

Dealing with the Frustrations of Life (Part One)

Key Thought: We Christians must know how to go through frustrations, disappointments and disillusionment, which are never easy to live with and don't even come at times and in ways we can anticipate.

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ I have seen something else under the sun:

The race is not to the swift
or the battle to the strong,
nor does food come to the wise
or wealth to the brilliant
or favor to the learned;
but time and chance happen to them all.

¹² Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come:

As fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are taken in a snare,
so men are trapped by evil times
that fall unexpectedly on them.

Life Need

Be honest with yourself. Do you like to be frustrated and disappointed? Have you prayed "Please, Lord, send more disappointment my way!"? No one wants disappointment or disillusionment; you and I are not exceptions to that rule. We don't like frustration and we want to avoid it, yet in our lives we discover that things like this are inevitable. Whether you like it or not, if you are a living, breathing human being then you have been disappointed by someone or something, or if it hasn't happened yet I guarantee that it will!

Even those who follow Jesus Christ will not avoid disillusioning moments. Contrary to what some may teach, becoming a Christian does not shield you from the bad side of life; if anything, becoming a follower of Jesus will make you even more aware of what life is like; it can (and will!) bring people more sorrow than they wish to have!

Doesn't sound very positive, does it? Many of you reading this are saying to yourselves, "I don't think I really want to read any more of this; I would rather read something more positive and feel-good like John or Romans or even Revelation." However if we Christians are going to be able to live as our Lord calls us to, we must deal with what we may perceive as "negative

aspects” of life; we should know what to expect and how to deal with them. It is as dangerous to only look at life from a positive point of view as to use only a negative viewpoint; all aspects of life, good and bad, must be considered if we will live a balanced, godly life.

The wise author known as the Teacher (see Ecclesiastes 1:15; 7:27; 12:9-10) offers balance in his book, and specifically in the two verses of our text. He tells us flat-out that we must expect frustration and disappointment. In light of this, how do we handle it?

Bible Learning

Verse 11. The Teacher observes something that he does not believe *should* happen. Conventional wisdom says the race should always be won by the fastest, the battle should be decided by skill and preparation, the big money should go to the best businessman and the wise should always have food on their tables. But things don’t always happen that way. Why? Two elements combine and mean we should not put all of our trust in conventional wisdom: Time and Chance.

Man cannot control time in any way. He cannot harness time no matter how hard he tries; it marches on steadily, and man has no say in it. If the better runner is in second place and needs the race to last just one extra second to overtake the inferior runner in the lead, he won’t get it. If the skilled warrior, perhaps a Navy SEAL, just needs a tenth of a second more to avoid an attack, he won’t get it. If a wise man needs just one more day to close a deal that will make his business prosper for the next twenty years, he won’t get it. Time is divinely appointed by God to march forward at a set pace, and we can’t alter it, contrary to what we may see in certain science-fiction stories on television or in movies.

Second, chance (referring to events that are unexplained and unforeseen) can hit a person at any time. You don’t know what someone driving next to you on the interstate will do; he could continue to go straight ahead, or miss seeing you and change lanes right into you. We don’t know if the next time we go out to eat at our favorite restaurant a piece of food served there will make us sick. We don’t know if a flight at the airport will be a delayed, or if we will get a flat tire on the way to work, or if our workplace is on the verge of closing. We are far less knowledgeable of events around us than we think we are, and events can work against us with no approval on our part.

Verse 12. Time and chance can combine for an unbeatable tag-team which mercilessly frustrates the plans and aspirations of men. The runner may have no clue about the small pebble which was missed by the caretakers of the race track, and will have no control over stumbling. The Navy SEAL

doesn't know when a bullet or a rocket may be fired randomly in his direction, and when he realizes it he will have no time to avoid it. The skilled businessman doesn't know of his rival's plan for a deal which is better than his, and when he learns about it he will have no time to react to it. The husband driving home with his wife and children doesn't know that his tire is about to blow out, and when it does he will not have the time to react to it. Truly, when we look at our lives, we are far more like the fish and the birds than the "masters of our fate, the captains of our soul." In many cases we just don't have a clue what will happen to us, for better or for worse, and have no time to react to it when it happens.

Bible Application

Pastor David Jeremiah relayed a story about Napoleon Bonaparte and the battle of Waterloo. In the morning the emperor of France met with his generals, went over the battle plans, and then bragged that he was going to defeat the coalition arrayed against him and make the Duke of Wellington bow at his feet. One general commented that they "must not forget that man proposes and God disposes." What was Napoleon's response to this general? "You had better remember that it is Napoleon who proposes and Napoleon who disposes." According to Jeremiah, from that moment *everything* went wrong with the battle. Napoleon's generals were not where he wanted them to be, the soldiers were given orders they could not carry out, conditions on the battlefield hampered his troops, and in the end it was the emperor who bowed at the feet of the Duke of Wellington.

Napoleon had the attitude of a fool, who thought he could go along without God. I wonder, is your attitude towards life similar to that of many people who will not say "My plans are in God's hands," but rather "My plans are in my hands"? There is a huge contrast between those two attitudes! Ask yourself, do you automatically assume that every plan you concoct, every goal you have in mind to accomplish, will be achieved and there is nothing that will stop you? Do we have the attitude which is condemned in James 4:13-16? Do we believe that we know every single factor that is happening at all times, and are able to predict what the future holds for us and thus can react to it? James, like the Teacher, has very strong words to say to us who believe we will go to this or that place and do what we will. In fact, my friends, we have no idea what is going on around us! We have no idea what others are planning and how it may help or hurt us. And when we learn of what others intend it may be too late for us to react. Why, then, do we live our lives as though we have complete and total control over what happens to us?

Life Response

It has been said, “If you want to make God laugh, tell Him your plans.” There is only One who knows how everything goes, and how everything will turn out. Allow me to tell you, brothers and sisters, that you are *not* the One who knows what is going on. God knows, and for His own reasons He has chosen not to let us know what will happen to us tomorrow. That can be a frustrating aspect of life, not knowing why some things happen the way they do, but it is just how life is. We are finite beings with no control over time and events that may happen around us. As a result, while we know that “all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28), we do not know what things God will use! Are you able to accept that? Can you accept the fact that events will be thrown at you which you may not want to have happen? Can you rest in the will of God, knowing that no matter what happens, He is in control, even if the events of your life may seem completely out of control?

Questions for Discussion

1. On a scale of 1-10, how frustrated are you with life (in general) right now? What is the most frustrating thing in your life right now, and how are you dealing with it?
2. On a scale of 1-10, what is the most frustrated you remember ever being about anything? How did you deal with it?
3. What do you think about the idea, expressed in the lesson, that to only look at life from the positive view is as dangerous as looking at life from only a negative view? Why do you agree or disagree with that?
4. What are some examples of realistic expectations that didn't come true? For example, have you known someone incredibly smart, or athletic, or wealthy, who ended up not becoming what you thought they would become? What happened to him or her?
5. How do you view your plans? Do you have the same attitude that Napoleon had before the battle of Waterloo? If so, why?
6. Being completely honest, how comfortable are you with the thought that you are not really in control of your circumstances? How much are you willing to let God have hold of your plans?

Dealing with the Frustrations of Life (Part Two)

Key Thought: One of the most troubling and frustrating aspects of life is ingratitude. Since thanklessness is a sad yet inevitable reality, what are you doing to prepare for it?

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 9:13-16 (NIV)

¹³ I also saw under the sun this example of wisdom that greatly impressed me:

¹⁴ There was once a small city with only a few people in it. And a powerful king came against it, surrounded it and built huge siegeworks against it.

¹⁵ Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man.

¹⁶ So I said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

Life Need

We have already examined some of the Teacher’s words about frustration, with his warnings of time and chance. However, it would be foolish to believe that these are the only aspects of life we need to be concerned about. Let’s face it, brothers and sisters, many, many aspects to life can be downright irritating and disappointing. In my experience one of the greatest irritants is the frustration of ingratitude.

Have someone ever ignored something that you did for them? Have you ever had a good deed go unnoticed? If so, the Teacher has something to say to you in this passage of Ecclesiastes.

Bible Learning

Verses 13-14. The Teacher is starting to tell a parable that we can relate to – a story of an underdog (a small town with just a few people) going against a powerful opponent (a king that built siegeworks against the town). We have storylines like this all the time in our movies and TV shows, don’t we? Just picture the king as a bad guy dressed in black, firing his guns and causing havoc in an old West town. Or see him as leading a large group of interstellar aliens to plunder Earth’s resources or simply destroy the planet. At any rate, the legitimate expectation here is that the king will demolish and destroy the small town; he’s not there to negotiate! After all, if he was there for a diplomatic meeting, why would he build siegeworks around the town?

Verse 15. The town had a poor man living in it who was wise, and by his wisdom he was able to turn back the powerful king and save the town! We aren't told how he did it, but the means of salvation is not the issue; the point is that the poor wise man had an idea to save the town, and he was able to do so! Given this accomplishment by the poor wise man, what should he have *legitimately* expected from the residents of the town? The answer should be simple: the poor man should have received gratitude and thankfulness for what he did in saving the town. Maybe he should have gotten the key to the city, or a position on the city council, or wealth, or a statue of himself in the town square, or any number of things. However, according to the Teacher's story, what did the poor man actually get? He was forgotten! He received nothing! After the salvation was wrought no one paid any attention to him or thought anything else of him; in the eyes of the people of the small town the poor wise man is now ancient history.

Verse 16. With the story told, the Teacher now comes to a conclusion about how life is. He first states that "wisdom is better than strength." Mind you, the Teacher has consistently taught this conclusion throughout Ecclesiastes (see, for example, 2:13-14, 26; 4:13; 7:11-12, 19; 10:2-3), and it is completely consistent with the rest of the Bible, even if he acknowledges that wisdom (including godly wisdom) is limited by what man sees and knows (see 1:15; 2:15-16; 7:20; 8:17). If you had to place a wager on either wisdom or strength, or either wisdom or folly, always, ALWAYS bet on wisdom. Furthermore, the wisdom that the Teacher is referring to is not mere worldly wisdom, as many Bible commentators will claim, but instead is given by God (see 12:9-11). But at the same time the Teacher warns us not to expect any goodwill or gratitude for our good deeds or our wisdom that we may utilize.

Bible Application

One Bible teacher commented on the passage this way: "The parable is not a moral tale to show what people should do; it is a cautionary tale to show what they are like."¹ In other words, the purpose of the Teacher's story is not to warn believers against being ingrates and have them be thankful people (although that should certainly be the case; as Christians, we should always have a thankful attitude toward God and those who do good to us!), but to warn believers that this is how people as a whole are going to react to anything good or wise the believers do. The fact is, people have short

¹ Kidner, Derek. *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976, p. 85.

memories (or seemingly *no* memories whatsoever!); they are not concerned with the good they were given yesterday, they are only interested in what you have done here and now. (Remember the saying, “What have you done for me lately?”)

Is this right? Should we, as a species, be proud of this? No way; we need to be a thankful people and a community of believers that will give thanks for whatever good is given to us. But unfortunately, ingratitude and forgetfulness are the norm in this world, and you and I do not have the power to change the mindset of the entire human race. Perhaps we need to reevaluate our expectations of people; instead of always anticipating recognition maybe we need to expect people to not pay attention to the good we do. Come to grips with this; accept this, even if you don’t like this. Do this, and you will be free to do good without undue worry or frustration. Ask yourself this: “Why should we do good?” Are we doing good in order to gain recognition, or because we are called to do good by a good God regardless of the consequences? Do we love others so we can be loved, or do we love others because God first loved us (see 1 John 4:19)?

When you do something wrong and you apologize for it, don’t expect that the people whom you wronged will always forgive you. When you lend money, don’t always expect people to pay you back. When you allow someone to use your car, don’t expect people to always refill your gas tank to where it was. Remember the words of the psalmist in Psalm 37:21: “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.” People will take advantage of the good you do; count on that to happen. But *do good anyway!* Do the right thing no matter what, even if the results are not what you may expect them to be! As the Teacher will say in just a little bit, doing good and gaining wisdom is always better than strength or weapons of war (Eccl. 9:17-18).

Life Response

Jesus’ works were disregarded by many people. Consider, for example, the account of him healing ten lepers (see Luke 17:11-19). How many of the ten came back to Jesus and thanked Jesus for what he did? Only one! What was the reaction of some of the people when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead? Rather than give praise and thanks to God, they plotted to have him killed (see John 11:45-53)! I must ask this question; if Jesus, who was a perfect man in every way, was treated with ingratitude and a thankless attitude by many people, what right do we have to expect people to always remember what we did and be thankful for what we do? Do you disregard the work of Jesus in your life?

At the same time, did the fact that only one leper out of ten came back to give Jesus thanks stop Jesus from doing good? Did the threats of the high priest to kill Jesus stop him from doing his Father’s will? No, it did not. If Jesus still did good despite the ingratitude thrown at him, how much more can we do good!

We can be grateful to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, that He has promised those of us who are His children a safe landing. But we have never been promised a smooth flight on the way down to earth, have we? So why should we expect our lives to be easy and smooth? Expect bumps. Come to grips with the fact that people will forget what you have done. It’s going to happen, no matter how much attention you may bring to yourself! Once you do this, you will be able to live the life that God has called you to live. You won’t have a heart attack or a stroke each time someone forgets you. You will be able to embrace the joy of Christian living, to accept and revel in the gifts God has given to you. Paul’s attitude can and will be the same as ours, if we will let it: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

No matter how we prepare, still many people will forget the good we do. No matter how many lights you have shining on your works, people will still close their eyes. However, the fact that you know forgetfulness will happen can help you have a mindset prepared for it. Remember, too, that God doesn’t forget. He will bring all things to judgment, even the hidden things (Eccl. 12:14).

Questions for Discussion

1. Tell the class about a good thing you did for someone which was not noticed or regarded. How did it make you feel when your good deed went unnoticed or ignored, and how did you react?
2. Do you agree with the Teacher’s statement in verse 16 that “wisdom is better than strength”? Why or why not?
3. Do you agree with the quote which says we should see the Teacher’s story as a warning not to expect people to remember good deeds?
4. How do you feel about the author saying we need to reevaluate our expectations of people? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
5. How should you go about seeking godly wisdom?
6. How are you preparing for the disappointments that will come?

Daily Temptation

Lesson Aim: To study the purposes and sources of temptation.

Golden Text: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.” (James 1:12)

Lesson Text: Judges 3:1-4; Psalm 106:34-41; James 1:13-15 (KJV)

^{Judges 3:1} Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

² Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

³ Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

⁴ And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

^{Psalm 106:34} They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them:

³⁵ But were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.

³⁶ And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.

³⁷ Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils,

³⁸ And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.

³⁹ Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions.

⁴⁰ Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance.

⁴¹ And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.

^{James 1:13} Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:

¹⁴ But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

¹⁵ Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Lesson Background

Judges 3:1-4. Here is a typical example of the way in which we manufacture our own temptations. God had strictly commanded Israel to destroy the native population of Canaan (Deut. 7:1-4). This they failed to do. Consequently, God punished them by letting the rest of the native peoples remain to be a thorn in their side and a temptation (Judg. 2:1-3). How much better off would they have been had they obeyed God's commands! This temptation need never have arisen. So do many of our temptations grow out of our foolish disobedience to God's Word.

Psalms 106:34-41. David in this Psalm reminded his people of what had happened to them in the past, of how many times they had been disobedient, and of how they had suffered all kinds of evil in consequence. History is an effective teacher to those who will hear her story. "These things were our examples." Israel did not heed.

James 1:13-15. Israel's experience, recorded in the two previous sections of the lesson text, underlines the truth of this statement of James'. Most of our temptations arise out of our own indiscretions. Let us not charge God foolishly in this. But Israel's experience teaches us also that when they repented and looked to God He saved them out of their distresses. In His mercy He will give strength for resistance to those who are true to Him.

Bible Learning

Judges 3:1. The LORD. Jehovah, the real conqueror of Canaan, left a few tribes undestroyed. This was so that Israelites who had not seen struggles of the past might have their faith tested as their fathers' had been.

2. To teach them war. God accomplishes His national purposes by natural means, so He taught His people, as He later taught David their king, to make war.

4. Whether they would hearken. War is a great disciplinarian. In the face of danger, Israel would learn absolute obedience.

Psalms 106:34. Did not destroy. They disobeyed God who had commanded the utter destruction of those nations (Deut. 7:2).

35. Learned their works. Because God knew the Canaanites would lead Israel into sin, He ordered their extermination.

36. Idols. It was not until after the Babylonian captivity that Israel gave up idolatry.

37. Sacrificed their sons. Molech, named as an “abomination” of the Canaanites (Ezra 9:1), required human sacrifices by fire (2 Kings 17:17; see v. 38.)

40. Abhorred his own inheritance. So vile were their lives that God loathed them.

41. Heathen. “Nations.” – A.R.V. God permitted their pagan enemies to conquer and rule them.

James 1:13. Tempted. Encouraged to do wrong. **Neither tempteth he any man.** God, who abhors evil, encourages no one to sin.

14. Drawn away. “As beasts are enticed from a safe covert into a place beset with snares.” – Vincent. Sin is deceitful. Its dreadful results are no more apparent than is the death that awaits the animal that is led by appetizing bait into a trap. (Heb. 3:13.) **His own lust.** One needs no influence from outside himself to lead him into sin. **Lust.** “Inordinate desire.” – *Diaglott*. The thing desired may in itself be perfectly wholesome and good. It is only when desire becomes uncontrollable, leading to over-indulgence, that it develops into sin.

15. Conceived. Evil desire may be compared to seed of noxious weeds. It must be destroyed before it grows into a plant, or it will quickly produce more seed like itself and soon choke out the good grain and occupy the entire field. **Finished.** Righteousness lives forever, but sin, because it is contrary to God’s will, must have an end. “Sin in a family, or in a nation, will at last destroy that family or that nation, and so destroy itself.” – S.J. Lindsay. **Bringeth forth death.** Sin is a fire feeding on the fuel of human passion, which in time will consume the one submitting to it (Psa. 37:20).

A Study of the Subject

Testing Proves One’s Worth

It is sometimes reasoned that one needs tempting with evil to develop the good. The logic is wrong. Some slanderously reported Paul as affirming, “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom. 3:8). “Woe unto them that call evil good” (Isa. 5:20). All the virtues of a Christian life are developed through close contact with God, and the abounding of sin has nothing whatsoever to do with the development of righteousness. Faith is the outgrowth of belief, and is expanded through prayer, indwelling and living of the Word, and the continual living by faith (Rom. 1:17; 10:17). Love produces love. The unchangeable law of all nature is that “kind produces kind.” Sin produces only sin.

Physiological Factors

In considering the source of temptation, the physiological make-up of man must be considered. All temptation comes through the five senses – feeling, seeing, smelling, tasting, and hearing. The sensory (afferent) nerves carry all impressions from without to the brain. From the brain, the motor (efferent) nerves carry all impulses outward. All temptation is transmitted over the sensory nerves, and all impressions come to the brain from without. Both sets of nerves are one-way transmission lines. The sensory governs the thinking – the motor controls the actions. James’ use of the word “entice” fits in with man’s natural make-up. The “enticing” comes from without and is transmitted over the sensory nerves. This is temptation. When the motor nerves carry the decision to yield to the temptation and cause the action, then sin is committed.

Temptation not from God

A basic truth around which all conclusions concerning temptation and sin should be built is the proposition that “God tempteth no man.”

Young People’s Class

Daily Temptation

God made us with certain natural desires which bring pleasantness to us when satisfied. The satisfying of hunger is a pleasure. To rest when one is tired is very enjoyable. It is proper that our natural desires be satisfied in a way that does not harm us or others and in a way that is not in opposition to God’s laws. If, however, the suggestion comes to us that we steal food and our desire to eat makes us want to steal, then we are tempted. This is what James called being “drawn away . . . and enticed.” The suggestion to do wrong may come from what we have seen, what someone has said, or from evil thoughts that we have allowed to rest in our minds. All people are tempted many times daily.

The Remedy

It is not wrong to be tempted. Even our Saviour was tempted, “yet without sin.” If we understand that the satisfying of our desires in the wrong way, or at the wrong time, brings all manner of unpleasantness and eventually an early death, it will be easier to overcome temptation. If we will remember that the greatest joy extending over the longest period of time will come by yielding to these natural desires only in the way God intended, it will be easier for us to cast out the evil thought before it has a chance to take root. Trust in God and He will help you overcome temptation.

Practical Applications

The slender sapling which comes up in the midst of a forest has little stamina in itself. Remove the trees surrounding it, and it is likely to be uprooted by the first stormy wind that blows. But the seedling that shoots up in the crevice of a rock high on a hillside, twisted and bent by every breeze, puts its roots deep down between the rocks, and in its maturity is secure through the storms of years. Temptations are like the winds that blow; either they strengthen, or they destroy. As each trial is permitted to assail us, we overcome it, thereby gaining strength to meet the next one; or, we succumb to it and are thereby weakened so that it is easier to fall before the next one.

There are those who contend that a child must “burn his fingers” in order to learn that fire is hot. In like manner, a child must taste of the sin of the world in order to know what sin is. There is nothing in God’s Word to bear out such a theory. Solomon said, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). As the little twig learns to withstand the breeze until as a sturdy tree it can endure the hurricane, so the child must be taught to resist small temptations in order that as he attains manhood he can overcome all the trials of life. If one is well acquainted with the Word of God from childhood up, he will be well equipped to meet and overcome every difficulty.

Trials Endured Bring Patience

James wrote thus: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (James 1:2-4). Today God is preparing a “people for his name.” Each must be tried and true. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:13, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

May we recognize in each adversity a “temptation,” or a “trial,” or a “testing”; may we overcome them one by one, until we come “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

“We can easily manage if we only take each day the burden appointed for it.”

God's Government

Lesson Aim: To show that God watches over the nations in fulfilling His purposes.

Golden Text: “By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.” (Proverbs 8:16)

Lesson Text: Judges 8:22-23; Daniel 4:28-33; Romans 13:1-6 (KJV)

^{Judges 8:22} Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian.

²³ And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you.

^{Daniel 4:28} All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar.

²⁹ At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

³⁰ The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

³¹ While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee.

³² And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.

³³ The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

^{Romans 13:1} Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same:

⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

⁶ For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Lesson Background

Gideon was the fifth of the judges. It was he who, with a tiny army of three hundred, routed the hordes of the Midianite conquerors, and delivered Israel. Then, after victory, when they gratefully offered to make him king, he nobly refused, like our own Washington, reminding them that God, not man, was their King.

Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon chosen by God to destroy Jerusalem and carry into captivity all Judah, in punishment for their protracted sins. With him began the "times of the Gentiles" now drawing to a close. He had had experience with the God of heaven, for his dream had been interpreted by Daniel, and he had seen the three young Hebrews whom he had cast into the fiery furnace come out unhurt. Yet he had not learned humility, and in this passage God reminds him anew that he is but an instrument of a far greater Monarch, as are all earth's rulers.

We might think it strange that Paul, who knew well the corruption and violence of the Roman power, should so urge support for it as he does in Romans 13. But on the other hand, there were many times when that strong arm of law had been his defense against lawless and violent men, and even saved his life. God has used the agents of the Roman empire, unknown to themselves, to further His work through Paul. Christians must stand for law and order, and respect it in the ruling power.

Bible Learning

Judges 8:22. Rule thou over us. Gideon, appointed by God as judge and deliverer of Israel, had defeated the Midianites and Amalekites by the power of God.

23. The LORD shall rule over you. Not many men could have refused an opportunity to become ruler by popular choice of a great people. Gideon, however, recognized Jehovah as the one King of His people.

Daniel 4:29. Twelve months. A year after Daniel had interpreted the king's dream.

30. Great Babylon. Even the ruins of Babylon are "great." In the time of Nebuchadnezzar, its massive walls, hanging gardens, and majestic palaces were marvelous indeed. **I have built.** God had given him the kingdom and "power to get wealth" as He has given it to Israel and Solomon.

31. Kingdom is departed. No matter who governs a nation, God remains its supreme Ruler (Dan. 4:17; 5:27-28; Psa. 22:28).

32. Kingdom of men. Kingdom ruled by men with God's sanction (v. 34).

33. Same hour. The penalty was immediately carried out. Not even a mighty emperor like Nebuchadnezzar can delay the accomplishment of God's purposes (v. 35).

Romans 13:1. Soul. Higher powers. "Superior authorities" – *Diaglott*. "Government authorities" – Moffat. Civil government is an ordinance of God, and officers are to be obeyed as His ministers, clothed with authority from Him (v. 4).

2. Damnation. Condemnation. God condemns the breaking of civil laws, as He condemns the breaking of spiritual laws.

3. Rulers are not a terror to good works. Police officers are the protectors of law-abiding citizens, but the "terror" of criminals.

4. Minister of God to thee for good. The Christian should thank God for ordering the appointment of such officers, for at the danger of their own lives, they protect us that we may "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:1-3).

5. For conscience sake. One's Christian conscience impels him to obey civil officers.

6. Tribute. Taxes. We willingly pay taxes by which the government, by sanction of God, employs armed men to protect us in our civil and religious rights (v. 4). **God's ministers.** "God's public ministers" – *Diaglott*.

Attending continually. A brother in Nebraska, compelled by engine failure to leave his heavily loaded farm track unprotected in the night, thanked God for His "ministers," the state police, whom he found guarding it the following morning.

A Study of the Text

God Rules over Nations.

"God is the King of all the earth" (Psalm 47:7). To what extent Jehovah rules in the kingdom of men this writer does not pretend to know. That He does concern Himself with the affairs of human governments is apparent

from the words of Daniel, and other writers of the Holy Scriptures. He no doubt orders and restrains the affairs of men to a much greater degree than we usually ascribe to Him (Rom. 9:21; Psa. 76:10). The fact that God uses nations for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose does not in any way make their acts of righteous character. For example: He used the Assyrians as a “rod of mine anger” (Isa. 10:5). The Assyrian did not know that he was being so used (v. 7).

Men Ought to Be Submissive

Paul was speaking the mind of God in this chapter as well as in other portions of his letter. Civil government is of God. Without it, there would be “no society, no security, no private property, all would be confusion and anarchy.” Peter informed us on our duty to magistrates in the following manner: “Submit yourself to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Pet. 2:13-15). There have been instances where such decrees countered the way of the Lord. When such happens one course is open before the true child of God. It is: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

God’s Ministers

Rulers of men are so named in the Word of God. It means authorities or servants. They may be vessels of honor. Festus was not a righteous man, but he was used as a means of opening up the way for Paul to go to Rome (Acts 25:1-15). He thus became “God’s minister.” When the import of present events is fully known, then will be understood the meaning of what now seems so mysterious.

Young People’s Class

A Higher Power

Many a boy has felt the laying on of his father’s hand because he failed to recognize his father’s authority. Men and nations have also been slow to acknowledge the power and authority of God, but they learn sooner or later. The earlier that one learns the supremacy of God’s authority, the earlier will he begin to enjoy God’s blessings. The people of Israel were reluctant to recognize that prosperity came to them when they walked in God’s way, and that when they turned from Him, they fell into the hands of their enemies. Even the enemies of Israel learned that God watched over His people, and Nebuchadnezzar in particular learned by a trying experience that God “ruleth in the kingdom of men and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

Governments were ordained by the heavenly Father as a means of regulating and controlling the human family. Governments in general are to insure protection to the people, but sometimes God sets up over a people the

“basest of men” for the chastisement of that people. It would seem that God allowed Hitler to rise to such power for the purpose of chastising his own nation and also other nations. Since God’s purposes are manifold, there were, of course, many other things being accomplished, such as the encouragement of Jewish people to return to their home land. All these things are for the eventual accomplishment of God’s great plan to have the whole creation under the just and righteous rulership of Christ.

Seeing that God rules in the kingdoms of men and that He shall accomplish His purpose, it behooves us to come under His rulership and authority today while we may have the reward of His present blessings and the hope of being Christ’s assistants in the coming age.

Practical Applications

God Aids His People

Jehoshaphat, fourth king of Judah, ruled wisely and well. He took down the idols which his father and grandfather had permitted to be set up everywhere, and sent priests throughout the land to teach the people to worship Jehovah. “The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David” (2 Chron. 17:3).

For years, all was peace and quiet for Judah, but one day word was brought to Jehoshaphat that the people of Moab and Ammon had conspired with those of Seir, and all were coming against him. Instead of seeking human help, he called upon God: “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee” (2 Chron. 20:12). God answered the king through Jahaziel, a Levite: “Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . Thus saith the LORD unto you. But not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not your’s, but God’s . . . Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you” (2 Chron. 20:15, 17).

On the morrow they set forth fearlessly, singing, “Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.” “The LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, and Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten” (v. 22). When Judah came upon them, they found only heaps of dead bodies, and precious jewels so that they took as spoil all they could carry.

Thus did God care for His people as long as they trusted and obeyed Him. When they turned aside from Him, invariably disaster overtook them,

until finally the kingdom was overthrown completely and the people carried away into captivity.

God Still Controls

God has not lost control over the nations of the earth. As with Israel and Judah, He gives men the privilege of doing as they please – obedience with peace, disobedience with disaster. In Jeremiah 31:10 we read “Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.” In His good time He will demonstrate His control over all nations, they shall all obey from the least to the greatest.

The Falling Away

Lesson Aim: To show how easy and how dangerous loss of faith can be.

Golden Text: “For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” (Psalm 56:13)

Lesson Text: Judges 8:33-35; 2 Peter 2:12-21 (KJV)

^{Judges 8:33} And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again, and went a whoring after Baalim, and made Baalberith their god.

³⁴ And the children of Israel remembered not the LORD their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side:

³⁵ Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel.

^{2 Peter 2:12} But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

¹³ And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;

¹⁴ Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

¹⁵ Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

¹⁶ But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

¹⁷ These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

¹⁸ For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

¹⁹ While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

²⁰ For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

²¹ For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

Lesson Background

The falling away after Gideon's death was part of a wearisome pattern when each judge died. With the kings, as well, there were repeated lapses into idolatry until the nation's destruction.

The ease with which Israel sank into sin on the least provocation is an example and a warning to us. In them we see our own weaknesses. Without our heavenly Judge, we as easily as they fall away from the Lord.

In the passage from Peter, the purpose seems to be a warning against the false teachings that were to come. Peter emphasizes his point with examples, quoting Noah's faithfulness in the face of world-wide apostasy, and Lot's vexation with the ungodliness of Sodom, showing how God preserved both of these patriarchs, because of their faithfulness, from the ruin that came upon their contemporaries. Balaam's sad case is an example of the wrong kind.

We are in the same peril today, and should take heed. The remedy is a strong faith gained by a diligent study of the Bible, and living close to God.

A Study of the Text

Judges 8:33. Gideon. A judge who delivered Israel from the Midianites who had held them in subjection for seven years (chapters 6-8). **Baalim.** It was idolatry that caused God to withdraw His protection (2:10-15).

34. Delivered them. God had delivered Israel on many occasions, all of which they forgot (2:10; Psalm 103:2).

35. Kindness to . . . Gideon. Gideon had risked his life to save them, but they showed no respect for his memory or example.

2 Peter 2:12. Beasts. "Natural irrational animals." – *Diaglott*. Peter compared false teachers (v. 1) to dangerous beasts that must be entirely destroyed. **Understand not.** They scorn as "foolishness" (1 Cor. 1:23) what they do not understand (3:3-4).

13. Day time. They enjoy making open display of their vile immoralities. **Deceivings while they feast with you.** Christians who associate with them are led into sin by their religious pretense (2 Tim. 3:4-5, 13).

14. Cannot cease from sin. They cannot resist the evil habits they have formed.

15. Forsaken the right way. They once went in “the right way” leading to life, but turned back into the broad way ending in death (Matt. 7:13-14).

16. Dumb ass speaking. Balaam was rebuked for his desire to earn the reward King Balak offered for the cursing of Israel.

17. Wells without water. Claiming to offer “the water of life,” false teachers have nothing but empty words. Jesus only can provide “living water.” (John 4:14, cp. Jer. 2:13.)

18. Allure. With their “great swelling words” they persuade many to “follow their pernicious ways” (v. 2).

20. Pollutions. Gr., “miasmata”; Eng., “miasma.” Noxious, contaminating influences from which the Christian has escaped by union with Christ. (1:4.) **Again entangled.** After having escaped from such wickedness, if they allow themselves to be entangled in it again, “there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb. 10:26-27), and they are worse off than they were in the beginning.

21. Better. Had they never known the truth they would have been more susceptible to its influences when it reached them, than they would be as “warmed over” Christians.

22. True proverb. “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly” (Prov. 26:11).

A Study of the Subject

People Soon Forget

“Lest my people forget.” How easy to forget God’s benefits! (Psa. 103:2.) We should forget many things, but the “works of God” let us not forget. The only way to escape the path of the “forgetters” is to join the company of those who “in every thing give thanks” (1 Thess. 5:18). “Cursed is the man whose heart departeth from the LORD” (Jer. 17:5). A few years ago a doctor called me at night and said a man dying in the hospital wanted to see me right away. He was in repentant mood, seemingly anxious to serve the Lord if raised to health. He promised if the Lord answered our prayer in his behalf, he would give his restored life over to the Master. He was raised up, but he soon forgot his promise. His number is legion. Have you forgotten God’s goodnesses?

Forsaking the Right Way

Peter affirmed that many, like Balaam, will forsake the right way and turn to the “wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). It seems that every few years is a re-occurring forsaking of the Lord. In Jeremiah’s time the people

had forsaken the fountain of living waters (Jer. 2:13). Soon after the Temple worship was re-established Nehemiah found the Temple forsaken (Neh. 13:11). Soon after people forget the “benefits” of the Lord, they “forsake” the way of the Lord which leads to the house of God.

Apostate

It is not pleasant to anticipate, but the solemn truth as set forth in the Word is that the great body of believers will become mostly apostate in the last days. They will have a “form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5). During the ministry of Jesus, the majority of people turned back after following him for a while (John 6:66-67). It is so now.

Young People’s Class

The Falling Away

Most likely you have known the way of righteousness to that extent where it would be better not to have known, than to turn now against God. Though it may seem almost impossible that you should ever want to oppose God (and I trust that you shall remain faithful no matter what may happen), still it is well to remember the possibility of falling away. Paul warned the Corinthians: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

It is Up to You

Your continued faith in God does not depend so much upon your strength and ability as on your desire for God’s help in overcoming the temptations that tend to draw you away from Him. “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptations also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

Three things you may do will help insure you against turning back. First, know assuredly that God is interested in you and that He has a great desire for your continued faithfulness. Second, remember the glorious rewards for walking in the way of righteousness which shall be yours both now and in the future. Third, keep in mind the utter hopelessness and uselessness of the lives of those in our lesson.

One other thing will help you always remain true to the heavenly Father. Keep in close contact with others who are faithful. Choose your companions from those who walk in righteous paths.

Attend church, for it is one of the best stabilizing influences you can find. Pray often for strength to be ever faithful.

Practical Applications

“Walk by Faith”

A storm swept the waters of Galilee one night, and a fishing vessel was tossed by the turbulent waves. The apostles who were in the ship saw a figure approaching from shore, walking on the waters. They were frightened, thinking, in their superstition, it was an apparition. But the voice of Jesus reassured them, “It is I; be not afraid.” Impulsive Peter said, “Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.” Jesus said, “Come.” So Peter stepped down from the boat and started to walk on the water to Jesus.

The waves were high and boisterous, and Peter eyed them with fear, and began to sink. In terror, he cried, “Lord, save me!” Instantly, Jesus reached out and caught him, saying, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?” It is so easy for fear to overwhelm faith. Had Peter kept his eyes on the Master, he could have continued to go to him; but when he allowed terror to overcome him, he lost sight of the Lord and began to sink.

When we Christians keep our eyes of faith fastened upon the promises of God, all goes well. Perhaps the trials of life surround us; we see difficulties and dangers on every hand, and we lose sight of the Master, and begin to sink in the abyss of despair. Then, in terror, we cry out, “Lord, save me!” If we cry from a contrite heart, he hears us, catches hold of our hands, and draws us back to his side. By faith we can hear him say, “O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?”

The life of a Christian is of necessity a constant overcoming of difficulties, a perpetual struggle to suppress the weakness of the flesh. Since this can only be done by faith, and since “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17), it behooves each of us to have the Word of God firmly fortifying our faith. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8).

Paul said in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” So fortified, our faith will always remain firm and steadfast.

“God takes very good care of his creatures, especially his faithful children who repose all their confidence in him.”

Jephthah's Vow

Lesson Text: Judges 11:29-40 (NRSV)

²⁹ Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. ³⁰ And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, ³¹ then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD'S, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering." ³² So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. ³³ He inflicted a massive defeat on them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty towns, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

³⁴ Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her. ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow." ³⁶ She said to him, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites." ³⁷ And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I." ³⁸ "Go," he said and sent her away for two months. So she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. ³⁹ At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made. She had never slept with a man. So there arose an Israelite custom that ⁴⁰ for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Introduction

If we were to ask for quick reactions to the name of each of the previous ten presidents, probably at least half would involve a misstep or controversial decision. Perhaps it is human nature to focus on the negative or scandalous; it certainly isn't new. The subject of today's lesson, Jephthah, would have been a polarizing figure in any era.

Jephthah was the son of Gilead and an unnamed prostitute (Judges 11:1). His younger brothers force him to leave the home because they don't want to share their inheritance with their illegitimate half-brother. When the angel called Gideon a mighty warrior that might have been ironic, since at the time Gideon was threshing wheat concealed in a cistern because he feared the Midianites (Judg. 6:11-12) Jephthah seems to have earned that reputation before being a judge, because outlaws joined him in the wilderness and they survived as raiders (perhaps like pirates or an ancient forerunner to Robin Hood and his merry men). When Israel gets in trouble, the leaders of Gilead call on Jephthah to save them, and if it wasn't for one rash decision he would have been one of Israel's heroes.

Bible Learning

Before looking at the *Lesson Text*, we'll look at the rise of Jephthah as a leader in Israel.

Judges 11:4-11. Jephthah the negotiator

Ammon oppresses Israel and the elders of Gilead go to the wilderness to ask Jephthah for help. He first complains that they had aided his brothers in kicking him out of the community, but they pledge to make him their leader and he agrees to help.

Judges 11:12-28. Negotiations fail

Jephthah sends a message to the king of the Ammonites asking for the cause of its oppression. The king replies that Israel has occupied territories claimed by the Ammonites and they want them returned. Jephthah replies that Israel didn't take the region from Ammon but from the Amorites, who had taken them from Ammon, and that Israel only acted after it was denied passage to the Promised Land. Jephthah doesn't seem to want to negotiate a settlement but rather to pick a fight. He concludes the negotiations by saying he wants to let the God of Israel, who had originally delivered the land, settle the matter, presumably in battle.

Chronological note: Jephthah states in verse 26 that Israel had possessed this land for 300 years. Scholars differ over the date of the Exodus, with an older date of sometime in the 1500s BCE or a later date of 1200 BCE. The older date seems more in line with biblical chronology and Jephthah's statement would support that date because the reign of the kings begins with Saul sometime around 1050 BCE.

Judges 11:29-40. The vow

The text first notes that the spirit of the Lord comes onto Jephthah and shortly afterwards he makes a vow that if God will give him victory, he will give as a burnt offering the first thing that comes to greet him when he returns home. While we might think of the family dog running to meet him, Fido isn't on the list of acceptable sacrifices to God. Neither are humans, but it appears that is what Jephthah has in mind. This is in direct contradiction to the command of God. "No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer." (Deut. 18:10). Later several kings of Israel appear to have violated this, including Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:6).

Jephthah wins the battle and returns home the victor where he is greeted by his daughter, his only child. He is devastated but cannot break his vow and thus sacrifices his daughter after giving her two months to mourn her virginity. Our text says that because of this the daughters of Israel annually went to the wilderness to lament the daughter of Jephthah for four days. This is the only account we have of that commemoration.

We are rightly horrified at what appears to have happened in this text and some have even tried to lessen the horror by suggesting that the daughter simply had to spend the rest of her life as a servant in the Temple. But there doesn't seem to be such an office in Israel, so most likely the shocking truth is that Jephthah gave his daughter as a burnt offering. That was done by the Canaanites in their fertility religions but it was totally anathema for Israel.

Judges 12:1-7. Bad accent

We have one last story from the judging of Jephthah. The Ephraimites seem to have a habit of missing the battle but then complaining that they weren't invited (Judges 8:1). This leads to civil war and a new word in our vocabulary. The people of Ephraim couldn't or didn't pronounce the 'h' in Shibboleth, so after defeating them in battle Jephthah's troops set up a road block at the fords of the Jordan and made "Shibboleth" the password. Those who dropped the 'h' were killed. Today a Shibboleth is a question to which there is only one politically correct answer.

Bible Application

What lessons do we learn from Jephthah?

1. Know your Bible. It's sad that Jephthah didn't know his Bible better. The Law gives very specific instructions about an alternative to human sacrifice. This was necessary because God claimed the life of every firstborn son in Israel, just as the firstborn of Egypt were killed in the time of Moses. But God didn't want a human sacrifice. Instead Leviticus 27:1-8 gives

explicit instructions as to how to redeem a person from being sacrificed. Vows were permissible, although they should be taken very seriously, but human sacrifice was totally forbidden.

2. This points to another problem. The elders of Israel had kept Jephthah on the margin of society because they didn't approve of his roots, then they elevated him to leadership out of desperation. He proved to be a good warrior but a rash leader. He was long on enthusiasm but short on depth. He sought his personal advantage in every situation but many suffered because of his actions. He forced a battle when negotiations might have worked, he sacrificed his daughter, he fomented civil war.

3. The story of Jephthah is a good example of why much of the Bible needs to be read as a narrative rather than a law book. If we think we should be able to find principles or rules to live by in every text, we won't get much out of Jephthah's account. But if we read this as a story of God's people, one that includes the bad with the good, then we don't have to justify or whitewash Jephthah's behavior. We can just take it as a picture of how things were in Israel when there was no king and everyone did what was right in one's own eyes (Judg. 21:25).

Life Response

One lesson from Jephthah is that Robin Hood types don't necessarily make good leaders. Even a person who is good in crisis isn't necessarily strong when times are less stressful. Winston Churchill appears to be such a person – the best leader for England during World War Two but a failure before and after. People who are good in crisis might tend to create crises when things could be going more smoothly. Even in the church, we might elevate a person to leadership because of one's enthusiasm more than one's experience. Paul instructed that in selecting elders and deacons we focus on signs of Christian maturity.

On a personal level, I think of 1 Corinthians 12:13: "No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it."

Jephthah appeared to think that there was no way out of his situation, but God had made a way out of our rash vows in Leviticus 27. He must have known that people would do what Jephthah did. Many people justify bad decisions by saying, "There was nothing else I could do." We certainly can face tough decisions, but if you ever hear yourself saying that you have no choice it might indicate that you need to ask for help in looking for options. You might not be able to think of anything else to do but perhaps someone you know can give you better alternatives. Maybe you have to make a tough

choice but there are ways to minimize the consequences. Look for a way out when you think you are in a corner.

Questions for Discussion

1. When we think of our nation's leaders, do we tend to remember the controversial or scandalous more than the good? If so, why is that?
2. The author characterized Jephthah's early days as being like an ancient Robin Hood. How would you characterize his beginnings?
3. What explanations have you heard for Jephthah's vow? Why would we not want to think that he sacrificed his daughter? What do you think actually happened?
4. What are examples of "Shibboleth"s we might encounter today?
5. Do you think that Jephthah didn't know about Leviticus 27:1-8? Should that have given him a way out?
6. How did Israel's elders fail in making Jephthah their leader?
7. The author suggested reading the Bible as a narrative rather than a law book – what is the difference?
8. The author suggested that we look for maturity rather than enthusiasm when selecting our church leaders. How do we recognize maturity? How do we encourage the enthusiastic to maintain their zeal? Do we need to help people avoid rash decisions?
9. Have you ever felt required to make a bad decision? How does one get in that position? How can we learn to ask for help when thinking we don't have options?
10. How can we help people who seem to have gotten themselves into a corner?

Samuel Appears

Lesson Aim: To show why human judgment of others is often wrong.

Golden Text: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.” (1 Cor. 4:5)

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 1:9-20, 25-28 (KJV)

⁹ So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.

¹⁰ And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

¹¹ And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

¹² And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth.

¹³ Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

¹⁴ And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

¹⁵ And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

¹⁶ Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

¹⁷ Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

¹⁸ And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

¹⁹ And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.

²⁰ Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

²⁵ And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

²⁶ And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.

²⁷ For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

²⁸ Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

Lesson Background

Eli was one of the judges of Israel, and also a priest of the line of Ithamar. His family was later shorn of the priesthood, and it passed back to Eleazar's line because of the disgraceful way Eli permitted his sons to conduct themselves – for the way in which they flagrantly profaned the priest's office. (See 1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-24.)

Eli's leniency with his sons on the one hand, and his hasty and groundless accusation of drunkenness against Hannah, on the other, reflect the incompetence of his last days, and the crying need for reform.

Samuel's appearance was a star of hope in Israel's dark days as the period of the judges drew to a close. Samuel was to be the last judge and the link between the judges and the kings. He was one of the greatest men of the Old Testament, raised up by God for a great work at that time.

Bible Learning

1 Samuel 1:9. Hannah. Devout wife of Elkanah. **Shiloh.** Town twenty miles north of Jerusalem where the tabernacle remained four hundred years during the period of the judges. **Eli.** High priest and judge of Israel.

10. Bitterness of soul. She sorrowingly regretted having no children. **Prayed.** Her experience proves that God answers prayer.

11. Vowed. Made a conditional promise to God. **No razor.** Untrimmed hair and beard was the sign of a Nazarite, one pledged to the service of God.

12. Continued praying. She did not give up, but continued "instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12).

13. Spake in her heart. To be effective, prayer must come from the heart (Psa. 44:21). **Thought she had been drunken.** Even the best of men may misjudge others from their outward appearance.

14. How long? Eli erred in making such a charge without first investigating. "Love thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

15. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink. A mother should demand no more self-denial from her children than from herself.

16. Daughter of Belial. “Belial is not a proper name, but a Hebrew word for ‘worthlessness.’ A son or daughter of Belial is, therefore, a worthless person.” – I.B.C.

17. God in peace. How humiliating it must have been to Eli, who had failed to rear his own sons well (2:22-25), to find he had wronged a good woman whose prayer was that she might have a son to serve God! Eli added his prayer to hers. (Matt. 18:19.)

18. No more sad. She now knew her prayer would be granted. (Matt. 11:24.)

19. The Lord remembered. God never forgets those who trust Him. (Psa. 112:6.)

20. Samuel. Literal meaning: “His name is El,” i.e., “God” – Diet.

25. Brought the child to Eli. As high priest, Eli represented God. (See v. 11.)

26. My lord. A title of respect, as we would address a judge, “Your honor.” **I am the woman.** As children were not weaned until they were two years or more of age, three years may have passed since Hannah had last met Eli, so she recalled herself to his memory (v. 22).

27. For this child I prayed. The child in her arms bore evidence of answered prayer.

28. Therefore. Because God had given her a son, she was ready to keep her pledge. **I have lent him.** “I have dedicated him to the Lord.” – A. Tr. **He worshipped.** When God answers prayer, one feels His presence and is moved to worship Him.

A Study of the Subject

Judge Not

The golden text expresses the aim of the lesson better than the text itself. Only the Lord can bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make light the counsels of the hearts of men. The practice of judging others causes the one judging no end of unpleasant thoughts, and the misuse of much good time that could be profitably used otherwise. Not long ago, a person said to me concerning a certain church, “That church is so full of two or three people there is no room for anyone else.” Such judgment was born of jealousy and misunderstanding. Judge the good and refuse the evil is oftentimes reversed, and made to read: judge the evil and refuse the good.

Bitterness of Soul

Hannah was in bitterness of soul prior to receiving the assurance that she would have a child. She had not adjusted herself to God's time. Impatience with the Lord robs one of calmness of mind, and peace of heart. What a blessing it would be for all of us, if we could learn to "wait on the Lord" (Psa. 27:14). Adjusting ourselves to the leadership of the Lord, and being perfectly satisfied that the "better way" was ordered by the Almighty would relieve us of many anxious moments (Rom. 8:28).

Blessing Obtained

What Hannah thought was an affliction was nothing more than God's timing. The blessing came at the appointed time. Those who wait for the Lord have their strength renewed and in due time receive the blessing (Isa. 40:31). Our contact with the Lord will teach us that His ways are not our ways (Isa. 55:7-8); and the more fully we surrender our lives, the more the cup of blessing runs over. Like Job, the latter end is much better than the former. Growing in Christ brings ever-expanding blessings (Eph. 4:15-16).

Young People's Class

Answer to Prayer

Often the natural course of events is changed because someone has earnestly prayed. Samuel is an outstanding testimony to the fact that God hears and answers prayer. If we could realize early in life the effectiveness of prayer as an instrument for good, it would better our lives and the lives of those about us in a most remarkable way.

The fact that we call upon our heavenly Father in prayer is evidence that we recognize some of our own weaknesses and limitations.

Judging Others

One of man's outstanding weaknesses is an inability to judge others fairly, as we see with the high priest's mistake. Isaiah states, regarding the power Christ will exercise in the Kingdom, that Christ will not judge by the inadequate means of hearing and seeing used by mortals (Isa. 11:3). He looks upon the heart of the individual, knowing the many interlacing circumstances which have affected that life. You and I cannot see the intentions of another nor the temptations that have come to him. We do not know what we would do in the same circumstances, since we neither know all of the circumstances nor what our strength would be at such a time.

Many times we get into trouble and seriously harm others by judging them unfairly. These four simple rules may help us: 1) Breathe a prayer for guidance when tempted to judge someone. 2) Always be charitable toward

others. 3) Remember how inaccurately others have judged you and that you can be no better than they are as long as you also judge. 4) If, however, we do misjudge someone, follow the high priest's example and make amends.

Practical Applications

Good Judgment Selects a King

God sent Samuel the prophet to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to replace Saul, whom He had rejected as king of Israel. The eldest son, Eliab, made a very good impression. He was tall and handsome, and would make a very satisfactory king, thought Samuel. "the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

One by one all the sons were rejected whom Jesse brought before him. Samuel asked if he had no other son, and Jesse replied there was one, a youth who was tending the sheep. When he was brought, God told Samuel to anoint him, that he was God's choice.

David was sent by his father to see his brothers, who had gone to fight the Philistines, and offered his services to fight the giant Goliath who had terrorized the men of Israel. David's brother Eliab scorned the offer, and King Saul echoed the opinion. David was far too small and too frail to face such a formidable enemy. But David persisted, and went forth armed only with his slingshot and smooth round stones. Goliath also made an error in judgment, for he scorned David, who swung his weapon once. The stone found its mark; Goliath dropped to the ground. David used the giant's own sword to cut off his head.

"Judge Not, That Ye Be Not Judged"

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned against human judgment. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged . . . And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye" (Matt. 7:1-3, 5). In other words, human beings are far too full of faults and frailties to be competent to judge one another.

Paul plainly told the Roman brethren, "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things." (Rom. 2:1-2).

Samuel the Prophet

Lesson Aim: To show by Eli's example the qualifications for Christian parenthood.

Golden Text: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." (Prov. 13:24)

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 3:11-20; 1 Timothy 3:1, 4-5 (KJV)

¹ Samuel 3:11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

¹² In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

¹³ For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

¹⁴ And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

¹⁵ And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel feared to shew Eli the vision.

¹⁶ Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel, my son. And he answered, Here am I.

¹⁷ And he said, What is the thing that the LORD hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that he said unto thee.

¹⁸ And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

¹⁹ And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground.

²⁰ And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD.

¹ Timothy 3:1 This is a true saying, if a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

⁴ One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

⁵ (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

Lesson Background

It is not unusual with God, when preparing a great man for His work, to provide for him the setting of a godly home and a devoted mother. So it was with Samuel. He was a child of prayer, hence his name, which means, “asked of God.” Before his birth, his mother dedicated him to the service of God.

Thus, in his earliest and most formative years he was reared in an atmosphere of reverence and faith. Who knows what that home contributed to the making of this man of God? When the child was old enough to be weaned, his mother took him, faithful to her vow, to the house of God at Shiloh, with appropriate gifts and sacrifices. Presenting him to Eli, she revealed to him that this was what she had asked of the Lord on that day when Eli had seen her praying and had thought she was drunken.

Hannah, previously childless, was rewarded with five more children after Samuel.

What a contrast with the kind of bringing up Eli’s sons had! All three boys were brought up in the house of God. Yet Samuel grew up to be a mighty man of God, loved and respected by all the people; Eli’s two sons went to the bad and dishonored their father’s name forever. Evidently Eli did not practice the teaching of the golden text.

At the time of our lesson, Samuel was assisting Eli in the Lord’s service. The day’s work was done, and both had lain down to sleep. When the Lord’s voice spoke to Samuel, three times he mistook it for Eli speaking. Then it dawned on Eli that it was God speaking, so he told Samuel to listen the next time it happened. When God spoke for the fourth time Samuel received the message contained in the lesson text. The next morning, delivering the prophecy against Eli’s house, Samuel became, while still a boy, a prophet of the Lord.

Bible Learning

1 Samuel 3:11. The Lord said unto Samuel. Samuel was a prophet as well as a judge (Acts 3:24). **I will do a thing.** Israel is God’s “sign people,” and what He does for them means much to all nations.

12. I will perform against Eli. Eli was held responsible for the sins of his sons (2:29, 34). Samuel, who brought the second warning to Eli, suffered also because of his wicked sons (8:1-3).

13. He restrained them not. Eli reproved his sons (2:23-25), but he did not remove them from office. Does God still hold parents responsible for their son’s actions?

14. Shall not be purged. “The soul that doeth ought with a high hand . . . shall be utterly cut off” (Num. 15:30-31, ARV). “This applied exactly to the conduct of Eli’s sons.” – Arnold. (Cp. Heb. 10:26.)

15. Samuel feared to shew Eli. It was natural that a young man should be reluctant to tell the high priest that God had turned away from him and his sons.

17. What is the thing? Eli sensed that God had given Samuel a message that was hard for him to deliver, but demanded it in full.

18. That him every whit. Had Samuel kept back anything the Lord had revealed, he would have been guilty of sin. (Deut. 18:18-19.) Let him do what seemeth him good. Like Jesus, Eli said, “Let God’s will be done” (Luke 22:42).

20. Dan . . . Beersheba. From farthest north to farthest south in Israel, Samuel was recognized as God’s appointed prophet.

1 Timothy 3:1. Office of a bishop. A bishop is an overseer of the church (Phil. 1:1). Jesus is called “the Shepherd [pastor] and bishop of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). The office of a bishop is identical with that of an elder (Acts 20:17, 28, ARV). As spiritual guide to old and young, his service is of greatest value and importance.

4. Ruleth well his own house. No one is fit to be an elder or bishop who cannot rule his own children by love and understanding sympathy. **Gravity.** “His children submissive and perfectly respectful.” – Moffatt. Respect of one’s children must be earned.

5. Church of God. The bishop takes care of God’s children. He loves, teaches, and encourages them in Christian growth and service. He is their confidant and adviser, their leader and friend. In his own words and actions he is their constant example. To desire an office like that is, indeed, to desire “a good work,” and a blessed one; a work that requires the best a man can give.

A Study of the Subject

Ears That Tingle

God held Eli responsible for the evil behavior of his sons. Eli knew that they were committing iniquity, yet he restrained them not. In this he sinned. For this neglect of parental duty, God caused the ears of all Israel to tingle, because of the punishment which He brought upon the house of Eli. It was a case of children left to themselves without parental guidance. See Proverbs 29:15. Parents of today, who fail to correct their children and restrain them from wrong doing, will some day meet with the judgments of the Lord. Parental responsibility cannot be avoided in the final reckoning.

Eli's Sons

The principle of “kind producing kind” was not violated with Eli, nor was the rule set forth by Solomon in Proverbs 22:6. Eli’s careless attitude was reflected in the careless living of his sons. The root of evil was grounded in Eli, and the tree with its full fruit came in his sons. Children who are brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord will not depart from that good way (Eph. 6:4). A few years ago, a lady wrote me condemning the church and myself because her boy had quit attending Sunday school and church. He was beginning to live just like his parents – without God and His church.

Grounded in Faith

Timothy’s stability in the gospel work was anchored to the faith which his mother and grandmother had implanted in him from his infancy. Those early days were the molding periods into which his later life was poured. The Church of God loses so many of its youth in marriage, and through lack of love for the truth (2 Thess. 2:10), all because parents neglect grounding of their children in the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

Young People’s Class

The Bad Example

We once heard of a man who taught golf by demonstrating how not to play it. That is not as impractical as it may seem, for we learn many things by the tragic mistakes of others. Eli set an example we will do well to avoid following. The key words of our text are: “His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” Undoubtedly Eli, like countless others, did not intend to let his sons become such wicked men. He may have thought he had plenty of time to correct them. Probably before he knew it they were too old to be disciplined without drastic measures and therefore he let them continue in their own way. A twig is easily bent, but when it has become a heavy timber it is too late to change it much.

Good Example

An overheard conversation told volumes on ruling well one’s own house. A boy said, “May I go to town with you today?” The father said, “No, son, not this time.” The boy immediately went away sobbing softly. He knew that no amount of coaxing and teasing would do any good because he lived in a home that was well ruled.

The qualifications of Christian parenthood are developed early in life, such qualities as godliness, honesty, faith, and, of equal importance,

diligence. If one is inclined to be lazy and indifferent, the good qualities that he might impart to his children may never be imparted. A parent must be mindful of this responsibility and fulfill it well with all diligence. God, who gave that responsibility as a blessing, will help you if you live close to Him.

Practical Applications

Abraham, an Ideal Father

The Lord said of Abraham: “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

We read later that God’s foreknowledge of Abraham was true. When he was told to take his son of promise, Isaac, up into the mountain and offer him as a burnt offering, he did not refuse. We know, too, that Isaac was trained to obey, for he did not rebel when his father bound him and laid him upon the altar, though he was capable of easily overcoming his aged father.

Children, a Gift from God

“Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them” (Psa. 127:3, 5). Proud or humble, parents for the most part are alike. Their children’s welfare is their first consideration. God has not left us in doubt concerning His desire in the matter of training them.

Solomon said, “Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame. . . . Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul” (Prov. 29:15, 17). If obedience is taught in childhood, a child is not apt to break the laws of God or man when he reaches maturity.

Jesus’ Training in Galilee

When Jesus was twelve years old, and was found in the Temple with the learned men, he asked his mother, “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” But we read “He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” (Luke 2:49, 51-52). Although his mother knew his heavenly Father could direct him, it is evident that she carefully trained her son in obedience and respect.

Paul’s advice to fathers in Ephesians 6:4 is pertinent: “Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” That would be well for all parents to heed.

Last of the Judges

Lesson Aim: To show why human governments fail.

Golden Text: “For the kingdom is the LORD’s: and he is the governor among the nations.” (Psa. 22:28)

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 8:1-9, 19-22 (KJV)

¹ And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel.

² Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba.

³ And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah,

⁵ And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.

⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD.

⁷ And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

⁸ According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee.

⁹ Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.

¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us;

²⁰ That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

²¹ And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he rehearsed them in the ears of the LORD.

²² And the LORD said to Samuel, Hearken unto their voice, and make them a king. And Samuel said unto the men of Israel, Go ye every man unto his city.

Lesson Background

From the time of Samuel's first prophecy, against Eli, God magnified him before the people. His word always came to pass. His fame spread rapidly and he was soon acknowledged as a prophet by all Israel.

In the battle at the time of Eli's death the ark of God was captured by the Philistines. God plagued the Philistines so severely where the ark was taken that they soon sent it back to Israel.

Not long after this, Samuel called the people to repentance and a reconsecration to God. Gathered at Mizpeh, they confessed their sins and rededicated the nation. The Philistines saw this assembly and moved to attack again. But Samuel led his people to such a crushing victory over the Philistines that they never again in his lifetime made war against Israel.

This endeared Samuel to the people. His name became almost a legend. A sacrifice was scarcely thought possible without him there to bless it. As judge he established his seat at four places he covered in circuit once a year: Bethel, Mizpeh, Gilgal, and Ramah, where he made his home.

Samuel is thought to be responsible for the system of schools that we see at most of the places he judged, and at other places like Jericho. These schools trained young men for the prophet's office. From these schools came hundreds of prophets of the Lord. They may have had much to do with the rise of the prophetic office just when it would be needed as a check against the tyranny of the kingly line.

Bible Learning

1 Samuel 8:1. Samuel was old. Samuel grew old in the service of God and of Israel. He saw Israel change from an unorganized group of tribes to a united, progressive, and well-governed nation.

2. Judges. "Heb. 'shaphetim,' i.e., 'rulers of the people.'" – Pop. & Crit. B. Ency. The English word "judges" does not express the full thought.

3. Took bribes. Bribery, a weakness of man's government from the beginning, will be unknown in the coming Kingdom. (Psa. 72:4; Isa. 11:4-5.)

5. Make us a king. They knew Samuel had authority to act for God, who was their real Sovereign (see v. 7). **Like all the nations.** They wanted a king whose pomp and glory they could see. It was Jesus' meekness and his failure to appear in such a guise that kept the Jews from accepting him as the Messiah.

6. Samuel prayed. Samuel was bitterly displeased, and he faced a difficult religious and political problem. He did the only thing a godly man should do under such circumstances, he prayed (Isa. 37:14-15, 36).

7. They have rejected me. In rejecting Samuel, who was the vicegerent of Jehovah, they were demanding the abdication of God, and the appointment of a man as their king.

8. So do they also unto thee. They were treating Samuel, who had served them faithfully, with the same ingratitude they had shown toward God who had delivered them from Egyptian slavery.

9. Shew them the manner of a king. God would grant their demand, but He warned them of what such a change would involve.

19. Nay. We are reminded of the Jews' rejection of Christ: "Away with him . . . We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). In rejecting Jesus as their King, the Jews also rejected God's rulership.

20. Like all the nations. They did not want to be a "peculiar people," even though God would place them "high above all nations" (Deut. 26:18-19). They wanted to be like other nations, with a visible king to lead them in war. They got what they asked for!

21. Rehearsed. Samuel listened to the people, and again went to the Lord about it.

22. Hearken unto their voice. Though they openly rebelled, God remembered His covenant with their fathers and remained their real, though unseen and unacknowledged, **Sovereign.** They cast Him off, but He did not cast them off! (Rom. 11:1-2; Isa. 24:21-23.)

A Study of the Subject

Like Other Nations

God separated Israel from the nations so they might be different – a peculiar people (Lev. 20:24; Exod. 19:5-6). They wanted the very thing God did not want for them – to be like other nations. A "separate people" is always a "different people." The desire to be like other people takes away a positive love for truth, which is essential to salvation (John 8:32). People who prefer being like the masses rather than being different and following the "narrow way" through a "love for the truth" will be condemned with the masses (2 Thess. 2:10-12). The church is called to separation from the world, as Israel was called to be separate from Gentile nations (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Failed to Heed the Warning

The indictment against Israel, "the people refused to obey the voice of God," marked one of the fateful decisions of Israel's history. Reason gave way to desire and an evil decision. God's face was against them (1 Pet. 3:12). There was no way of escape now that they had decided to walk the course of other nations – they must share the besetting sins. They were

sowing to the flesh, of the flesh must come their harvest (Gal. 6:8). Being moved by their love for the course of the world, they veered to the left and came face to face with the curse of God (Deut. 11:26).

Rejected God

To reject the servant of the Lord is to reject God. In rejecting Samuel, they were refusing God. God spoke to Israel, they heeded not, but rather chose that in which He did not delight (Isa. 65:12; 66:4). People reject the Lord in many ways. For example, we reject Him by not being for Him (Matt. 12:30), or by rejecting His Word (John 14:23-24), or by refusing to follow the Christ (Matt. 10:38).

Young People's Class

Human Nature

Like water, human nature always seeks a lower level. Eli was faithful to the Lord as far as his own service was concerned, but his sons fell far below the standard set by their father. That family was removed, and Samuel led in Israel. In Samuel's case, the process was repeated. Samuel seemed unable to transmit to his sons that same high quality of character which he had.

Who, then, shall we blame? Were they not all equally guilty of following the downward path? Samuel should have taught his sons to be just in all of their dealings. His sons should have resisted the temptation of bribes. The people should never have offered money to pervert judgment.

Never for long does a righteous ruler lead a nation, one strong enough to lead it in paths of righteousness. He dies, and with a ruler who is weak or corrupt human government fails again.

The Sustaining Influence

There are two things that keep us from being too discouraged about man's downward rush. First, we know that God will send His Son to rule this earth in righteousness. That rule will be successful and permanent because Christ has been given all power in heaven and in earth.

Second is the fact that God has given strength to such men as Samuel and David and still strengthens those who are devoted to righteousness.

You have the privilege to be one of God's servants who restrain wickedness and sustain those who love righteousness. There is no greater opportunity.

Practical Applications

Babylon as an Example

When God organized the first nation in the earth, He gave certain rules which must be obeyed. But nations, as individuals, have always been willful and disobedient, and this always has been their downfall. Nation after nation has arisen, has come under God's condemnation, and has gone into oblivion.

Consider Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, shown as a great "head of gold" in the famous dream. Daniel told that king: "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:" (Dan. 2:20-21).

For a time after this God was worshipped in Babylon and all went well. But Belshazzar forgot about God. He came to power and gave a feast for many of his friends. He called for the gold and silver vessels his father had removed from the Temple when he captured Jerusalem, and they worshipped the gods of gold and silver, of brass and wood, and drank wine from the sacred vessels. Then a hand wrote a mysterious message upon the wall, which no man present could interpret. Daniel was sent for, and said: "God hath numbered thy kingdom and finished it. Thou art weighed in the balances and art found wanting. Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians." That very night the king was slain, and Darius, king of Media, captured the kingdom.

Has the World Changed?

Today, the whole world is in the throes of the most horrible war man can devise. Nations rise, and fall. Japan was, until a few years ago, a comparatively small and insignificant island nation. Unlimited greed and uncontrolled aggression turned the heads of the war lords, and they set out to capture and subjugate the world. No God-given laws bothered them, for they disregarded all rules of decency and order. They prospered for a short season; but evil sooner or later goes down, so the people of Japan are facing today what Germany has already met, complete collapse.

God made Abraham this promise: "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen. 12:3). That holds true. Those nations which persecute the Jews cannot prosper.

A Kingdom is Founded

Lesson Aim: To contrast the choice of rulers in the kingdoms of God and men.

Golden Text: “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:10)

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 10:17-25; Matthew 20:20-23 (KJV)

¹ Samuel 10:17 And Samuel called the people together unto the LORD to Mizpeh; ¹⁸ And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you:

¹⁹ And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes, and by your thousands.

²⁰ And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.

²¹ When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found.

²² Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold he hath hid himself among the stuff.

²³ And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

²⁴ And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king.

²⁵ Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the LORD. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.

Matthew 20:20 Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him.

²¹ And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

²² But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.

²³ And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

Lesson Background

God had foreseen long before that Israel should be a kingdom, for He had promised Abraham and Jacob that kings should be descended from them, and Balaam had spoke of “the shout of a king” among them, and their kingdom being exalted.

The man whom God picked to be the first king was the one whom the people themselves would have chosen, and whom they did afterward ratify. He was a man’s man, admirable from every human standpoint. But he had hidden defects of character which later brought him to ignominious failure.

It fell to Samuel to formally anoint the young king with the sacred oil. Under protest he installed their king, and then warned them of the grief they were laying up for themselves by insisting on their own way.

Like unto Saul were James and John, who thought that the King of kings would choose his rulers as men do, through selfish favoritism. If God would choose us as kings with Christ, we must have the qualities that please Him, whether or not we possess those that please men.

Bible Learning

1 Samuel 10:17. Mizpeh. A city five miles north of Jerusalem, at the highest point on the plateau, nearly 3,000 feet above sea level.

18. Saith the LORD. Jehovah addressed them through Samuel, reminding them of how He had saved them from all oppressors.

19. This day. It was a momentous occasion. Their course as a nation was being radically changed. **Rejected your God.** God repeated to Israel what He had told Samuel personally (8:7), so they might not forget.

20. Benjamin was taken. Benjamin was the youngest of Jacob’s sons, yet the king was to be chosen from among his descendants.

22. Enquired of the LORD. Prayer was still their best recourse. The Lord answered. No one can hide from God (Psa. 139:7-12).

23. Higher than any of the people. Saul was tall and of kingly bearing – the sort of a king for which the people had asked. When God later chose David, He looked upon his heart, not his physical appearance (1 Sam. 16:7).

25. Manner of the kingdom. God gave Israel a written constitution which Samuel carefully laid up “before the Lord” for preservation.

Matthew 20:20. Desiring a certain thing. A good mother always desires honors for her children. She is more interested in their success and happiness than in her own.

21. Grant that these my two sons. She craved places of highest distinction for her sons in the Kingdom of God, in the coming of which she fervently believed.

22. Ye know not what ye ask. She did not realize that one must “through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). **We are able.** Her sons answered Jesus’ question without understanding its implications.

23. Is not mine to give. Jesus was not possessed of kingly authority. It was not in his power to appoint anymore to positions of honor in the Kingdom. That power rested in the hands of God only. **It shall be given.** The Kingdom was then, and is now, in the future. It will not be officially in existence until Jesus returns to “build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down,” and to “reign over the house of Jacob for ever” (Acts 15:16; Luke 1:33). We may then have the place God has prepared for us in His Kingdom (Rev. 2:26; 3:21; 5:9-10; 20:6).

A Study of the Subject

A Theocratic Kingdom

The earthly throne of the Lord is about to be established. It apparently was the Lord’s purpose to begin the theocratic kingdom with the reign of David, but the rebellion of Israel brought another king to the throne. The throne of the Lord is associated with and is likewise called David’s throne (1 Chron. 28:5; 29:23; Luke 1:32). The organization and development of this Kingdom has been written about that we might understand and be edified through its lessons and typical importance (see Rom. 15:4). It was the Lord’s Kingdom, and through rejection of the appointed King of kings, this Kingdom has been set aside until the King returns, when it shall be restored in refreshing glory (Acts 3:19-21).

God Chooses the Rulers

“Men may propose, but God disposes.” How true in respect to rulers. They are God’s ministers (Rom. 13:6), chosen by Him for a particular work

(Dan. 4:17; Rom. 4:17). God's plans and purposes comprehend all time, and proceed to the final consummation (Acts 15:18). Nations are merely incidental to the eternal purpose, and fit into the scheme of things, unknowingly (Isa. 10:6-7). Thus in all activities of life man lives, moves, and has his being within the control of God (Acts 17:28). This does not take from man his will to act in harmony or contradiction to the will of God, but it does place God above man. The supreme Mind can turn man's wrath to His own praise (Psa. 76:10).

A Kingdom Coming

Jesus said His Kingdom was not of this world (order) (John 18:36). We will have a Kingdom. This Kingdom is coming into being at the appearing of Christ (2 Tim. 4:1-2). It is to be a theocratic Kingdom, composed of the kingdoms of this world (Rev. 11:15).

Young People's Class

Man's Kingdom

Israel, after it rejected God, is an example of man's kingdom. Saul, though God chose him for Israel's first king, was typical of the kind of rulers men chose for themselves. The whole story is told in a few words. "He was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward." Saul was evidently the type that we might describe as being tall, dark, and handsome.

Of course, it is natural for us to depend upon the outward appearance since that is what gives us our first impression. We think our eyes and ears should be satisfied first, but Solomon said that the eye could not be satisfied. Israel was not blessed by the ruler who merely looked like a king. Today's lesson is just another evidence of man's faulty judgment.

God's Kingdom

Israel restored under Christ will be God's true Kingdom. Jesus the Christ is God's true choice of rulers. We cannot compare Jesus with Saul but we may contrast them. Saul appealed to man's carnal nature while Jesus appeals to our spiritual nature. Saul was much inclined to do his own will, while Jesus always did the will of God. Saul sought to save his own life and slew many innocent men in the attempt, but Jesus gave his life for others.

Man's choice of rulers usually does not deserve to rule, but God's choice not only has the right but shall rule forever.

The best thought in this lesson is that you and I have the opportunity to prepare for rulership in God's kingdom. God looks upon the heart when choosing and if we give our hearts to Him He will prepare us for His

service. In God’s Kingdom, every man will be rewarded justly, and we shall be given the position for which we qualify.

Practical Applications

Selecting a President

To become president of the United States of America, a man must be an American citizen, thoroughly trained in law and government, with a long and successful political career. He must have unquestioned integrity and high moral standards, and be a leader among men. His religious reputation, however, is not so closely scrutinized. Whether or not he would lead the nation to a closer walk with God is not studied – rather, can he win the war? Can he hold his own among the leaders of the other nations? Can he secure the rights for the American people after the war is over?

Israel was very proud of her first king. He stood head and shoulders above other men, and was very handsome, but he had not the stability of character that made him acceptable to God. He disobeyed direct commands until it became necessary for God to remove him. Samuel was sent to select one of the sons of Jesse to succeed Saul as king, and it seemed to him the eldest – tall, handsome Eliab – was the proper one. God made it plain to him that He was not choosing a king for looks or stature, but for those qualifications which would endure through the years.

Rulers for God’s Kingdom

Peter asked what reward the apostles would get for leaving all to follow Jesus. He said “ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt. 19:28). The apostles were thoroughly trained in the ways of the Lord, and their messages in God’s Word give us the requirements we must meet. Peter, in his second Epistle, told us to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity. “If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (1:8, 11). “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron” (Rev. 2:26-27). These words of Christ give the way of attaining the great reward. May we be worthy to be “kings and priests.”

The Virtue of Obedience

Lesson Aim: To show the importance of obedience to God's laws.

Golden Text: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."
(John 15:14)

Lesson Text: 1 Samuel 15:16-28 (KJV)

¹⁶ Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

¹⁷ And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?

¹⁸ And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

¹⁹ Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?

²⁰ And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

²² And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

²⁴ And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice.

²⁵ Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD.

²⁶ And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel.

²⁷ And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent.

²⁸ And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou.

Lesson Background

Saul reigned forty years over Israel. One of his first acts was an energetic campaign against the Ammonites, who had insolently threatened Jabesh-Gilead. He also conducted a war against the long-time enemy, the Philistines.

It was during the Philistine campaign that Saul committed his first grave sin. The Philistines were advancing, and he was awaiting the coming of Samuel to offer the sacrifice before the battle. Impatient over a slight delay in Samuel's appearance, he took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice, a thing which only a priest might do. No sooner was he finished than Samuel came, pronouncing upon him God's displeasure for his disobedience, and his rejection as king.

Soon afterward, to vindicate a foolish decree he had made, he condemned his son Jonathan to death. But the people rebelled, and saved Jonathan.

Saul's second serious disobedience came when God through Samuel commanded him to destroy the Amalekites. These were the savage tribesmen who had attacked Israel soon after they came out of Egypt, and God had condemned them to be utterly destroyed (Exod. 17:8-14). But Saul and his men spared the king and such of the animals as they wanted, instead of destroying all, as God had specified. Again the accusing Samuel met the guilty Saul to warn him of the doom he had thus brought upon himself.

A Study of the Text

1 Samuel 15:16. Samuel said unto Saul. Although Saul was king by demand of the people, Jehovah still issued the orders by which the kingdom was governed.

17. Little in thine own eyes. When he was made king over Israel, Saul was without any great distinction. God made him great.

18. Utterly destroyed. God, whose justice cannot be questioned, had condemned the Amalekites to death and made Saul His executioner (see v. 1-3 and Exod. 17:8-14).

19. Didst fly upon the spoil. Moved more by greed than by a desire to make a sacrifice to God, Saul saved the best of the spoil. **Evil.** His failure to utterly destroy the Amalekites and their goods was a great sin. No matter what God commands, whether we can see good in it or not, it must be done.

20. I have obeyed. Saul told but half the truth, and so added the sin of lying to that of disobedience.

22. Hath the Lord. No sacrifice, however great, can counterbalance disobedience to God (Psa. 51:16-17). Obedience to Him is an evidence of faith, without which it is impossible to please Him (James 2:18; Heb. 11:6).

23. Witchcraft . . . idolatry. Disobedience and stubbornness are as bad in God's sight as any sin that can be named. **Rejected.** In his disobedience, Saul rejected God's Word. Because of that disobedience, God rejected him.

24. I have sinned. Other rulers have sinned because they "feared the people," but few acknowledged their transgression.

25. That I may worship the LORD. Saul knew he must obtain pardon before he could approach God acceptably (Isa. 59:1-2).

26. I will not return with thee. Samuel remained firm in his determination to mitigate in no way Saul's punishment. To have done so would have been to disobey God.

27. Skirt of his mantle. Saul tried to grasp Samuel and hold him back, that he might plead with him longer, but succeeded only in providing the prophet with a striking illustration of what the Lord had done to him.

28. The LORD hath rent the kingdom . . . from thee. Samuel could not prevent the accomplishment of God's purpose, for who can contend successfully against the Almighty? **Neighbour.** David, Saul's successor, was to come from Judea, which lay next to Benjamin, Saul's homeland. **Better than thou.** David was better than Saul in that he obeyed the Lord and fulfilled all His will (Acts 13:22).

A Study of the Subject

The Word Must Be Obeyed

Righteousness is imputed only to the obedient. "Be ye doers of the word" (James 1:22). Doing God's will from the heart is obedience (Eph. 6:6-8), and it keeps the judgments of the Lord away (Jer. 26:13). Happy is the man that obeys the Word of God (John 13:17). All that the Lord says is important, and none of it will be set aside of God as non-essential (Matt. 5:18). It was the purpose of Christ to do the will of God (Heb. 10:7). When we come short of this objective, we are failing in the primary purpose of life. When Israel kept the testimonies of the Lord, the blessings of the Lord were abundant.

Blessings Are Contingent upon Obedience

Abraham was chosen to be the father of the faithful, for God knew that he would be obedient and command his children (Gen. 18:19). Israel was to be a peculiar people unto God, provided they obeyed His voice (Exod. 19:5). God promised to be an enemy unto their enemies if they were obedient (23:22). Solomon's house would have been established forever, if

he had been obedient (1 Kings 9:4-5). If we are to be presented to the Father “unblameable and unproveable,” we must be grounded and settled in the faith and remain therein (Col. 1:22-23). The crown of life comes to the obedient unto the end (Rev. 2:10).

Examples of Obedience

Noah walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Caleb and Joshua entered the Promised Land (Josh. 14:6-14). Hezekiah had his life prolonged and was delivered of his enemies (2 Kings 20:3). Job triumphed, for there was none like him in the earth (Job 1:8). Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles because of his zeal for righteousness (Acts 23:1; 24:16).

Young People’s Class

The Purpose of Obedience

It is easier to do the things we want to do than what we do not want to do. Saul found it easy to keep a heathen king alive to satisfy his pride of victory. It was also easier for him to let the people keep the spoil God had ordered destroyed than to enforce God’s command. It is plain that Israel’s new king was interested in what he wanted and so chose the easy way, which turned out to be hard.

You are interested in how you may get the most out of life. It is easy to tell you that by obeying God’s laws you will not prosper. It will not be too difficult for you to obey if you keep in mind that obedience is for your own good and the good of those for whom you are responsible. God never made any laws that were not good for those who were required to follow them. For that reason, it is extremely important that we obey them.

Obedience from God’s Standpoint

Some have thought it was very technical of God to reject Saul after the small matter of keeping a king and a few cattle alive. It seems that in other cases, however, God almost entirely overlooked the breaking of equally important laws. What is the reason for this? First, it may relate to the importance of Saul’s position. It may also be about what is indicated by the disobedience. Saul rebelled against God. David repented of sin.

God wants the individual. He wants you. Obedience is the indicator. When you come to the place that it hurts you inside to disobey God’s will in the slightest way, you belong to Him. If you obey the more important laws merely because they carry a greater punishment, you are not really loyal to God. Obedience is easiest for those who love God and His laws.

Practical Applications

“Obey My Commandments”

Whenever God has given His laws to men, He has given them opportunity either to obey or disobey, as they see fit. There has never been any question as to His will for His people, neither is there a shadow of doubt but that all mankind has always fallen far short of His desire for them. In the Garden of Eden, Adam disobeyed and brought death sentence upon all mankind. The law was given to Israel through Moses, and disobedience brought disaster and punishment not only upon the nation, but upon individuals as well.

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1-2). When the rich young man came to Jesus asking what he could do to merit eternal life, Jesus told him, “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” He then asked, “Which?” Jesus answered, “Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matt. 19:17b-19). The young man answered that he had kept all those things from his youth, but still he lacked something.

God or Mammon?

Jesus’ answer sent him away sorrowing, “Go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (v. 21). His wealth and the companionship of those with whom he lived meant more to him than life eternal, and, since he could not have both, he left the side of the Master. Again, the age-old privilege – obedience with life, disobedience bringing death.

John said, “Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (1 John 3:22-23).

James wrote: “If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (2:8, 10). God’s law has not changed. The promises are to those who overcome temptation, obey the commandments he has given us. May we ever “walk in love, as Christ has loved us,” that we may receive the promised reward when he returns to claim his own.

David's Sin

Lesson Aim: To show what God requires after we have sinned.

Golden Text: “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.” (2 Cor. 7:9)

Lesson Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-8, 13-14 (KJV)

¹ And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

² The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:

³ But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

⁴ And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

⁵ And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:

⁶ And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

⁷ And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;

⁸ And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.

¹³ And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.

¹⁴ Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

Lesson Background

After the death of Saul, David reigned over the tribe of Judah for seven years before being recognized as king by the other tribes. He reigned thirty-three years over all Israel, forty in all.

He brought the ark of God to Jerusalem and set it up in the tabernacle there, after it had remained many years in a private home. He also planned the building of the Temple and gathered together the materials for it. God had made a covenant with him, assuring him that the throne of Israel should always remain in his family. In various wars he conquered in succession the Philistines, the Moabites, the Zobahites, the Syrians, the Edomites, and the Ammonites.

It takes a strong man to withstand the temptations that come with success. David was not a match for them. He had multiplied to himself so many wives that he became careless of taking another, even though he had to take her from someone else. He had killed so many men in war that it did not seem to him a sin to kill one more, even though it was one of his best friends.

The episode in this lesson is one of the most dramatic in the Scriptures, indeed, in all literature. Here is a powerful king, compelled unwittingly to condemn himself to death for a deep-dyed sin, and then, after being charged with his guilt, being big enough and humble enough to acknowledge his sin. Where will you find the drama of this story surpassed anywhere? When God tells a story He does not whitewash the hero.

David's confession of his sin and his sincere repentance are all that saved him from the fate that befell Saul. But retribution pursued him to his dying day.

A Study of the Text

2 Samuel 12:1. Nathan. A prophet in the time of David and Solomon. He was a man of judgment and of great moral courage. David consulted him regarding his purpose to build the Temple (7:1-3). Here he faced his friend the king to reprove him for a serious crime. The result of this interview is seen in David's prayer of contrition (Psalm 51). **There were two men.** Teaching by parables was a common practice throughout the East long before Jesus, the Master of masters in that form of teaching, was born.

2. Many flocks. Nathan's description is vivid, realistic, and convincing (see v. 5).

3. One little ewe lamb. The prophet played on David's sentimental nature with the skill of an accomplished harpist touching the strings of his instrument. Home, children, a family pet, were all brought into the tender and appealing picture Nathan painted.

4. Traveller. One whom the rich man wanted to impress with his own wealth. **Spared.** He selfishly determined to save his own abundant flock by robbing the poor man of his only lamb.

5. David's anger was greatly kindled. So simply and impressively did Nathan tell his story that David accepted it as an actual fact, not as a parable. **As the Lord liveth.** The king was moved by righteous indignation to express himself with an oath.

6. Had no pity. It was David who said, "As a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Psa. 103:13).

7. Thou art the man. It was a powerful and dramatic climax to the parable. The approach had been masterly; the conclusion was pointed and personal. **I anointed thee . . . I delivered thee.** God reminded David that his riches and honor came from Him.

8. Israel . . . Judah. The Lord had united the entire nation under David, and given him rest from war (7:1).

9. Despised. He had disobeyed God's commandment, forgotten His goodness to him. **Thou hast killed.** God had not reproved David for the thousands he had killed in battle, but punished him severely for one man whose death he had caused to satisfy his personal lust! (1 Sam. 18:7; 2 Sam. 18:7.)

10. Sword shall never depart from thine house. The sentence was carried out, ending only with the overthrow of Zedekiah, the last Davidian prince to occupy his throne (Ezek. 21:24-27).

13. I have sinned. David's humility and repentance are two of the splendid characteristics of the man after God's own heart.

A Study of the Subject

Sin Known to God

The offense of David was more or less secret, yet it was known to God. Sin cannot be hidden from Him. Adam and Eve tried to hide their transgression, but God knew all about it (Gen. 3:11). Cain could not escape his sinful act (4:10). God knows vain men and sees their wickedness (Job 11:11). The Lord knows our thoughts (Psa. 94:11). Jesus said there is nothing that shall not be revealed (Matt. 10:26). When the Pharisees sought to trick Jesus with their question in respect to tribute money, Jesus perceived their wickedness (22:18). Jesus knew who would betray him (26:46). He knows whether our love for him is genuine or not (John 5:42).

Repentance Essential

Genuine repentance is the kind that results in a turning away and refraining from doing the sin any more (Job 34:31-32). Hardened hearts of

course will not depart from evil, or seek the peace that comes to the forgiven (Psa. 34:14; 95:7; 147:3). God is not far from any man (Acts 17:27), and when sinners turn to Him, He will turn to the sinners (Mal. 3:7). Not long ago a man came to me seeking help in finding Christ. He felt he had sinned away the day of grace. Jesus is the answer to everyone seeking freedom from sin (John 6:37; 8:36). When sins are forgiven, they are blotted out (Psa. 103:12).

Confession of Sin

David readily confessed his mistake. Paul made no attempt to conceal his sins. He acknowledged himself to be “chief of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15), when he persecuted the Church of God (1 Cor. 15:9). Confession leads to forgiveness (1 John 1:8-10), and it also strengthens one against repetition of the same offense. It also does one good to confess his faults to another (James 5:16). The story of the prodigal well illustrates confession (Luke 15:17-21).

Young People’s Class

Sin and Repentance

All fail to measure up to God’s high standards. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). This, however, is no excuse for our continued or willful sinning. God expects us to put forth every effort to refrain from doing things that are contrary to His will. He has also promised to strengthen and sustain us in times of trial that we may overcome evil. Nevertheless, we often make mistakes and there are times when we are taken off guard and we yield to some temptation.

God gave His only begotten Son as an atonement for sin. Those who looked forward to Jesus as their Savior had their sins covered even as we who look back to him. David’s sin was forgiven because he fulfilled the great requirement known as repentance.

Consider a time you disobeyed your parents and were rebuked; you may recall two different attitudes on your part. One may have come from a feeling that you had been unjustly criticized or that the wrong was done through no fault of yours. The attitude may have been one of resentment and rebellion.

The other attitude may have arisen from a sincere feeling of sorrow, not because you might be punished, but because you had grieved your parents. This feeling was, therefore, one of love and repentance toward your parents with the request that you might be restored to their favor.

This latter attitude is exactly what God requires of us when we have sinned. God is not interested so much in your present accuracy in doing His

will as He is in having you want to always be in His favor. Our heavenly Father knows that if we count His favor as being highly important, we will put forth a supreme effort to please Him in all that we do.

Practical Applications

Peter's Denial and Repentance

After Jesus had given to his apostles the ordinance of the Lord's Supper on the last evening with them before his crucifixion, he spoke to Peter thus: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" (Luke 22:31-34).

How well Jesus knew Peter's desire to do that which was right; how well, too, he knew the weakness of the flesh! After Jesus had been taken to the high priest's house, and Peter had thrice denied knowledge of the Master, the cock crowed; and Peter, remembering the words of the Lord, went out and wept bitterly. Years afterward, he was such a fearless and faithful worker for Christ that the brethren were indeed strengthened by his example. Christians to this day are upbuilt and helped by his Epistles to the church.

How different was the regret of Judas! When he found that Jesus was condemned to die, and there seemed nothing he could do to right the wrong he had done, he went out and took his own life. No true repentance there to help him upbuild for his Master, but more destruction!

Paul's Admonition

Paul wrote a letter to the brethren at Corinth, in which he said, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." Later in the same chapter, he said, "Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." (2 Cor. 7:1, 9-10). Therein lies the difference, Peter's "godly sorrow that worked repentance," and Judas' "sorrow of the world [that] worketh death."

Peter's words to Israel in Acts 3:19 are applicable to all: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

David's Last Words

Lesson Aim: To show how God treats sin.

Golden Text: "My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me." (Job 17:1)

Lesson Text: 2 Samuel 23:1-7; Romans 6:16-23 (KJV)

² Samuel 23:1 Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,

² The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.

³ 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.

⁴ And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.

⁵ Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.

⁶ But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands:

⁷ But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.

Romans 6:16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

¹⁷ But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

¹⁸ Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

¹⁹ I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

²⁰ For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

²¹ What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

²² But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

²³ For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lesson Background

David in his old age was well equipped to speak of the results of sin. He knew how God treats it from first-hand experience. He had not only seen what had happened to Saul before him, but had felt the terrible effects of it in his own life. His child of sin died, his daughter was dishonored, one of his sons was murdered by another, Absalom led a rebellion against him in an effort to seize the throne, he was driven into exile and heard curses heaped upon his head, and in his last days another son attempted to seize the throne and was only prevented by the fast work of a few of Solomon's friends. All this came upon him as punishment for his great sins. On another occasion seventy thousand of his people perished from plague because of his stubborn disobedience in insisting on numbering the people.

Moreover, he had Samuel's noble example of what a man can be who wholly follows the Lord. So, writing these words of our lesson text, he is able to appreciate the value of righteousness in rulers and the evil results of sin, against the background of his own knowledge. He could also see that he fell short of this standard.

The passage from Romans is a fine example of Paul's clear-headed reasoning on deep subjects. Here he pointed out that baptism no more assures one of salvation than being of the seed of Abraham, and that sin condemns one wherever it occurs.

A Study of the Text

2 Samuel 23:1. Last words. The last words of any godly man are of interest, and especially so when they come from an inspired one. In his introduction to the last words of David, the biographer sums his career in four brief statements: he was a son of Jesse; raised to honor; anointed king; and the sweet singer of Israel – all through the blessing of Jehovah his God!

2. The LORD spake by me. David knew himself to be a prophet of the Lord.

3. Must be just. As God taught him how to lead his people in war, so He taught him how to govern them in peace. In all David did, he acknowledged God's supremacy.

4. He shall be. The reign of the king who rules in the fear of the Lord shall be, because of God's guidance and blessing, as bright and beautiful as a cloudless day.

5. Although my house be not so. In his last words, David confessed that his kingly house had not always been submissive and obedient, yet in spite of its mistakes the Lord had made an everlasting covenant with him (Psa. 89:3-4). **Ordered.** The future service of his dynasty has been arranged in every detail by the Lord. **All my salvation, and all my desire.** To see the purposes of God accomplished through him was David's great desire. In that, his salvation will consist (Isa. 9:7; Hos. 3:5).

7. Burned. "All that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 4:1).

Romans 6:16. Servants. Bond-servants, or slaves. When one submits to sinful desires he becomes a slave of sin.

17. Delivered. Those who have believed the gospel and obeyed it in baptism should thank God for their deliverance from the slavery of sin.

18. Servants of righteousness. When Christ has freed us from sin, we become servants of righteousness, obligated to live righteous lives (Gal. 5:1; 1 Peter 2:16).

19. Yield your members. Our bodies, once used in the service of sin, must now be employed in deeds of righteousness (Rom. 12:1).

21. Now ashamed. We would be ashamed now to do many of the things we formerly did without any sense of guilt.

22. Fruit unto holiness. The product of Christian faith in good works (Gal. 5:22-23).

23. Death. Death is the result of sin. **Eternal life.** Eternal life is reserved for those who are in Christ (1 John 5:11-12).

A Study of the Subject

Servants of Sin

To whomever or to whatever we yield ourselves, to such we become servants. In our lesson, Paul spoke of being "servants of sin." That is, those who are overcome by, and fail to resist, the allurements or temptations of sin become servants to sin.

There are many kinds of sin to which one becomes slave. Cain was overcome with jealousy (Gen. 4:2-8). It was hatred that caused Jezebel to seek the life of the Prophet Elijah. It was love of money that prompted Judas to betray Christ for the thirty pieces of silver. It was the love of money that led Ananias and Sapphira to lie about their possessions. These all became servants to their passions.

Free from Sin

Sin that is forgiven is sin no more (Jer. 31:34), but forever removed from the book of God's remembrance. Freedom from sin makes one suitable to become the righteousness of God. Scarlet sin is turned to the whiteness of snow (Isa. 1:18). When in sin, one is reckoned as being dead in sin, but when made free, then one is considered as being made alive (Col. 2:13). For the first time, a person becomes alive unto God and useful in the stewardship of the gospel. When cleansed from our sins, we are counted as being clean, even as the One that cleanses us is clean (1 John 1:7).

The Fruit of Sin

The wicked fall into their own nets (Psa. 141:10). When one sins, he wrongs his own self more than others (Prov. 8:36). They who sow the wind, reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). The fruit of sin even touches the land on which the sinners live (Mic. 7:13). All the motions of sin bring forth fruit unto death (Rom. 7:5). In the church, it causes strife, divisions, and envying (1 Cor. 3:3). May the time past of our life suffice for sinful acts (1 Pet. 4:3).

Young People's Class

David's Last Words

The last recorded words of the Psalmist seem to sum up his life in a few words. 1) David was the ideal ruler, being in several ways typical of Christ who is God's Anointed. 2) The effect of his rule over the people was as sunshine and rain to the grass of the field. 3) God made a covenant with David promising that his kingdom and his throne would sometime be established forever. 4) The wicked were destroyed before David because they would not submit to righteous rule.

In David's life, we have a type of the work of Christ, the perfect ruler who will put down all unrighteous rule and authority. As David delivered up to his successor the kingdom of Israel freed from its enemies, so we read of the time when Christ "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power."

David an Example

David had many opportunities to give up hope and turn from God. He could easily have become the servant of sin as many other rulers did. David chose to serve the Lord in righteousness and yielded himself wholly to God except in a very few instances.

No matter how you figure it, you as an individual are the one who chooses whose servant you will be and you are the one who yields yourself to that master.

God cannot tolerate sin and therefore purges it out of the one who will yield himself to God. There is wonderful hope for those who become servants of righteousness. God shall destroy the sinners who will refuse to yield to that purging. Whom will you serve?

Practical Applications

The Earth Cleansed by Water

Only ten generations from the time God created Adam and Eve, wickedness had become rampant over the whole earth. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them” (Gen. 6:5-7).

Noah and his family found favor with God, however, and God gave directions for building an ark to carry them safely through the Flood He intended sending upon the earth. For one hundred twenty years Noah labored, preaching to those around him concerning God’s plan, but none would heed his warning. The Flood came, and all creatures depending on breath of life were destroyed save those in the ark. God set His rainbow in the heaven as a seal of His promise never again to destroy all life from the earth by flood. But again sin became rampant.

Cleansed by Fire

We have God’s sure promise that all the earth will be renewed and made beautiful and sinless, even as before the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. In the fullness of time, Christ will reign in righteousness and peace. Sin will be abolished from the earth, with all its evils. John foresaw the end of sin and described it thus: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14-15). Paul, too, gave a preview of the cleansing: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

When punishment for sin is so explicitly pictured, our thoughts turn to how we can escape that punishment. We are not left in doubt. As Noah and his family entered the ark and safely rode through the time of disaster, so we, too, may enter our Ark of Safety, even Jesus Christ our Lord.