this accident in permanent lameness (2 Samuel iv. 14). As the sole survivor of the house of Saul (after the death of Ishbosheth) he might have been regarded as an object of suspicion by the reigning king, but David chivalrously gave him a place in his court, and restored to him his hereditary estates (2 Samuel ix.).

David's Great Sins.—During the second campaign of the war with the Edomites (referred to in a previous section) David was betrayed into his great sin of adultery. The sharer in his guilt was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a brave soldier who was then fighting for the king's cause against the Edomites. His first sin

led to the commission of a second no less heinous. He deliberately gave instructions to Joab to place Uriah in a position of special peril, and as the result of this Uriah was killed. Thus David broke the Sixth Commandment as he had previously broken the Seventh, adding the crime of murder to the sin of adultery.

The Royal Penitent.—Bathsheba became David's wife, and their sin was hidden from men, "But the thing that David had done *displeased the Lord.*" The messenger chosen to denounce David's sin and to declare the punishment that would follow it was the prophet Nathan. To bring home to David the selfishness and cruelty of which he had been guilty, he told the story of two men, the one rich and the other poor; the rich man possessed of an abundant store of flocks and herds, the poor man owning but one ewe lamb, which he had tended with the greatest care and regarded with the deepest affection. A traveller coming for refreshment to the rich man's house, the rich man spared to take of his own flocks and herds, but took instead the poor man's one cherished lamb, and dressed it for his guest.

David's anger was kindled by the story of such an outrage, and he pronounced sentence on the man who had dealt so cruelly and unjustly: "As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Then the prophet applied the story, and drove home the lesson. "Nathan said to David, *Thou art the man.*" The sin that David condemned in another was, in its essence, precisely the same as the sin of which he had himself been guilty. To satisfy his own lust, he had broken into another's home, and robbed him of the one joy and solace of his life.* And his sin should not go unpunished; "the sword should never depart from his house"; as he had destroyed the peace of Uriah's home, so should peace be taken away from his own; it should be rent by internal dissen-

* It is noteworthy that sins of lust and impurity are represented under the Dispensation of Sinai as the extreme form of *selfishness*; under the Dispensation of the Gospel as *sacrilege*. "Flee fornication . . . he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. Know ye not that your body is *the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own!*" (1 Corinthians vi. 18, 19).

sions, and his wives should be put to shame even as he had brought shame upon the house of Uriah.

David's repentance, when his sin was thus brought home to him, was genuine and sincere. "I have sinned against the Lord" was his confession to Nathan; and his penitence found expression in the words of the Fifty-first Psalm, "Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness; according to the multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences." Nathan was thereupon commissioned to pronounce God's forgiveness, "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." But "his sin had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." Men would point the finger of scorn at one who had professed such deep piety and used language of such deep devotion, and who had nevertheless acted so basely, and thus discredit would be brought on the religion which he professed.* To vindicate God's righteousness, and to make it clear that sin should not go unpunished, the child born of Bathsheba should die.

This sentence was duly carried out. The child, to which David was tenderly attached, was stricken with mortal sickness. David strove to avert the blow by fastings and prayers, but on the seventh day after its seizure the child died. Then David, submitting himself to the Divine decree, ceased from his penitential exercises; he "came into the house of God and worshipped," and afterwards returned to his palace and to the ordinary habits of his daily life. Such conduct excited the wonder of his servants, but David replied to their questionings in the memorable words:—

While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live?

But now he is dead wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

* Such acts as those of David would be lightly regarded by an absolute Eastern monarch, responsible to no one for his conduct and untrammelled by religious scruples. The seriousness with which they were regarded by the Divine messenger, and the depth of David's subsequent penitence, bear witness to the higher standard of moral conduct, towards God and towards man, to which the Jews were commissioned to bear witness amongst surrounding nations.

IV.

DAVID'S DOMESTIC TROUBLES.—THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM.

READ 2 Samuel xiv. and xv.

David's Domestic Troubles.—“The sword shall never depart from thine house. . . . I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house (2 Samuel xii. 10, 11)” This was the sentence pronounced by Nathan upon David in punishment for his sins, and subsequent chapters show the carrying out of this Divine decree.

First Amnon, David's eldest son, shamefully treated his half-sister Tamar; to revenge this outrage, her brother Absalom caused Amnon to be put to death at a festive gathering to which he had invited him. Absalom, fearing that he would be punished for this deed of violence, took refuge with his father-in-law Talmai, King of Geshur, and remained in exile three years. Time had softened David's regrets for his son Amnon, and had increased his yearning for his banished son Absalom; Joab, perceiving the bent of the king's feelings, took measures to obtain Absalom's recall. This he did by engaging the services of “a wise woman of Tekoah;” she elicited the king's sympathy by representing herself as a widow, bereaved of one of her sons, who had been slain by misadventure by his brother, and threatened with the loss of the other son by the vengeance of his kinsmen. When the king promised immunity to the son who had slain his brother, the woman artfully appealed to him to show like mercy to his own son Absalom. David perceived that Joab had prompted this appeal, but he nevertheless gave way to it, and authorised Joab to bring back Absalom. At first he was excluded from the court, and dwelt for two years in Jerusalem without being granted an audience with the king. Joab's assistance was again invoked, and Absalom was summoned to the king's presence and received from his father the kiss of reconciliation which placed him on his former footing in the royal family.

Absalom's Rebellion.—Absalom, as the eldest surviving son of David, would naturally be looked upon as the heir to the throne.

But he may have suspected that his wrong-doing and subsequent exile would interfere with his succession. He accordingly took measures to gain the good-will and support of the people. He made a show of state with chariots and horses, and a company of fifty men as runners before him when he appeared in public; to this princely pomp he added a gracious condescension, treating the populace with extreme courtesy, and condoling with litigants on the mismanagement of the affairs of the kingdom, which it would be his pleasure to redress if opportunity were afforded him.

By these devices, no doubt aided by the splendour and attractiveness of his personal appearance (2 Samuel xiv. 25, 26), he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel," and in the course of a few years* proceeded to open rebellion. He obtained permission from David to go to Hebron, the place of his birth and childhood, under the plea of fulfilling a vow to do service there to the Lord. Hebron, as the former capital, afforded a suitable centre from which to promote the rebellion against David. Absalom attached to himself two hundred men from Jerusalem, and enlisted also on his side David's chief adviser, Ahithophel of Giloh, a town near to Hebron. He sent agents throughout the country to make proclamation of his monarchy established at Hebron, and his conspiracy rapidly gained strength.

David, hearing of these proceedings against his throne, made a hasty retreat from Jerusalem, displaying a timidity which we can only account for by his recognising that his son's rebellion was a part of the Divine chastisement for his sin. The course of David's flight was across the brook Kidron, which lay to the east of Jerusalem, and up the ascent of the Mount of Olives. His royal bodyguard (the *Cherethites* and *Pelethites*) remained faithful to him, and a company of six hundred *Gittites* (troops of Gath) under Ittai. The priests Zadok and Abiathar brought out of the city the sacred Ark, and carried it forth to join David's forces; but David refused to allow it to be exposed to the risk of profanation which it had incurred on former occasions (1 Samuel iv. and 2 Samuel vi.), and bade Zadok

* The "forty years" in 2 Samuel xv. 7 is plainly an error in the text, as David's whole reign was only forty years; for *forty* some propose to read *four*.

and Abiathar, with their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan, carry it back to Jerusalem.

David submitted himself as a penitent to the Divine chastisement, and went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet with signs of mourning, which was shared by the whole body of the people. The news of the defection of Ahithophel, his trusted counsellor, moved his indignation: this found expression in the prayer, "O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness." The treachery of Ahithophel is the subject of Psalm xli.: "Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Cf. Psalm lv. 12-14. Ahithophel, who thus dealt treacherously against David, is a type of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed the Son of David; the verses from the Psalms (lxix. 26 and cix. 8), quoted in Acts i. 20 as applying to Judas Iscariot, were probably spoken originally with reference to Ahithophel.

Amongst those who showed loyalty to David was one Hushai the Archite, who joined him on the summit of the Mount of Olives with a desire to share his exile. David, however, pointed out that he could be more serviceable to his cause by returning to Jerusalem, and, while simulating adhesion to Absalom, keeping David informed of the plans adopted by Absalom on the advice of Ahithophel. In this he would be aided by Ahimaaz and Jonathan, the sons of the priests, who would act as his messengers to David.

Questions.

1. What do you know of the following persons: Ishbosheth, Abner, Uriah the Hittite, Nathan, Ahithophel?

2. Give quotations from the Book of Psalms illustrating the following events:—

- (a) The placing of the Ark in the Tabernacle on Mount Zion.
- (b) David's penitence for his sins.
- (c) The treachery of Ahithophel.

3. Distinguish the forgiveness of Absalom for the murder of Amnon from his reconciliation with his father. Give an account of the circumstances which led to Absalom's rebellion.

4. Write notes on the following passages, with reference to the context:—

- (a) "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askalon."
 (b) "He called the name of the place *Perez-uzzah*."
 (c) "Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"
 (d) "The poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb."

V.

INCIDENTS OF DAVID'S FLIGHT—DEFEAT AND DEATH OF ABSALOM.

READ 2 Samuel xvi.—xix.

Mephibosheth and Ziba—In David's flight from Absalom he was met first by Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth (cf. 2 Samuel iv. 4 and ix.), who professed himself to be devoted to David's cause, and as a sign of his loyalty brought asses for the use of the king's servants and provisions for their sustenance. In answer to David's inquiry, he stated that Mephibosheth had remained at Jerusalem, hoping that the revolution might result in the restoration of the house of Saul and his own accession to the throne. David, hastily accepting the truth of Ziba's story, transferred to him the possessions which he had assigned to Mephibosheth. On David's restoration to the kingdom Mephibosheth defended himself from the aspersions cast upon him by Ziba, and David restored to him one half of the possessions of which he had been deprived. We cannot determine whether Mephibosheth was wholly innocent in the matter; if he was, it seems hardly consistent with David's justice that he should not only have allowed Ziba to go unpunished, but should also have permitted him to retain one half of the property which he had acquired by fraudulent misrepresentation and treachery (xix. 24–30).

Shimei.—David was spared no insult that his enemies could heap upon him in the course of his flight from his son. At Bahurim one of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, cast stones at him, and reviled him as justly punished for his

usurpation of Saul's kingdom and for the bloodshed by which he had secured his position. Abishai would fain have killed Shimei because of his insolent behaviour; but David accepted the reviling as part of the punishment Divinely appointed for his crime. When David regained his kingdom Shimei made an abject submission, and his life was spared (xix. 16-23). He was put to death, however, in the next reign, having broken the conditions which Solomon had thought it necessary, as a matter of political prudence, to impose upon him (1 Kings ii.).

Absalom set up as King in Jerusalem.—Absalom and his troops entered the capital, which had been deserted by David. Here he was joined by Hushai, whom David had sent back with the purpose stated in the last lesson. Absalom in the first instance accepted the counsel of Ahithophel, adopting a course which involved the greatest dishonour to his father, and so made the breach between them permanent and irreconcilable.

Ahithophel further advised an immediate pursuit of David with a strong force, which should overtake him unprepared and disperse those who still adhered to his cause; the death of David under these circumstances would settle the matter, and secure Absalom's succession. As a matter of tactics no doubt this advice was prudent, but it was overruled by the counsel of Hushai, who represented the danger of driving the king and his heroic followers into a corner, where they would fight like lions for their lives, and also the consequences that would result to Absalom should he sustain a temporary reverse.

Hushai, having thus delayed the movements of Absalom, sent Ahimaaz and Jonathan, the sons of the priests, to warn David of his peril. These narrowly escaped detection by the servants of Absalom, but were able to reach David, who, in consequence of Hushai's timely notice, made good his escape beyond Jordan, and fixed his headquarters at Mahanaim, on the eastern side of the river. Here he had time and opportunity to organise the bands of his followers; he was assisted by Barzillai the Gileadite and by others, who brought supplies for the refreshment of the troops of the king.

Ahithophel, chagrined at the rejection of his advice and at the favour shown to his rival Hushai, and foreseeing the disaster which would ensue to the cause of Absalom from the delay, returned to

his home at Giloh, and, having put his household in order, hanged himself and died. In this self-inflicted death the traitorous Ahithophel was also a type of the traitor Judas (see p. 56).

War on the Eastern Side of the Jordan. Death of Absalom and Collapse of his Rebellion.—Absalom at length followed David across the Jordan; he placed his cousin Amasa in command of his forces, instead of Joab who remained faithful to David. David yielded to the wishes of the people in not personally engaging in the battle, and entrusted the command to Joab, his brother Abishai, and Ittai of Gath; to these he gave an express command to “deal gently with Absalom.”

The decisive battle was fought in the wood of Ephraim, the precise locality of which cannot be determined, but which was evidently in the country east of the Jordan. It ended in a decisive victory for David's troops, 20,000 of Absalom's followers being slain. Absalom, in his flight, riding upon a mule, encountered a company of David's troops, and, in his endeavour to escape from them, was caught by the hair in one of the trees of the forest, the mule on which he rode going away from under him. In this perilous position he was seen by one of David's troops, who carried the news to Joab. The man himself had refrained from taking advantage of the opportunity thus afforded him of putting Absalom to death, because of the command which David had given to his officers in the hearing of all his troops. But Joab was not deterred by any such scruples; he took up three staves, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom; the troopers who accompanied him then “compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.” This brought the rebellion to an end; the body of Absalom was cast into a pit, and the site was marked by a cairn of stones; his name, however, was kept in remembrance by a pillar which he had set up in his lifetime in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, perhaps the burying-place of his children who had died in infancy [cf. xviii. 18 and xiv. 27].

The Tidings brought to David.—Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, was the first to arrive at Mahanaim with tidings of the battle and its sequel, but he shrank from telling the king of the death of Absalom; this task was left to a Cushite slave, to whom Joab had assigned the unpleasing duty. He conveyed the tidings in the words, “The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise

against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is." In spite of his disloyal and undutiful conduct, Absalom was still dear to the heart of the king; David may have recognised in him not so much the undutiful son as the appointed minister of God's threatened punishment; he gave utterance to his sorrow in the pathetic lament, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Joab bitterly reproached David for indulging a grief which involved a reflection on those by whose services his life and kingdom had been preserved. David admitted the justice of this reproach, and resumed his public duties: he was eventually restored to his kingdom, with the good will of all his people. He displaced Joab from his position as commander-in-chief of the army, and appointed another nephew, Amasa Absalom's former officer, to succeed him.

VI.

THE CLOSE OF DAVID'S REIGN.—THE PLAGUE.—THE COLLECTION OF MATERIALS FOR THE TEMPLE.—THE SUCCESSION OF SOLOMON.

READ 2 Samuel xxiv., &c.

The Plague in Punishment for the Numbering of the People.—“The closing period of David's life, with the exception of one great calamity, may be considered as a gradual preparation for the reign of his successor.”* Particulars of this calamity are given in 2 Samuel xxiv. “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.” David gave an order to Joab (now reinstated as the commander-in-chief of his army—see chapter xx.) for the numbering of the people. The mere taking of a census was not in itself wrong, but it appears from the context that this was a military census, a reckoning of the fighting power of the nation; looked at in this light it indicated a reliance on the “arm of flesh” rather than on the living God, and as such it brought

* Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible."

down God's judgment on the king, and also on the people who may have shared in his proud and ambitious thoughts.* This numbering of the people was objected to even by the unscrupulous Joab and the captains of the host, but the king was not to be diverted from his plan, and the numbering was begun. More than nine months were occupied in the taking of the census, but before it was completed David realised the sin of which he had been guilty. The prophet Gad was commissioned to announce to him his punishment; he was offered his choice from amongst three forms of Divine chastisement, either (a) seven years [in Chronicles, *three years*] of famine; or (b) three months' defeat by his enemies; or (c) three days' pestilence. David showed his piety in choosing the last of these; "Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great." His choice also showed his magnanimity and unselfishness, for the visitation which he selected was one from which he personally was more in danger of suffering than from either of the other alternatives.

David had a vision of the destroying angel hovering above Jerusalem, with a drawn sword stretched out over the city (1 Chronicles xxi. 16); in answer to his prayers the work of destruction was stayed, but not till 70,000 of the people had died from the plague. The prophet Gad directed David to build an altar to the Lord *in the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite*, the site over which the destroying angel had been seen. Araunah, one of the royal family who had previously reigned in Jerusalem, magnanimously offered David both the site free of cost and materials for his sacrifice, accompanying this with a prayer that his offering might be accepted of God. David, however, refused to offer to the Lord of "that which cost him nothing." Having purchased the threshing-floor and the oxen, he offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Thus the plague was stayed and forgiveness was assured

* The numbering of God's people, moreover, rightly regarded, had a religious aspect, and so should not have been taken in hand from any lower motives. See Exodus xxx. 11-16, which prescribed a money payment, to be made by every one included in the census "as a ransom for his soul," as an acknowledgment of the privilege to which he was admitted, and of his own unworthiness. The punishment for the neglect of this was *plague*, and a reverent regard for this precept of the law may have influenced David in his choice of punishment.

both to the king and his people. The site of this altar was Mount Moriah, the scene of Abraham's sacrifice (Genesis xxii.), and this became subsequently the site of Solomon's Temple (2 Chron. iii. 1).

Collection of Materials for the Temple.—One occupation of David's latter days was the collection of materials for the Temple, the building of which was reserved for his son Solomon (see 1 Chronicles xxii., xxviii., and xxix.). The plan and details of the Temple had been mysteriously communicated to David—"the pattern of all that he had by the Spirit" (1 Chronicles xxviii. 12); and the materials and furniture were of the most costly description. The collected treasures were solemnly dedicated to God in the presence of the whole congregation, with sacrifices and prayers, the latter expressing the most noble thoughts of God and His greatness (1 Chronicles xxix. 11-19). This dedication was accompanied by the formal designation of Solomon as David's successor on the throne.

David's Last Days.—The appointment of Solomon disappointed the hopes of Adonijah, who was now the eldest surviving son; he took steps to secure the succession for himself, and won over to his side Joab, the commander-in-chief, and Abiathar, the priest. Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the commander of the royal bodyguard, loyally adhered to David's wishes, and proclaimed Solomon as king. Adonijah's supporters were panic-stricken by the prompt action of Solomon's party. Adonijah himself fled for sanctuary to the altar, and his life was spared, till in the next reign his conduct gave cause for suspicion of disloyalty, and he was put to death.

David died, at the age (according to Josephus) of seventy years, and after a reign of forty years, seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. His "last words" (2 Samuel xxiii.) are his own inspired statement of the faith by which his life was actuated: "The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, *He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.*" He was buried in "the city of David," and the place of his burial was known in New Testament times, as we gather from St. Peter's speech, "His sepulchre is with us unto this day" (Acts ii. 29).

David was spoken of by Samuel as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel xiii. 14, cf. Acts xiii. 22), and the history of his life is summed up in 1 Kings xv. 5: "David did that which

was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life *save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.*" This was the one dark spot in a life which was, in the main, lived in conscious communion with God and in obedience to His commands. The history has furnished us with evidences of David's loyalty to his king, his courage, his warm and disinterested friendship, his affectionate remembrance of those who had shown him kindness, his hatred of treachery and meanness, his zeal for God's glory, and the tenderness of his domestic affections. He discharged his duties as a king with an abiding sense of responsibility to Him Who is "the King of all the earth." In the words of St. Paul, "He served his own generation *by the will of God*" (Acts xiii. 36).

In David Christus is the saying of St. Augustine, by which he meant that in the life of David we find many points of resemblance to the life of Him Who is called the "Son of David." Our Lord was "of the house and lineage of David"; He was born in Bethlehem, "the city of David"; David's victory over Goliath typified our Lord's victory over Satan; as the *anointed* king of Israel he was a figure of the *Messiah*; David an exile, passing over the brook Kidron, ascending the Mount of Olives, and weeping as he went, reminds us of Him Who, from the same mountain, beheld Jerusalem and wept over it, and Who trod the same road on the night of His betrayal; the treachery of Ahithopel, David's "own familiar friend," foreshadowed that of Judas Iscariot; and David's restoration to Jerusalem is a figure of the Ascension of our Lord to His throne in heaven.*

* See Hobson's "Aids to the Study of the Books of Samuel," pp. 237-239.

RECAPITULATORY QUESTIONS

*[Most of these Questions have been set in Training College,
Pupil-Teacher, or other Public Examinations.]*

1. UNDER what circumstances was Hannah's song composed? To what song contained in the New Testament does it bear a resemblance? Point out the passages in which this resemblance is displayed.

2. Sketch the history and character of Eli, stating through whom he was rebuked, and why.

3. Describe the circumstances which led to Saul being chosen as king over Israel. How did he behave when chosen? How and when was he acknowledged as king?

4. "Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." By whom was this speech uttered, and on what occasion? Illustrate it from other portions of the Old Testament.

5. Compare the behaviour of Saul with that of David in the matter of dependence upon God, and reference to God's will.

6. What events are connected with Bethshemesh, Ebenezer, Jabesh-Gilead, Keilah? Indicate the geographical position of these places.

7. Trace the history of the Ark during the period covered by the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David.

8. Mention incidents in the life of David which show (a) his fear of God; (b) his regard for the lives of men; (c) his constancy in friendship; (d) his penetration.

9. What lessons may we learn from the sacred record of Uzzah and Araunah, and from David's conduct with respect to his child that was sick unto death?

10. Give some account of Joab. How did he gain the position which he held? To what may we attribute his influence over David?

11. Describe the rebellion of Absalom. What cause may be assigned for Ahithophel joining it? What reference is there to Ahithophel in any other part of Holy Scripture?

12. What was wrong in David's act of numbering the people? What choice was offered him in the matter of punishment for his sin? Give the words of his reply, and point out what indication they afford of David's character.

13. Write notes on the following, with reference to the context:—

- (a) "Surely the Lord's anointed is before Him."
- (b) "How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?"
- (c) "Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."
- (d) "The sword shall never depart from thine house."

14. Write what you know of the Witch of Endor, the Woman of Tekoah, Abner, Shimei, Abiathar, Hushai.

15. What incident gave occasion to the friendship between David and Jonathan? What "covenant" was made between the two friends? How did David observe this after Jonathan's death?

16. What references to the histories of Samuel, Saul, and David are found in the New Testament?

17. In what respects was David a type of our Blessed Lord? By what quotation from the Psalms did our Lord show that he was greater than David?

18. How may the histories of Samuel, Saul, and David be used to illustrate the duties of love to our enemies, and obedience to authority; and the penalties on disobedience to parents, and on irreverence about holy things?

19. Explain the expressions "Sons of Belial," "Ark of the Covenant," "House of Dagon," "a seer," "Ichabod"

20. Give an account of David's offer to build a house for God, its results, David's prayer, and the answer.

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