

LESSONS FROM SAUL'S FAILURES

– MARCH 21. – 1 SAMUEL 14:1-46. –

OBEDIENCE WITHOUT ITS SPIRIT CAUSED SAUL'S DIFFICULTIES – THE KINGDOM, TAKEN FROM SAUL'S FAMILY, GIVEN TO DAVID, "A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART" – SAUL PROFITED PARTIALLY BY HIS MISTAKES AND WAS BLESSED ACCORDINGLY – LESSONS FOR EVERYBODY – PARTICULARLY FOR GOD'S CONSECRATED PEOPLE.

"Let us put on the armor of light." – Romans 13:12.

THE army which gathered to Saul, and which accomplished the victory of our last Study, was disbanded; and subsequently the king had a standing army of three thousand men. One thousand of these were under command of his son Jonathan. The remainder constituted a royal guard and were immediately under Saul's own directions. Apparently the land of Israel was completely dominated by the Philistines, who here and there had garrisons. These were content to take a certain amount of tax from the people, much as the British govern India.

The Israelites were poorly armed; for the Philistines would not permit them to have weapons of war lest they should rebel. Similarly, the British prevent war munitions from going to India for the same reason. When therefore Jonathan made an attack upon the garrison of the Philistines and wiped it out, it raised a hubbub, much as such a circumstance would do if the people of India were to rise against the British garrison there. It meant war. The Hebrews trembled at what might be the result, just as the people of India would tremble at what the British might do in a similar case.

The Philistines increased their army of occupation; and the Israelites – unarmed, except with agricultural implements, etc. – were terrorized by the warlike Philistines. Saul's army of three thousand dwindled to six hundred; yet the word which reached him from the Prophet Samuel was, to wait seven days for his arrival, apparently with the intention that the people should thoroughly feel their impotence, and cry unto the Lord for succor. King Saul did as directed to the extent of waiting seven days; and with the expiration of the time, seeing how his army was dwindling and that Samuel had not returned, he on the seventh day undertook to be his own priest. He offered up sacrifices to God without authority.

Just as he had finished the sacrifices, the Prophet Samuel appeared, reproved him sharply, and told him that because of his failure to fully obey the Lord, his family should not be continued as the Lord's representatives in the Kingdom of Israel. The king apologized, explained the circumstances – thought it necessary to do something, and that what he did was the only thing he could think of. Very few kings or generals of our day would be prepared to do any nearer the will of the Lord than did King Saul. Very few would have waited seven days at all, or would have paid any attention to the Prophet. Very few would have apologized to the Prophet afterwards, and explained why they attempted to offer sacrifice to God.

We cannot but think that if King Saul had been given further opportunities he might gradually have learned the lesson of implicit obedience to God; and yet our next lesson will show us that he again failed along the very same lines. It requires many experiences to teach some of us the lesson of complete reliance on the Lord and full obedience to His every requirement. Perhaps the Lord was wishing to teach a special lesson along this line – that any king sitting upon the typical throne of the Lord must be implicitly obedient, not merely to the letter of the command, but also to its spirit; for Israel's kings to a considerable extent

foreshadowed the Kingdom of Christ and His Church. Those who will be joint-heirs with Messiah in His Kingdom of glory must learn obedience; else they will not be accounted worthy of the honors of the Kingdom. They must not only be outwardly obedient, but inwardly obedient to the spirit or intent of the Lord's Law.

ONLY PRIESTS MIGHT SACRIFICE

While passing, we do well to note why King Saul's sacrifice of burnt offerings to the Lord was condemned as a sin. This was because God had made a specific law to the effect that only the priests might offer sacrifices. Then comes the question, Why should God limit the offering of sacrifices to the priestly tribe? The answer is that that tribe typically represented the Church – fully consecrated to God and accepted by Him. These the Apostle styled the antitypes, not only of Israel's kings, but also of Israel's priests. St. Peter says of the Church in general, and not of the clergy in particular, "Ye are a Royal Priesthood."

In the antitype, all of God's consecrated people are prospective kings and are sacrificing priests. Unless these saintly Christians sacrifice their earthly interests, their present lives, they will not get the great reward of joint-heirship with Christ, the great Chief Priest of their profession. As we read, "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him"; and again, St. Paul says, "I beseech you, brethren,...present your bodies a living sacrifice."

It would be therefore a mistake for us to suppose, as some do, that the clergy have special priestly offices now, and are commissioned to offer mass and prayers. Let us remember that there is only one great High Priest – the Lord Jesus – that He offered up Himself in the days of His flesh, and has passed beyond the Veil into glory, and that He has since been offering up His consecrated people, who present themselves to Him in the proper spirit of submission and self-sacrifice.

The Bible recognizes no division of the people of God into clergy and laity. This was a snare of the Adversary, introduced gradually in the third and fourth centuries. The Bible teaching is that all spirit-begotten children of [R5638 : page 62] God are members of the antitypical Royal Priesthood, that they are all brethren, that they are all ordained or authorized to preach the Message of God's grace as presented in God's Word; and that they should call no man on the earth father; but should realize that One is their Father, even God, and that the Lord Jesus is their Elder Brother.

CRAVING FOR ANOTHER CHANCE

How many of the human family have felt, when they reached their death-beds, that if they had life to live over again, their lessons of experience would be precious and enable them to do much better! The man or the woman who has not had some experiences along this line of failures and endeavored to surmount them and to do better, has lived his life very much in vain. Let us therefore encourage one another to strive for high ideals, and not to be discouraged by our unintentional failures. This is expressed by the little quotation which we all learned in childhood, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." That little message which came to our childish minds was a valuable one. It helped us over many a discouragement.

Beset by our own weaknesses with which we were born, surrounded by others who similarly have weaknesses of mind, body and morals, and assaulted, as the Scriptures assure us we are, by Satan and the fallen angels, who seek to ensnare us and divert us from God and from righteousness, is it any wonder that we fail to come up to our own highest ideals, and therefore fail still more seriously to come up to the perfect standards of God's Word?

The very simplest statement of God's Law is the Golden Rule. Yet how many who understand that Golden Rule and its spirit

perfectly could claim that they live up to its requirements every hour, every day? "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." All that any of us can do is to be honest with ourselves, to confess our delinquencies, to strive daily to overcome these and to attain more and more to the Divine standards in thought, in word, in deed.

It is a further lesson, which only Christians have learned, that it is impossible to live up to the standards of this Law, and that we need the covering of the Redeemer's merit – even after we have surrendered all to Him to seek to walk in His steps – to cover our shortcomings and to continue us in relationship with God. Another lesson which the Christian learns is that those continuing in relationship with God find not only forgiveness for trespasses unintentionally committed, but find also grace to help, assistances for every need – through the same Savior.

Thus the Christian is learning of his own weaknesses and of God's mercy, and growing strong in battling for the right day by day. He not only has a second chance, but has many repeated chances, day by day, of repentance of sin and of making a fresh start after recovery from the stumbling, through the merit of Christ.

King Saul in our lesson had no such experiences; the Savior had not yet died; He had not yet appeared in the presence of God, to offer an atonement or to open up a new way of life. Saul, therefore, had only the arrangement which was common to all Jews – the typical Day of Atonement, once every year, to atone for the sins of the whole people for one year, including the typical priesthood, through whom the message of God was communicated to them. And being himself partly a type, King Saul was necessarily dealt with along the lines of strict justice, and **[R5639 : page 62]** the kingdom was declared to be forfeited by his family because of his offering to the Lord a sacrifice not authorized.

THE WORLD IN THE FUTURE

Gradually Bible students are learning that the story of our various creeds of Christendom is untrue, which tells that all the heathen have gone to eternal torture, and all the Jews similarly, because they did not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and furthermore, that nearly all the people of civilized lands who have died, have gone to eternal torture because, having heard of Christ, they did not become His saintly followers. These terrible doctrines have driven many away from God and from His Book, as people seem to realize their horrors and injustice.

Bible students are coming to see that God has provided two trials for the whole world of mankind. The first trial was in Eden, Father Adam being the representative of himself and his race. That trial ended in disaster to all concerned. Unless God had made an arrangement for a second trial, none of the human family would ever gain eternal life or escape the sentence that came on them there. The death of Christ was for the very purpose of giving a second trial to Adam and all his race; as the Apostle declares, "As by man came death, by man comes also the Resurrection of the dead. For as all in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive; every man in his own order." – 1 Corinthians 15:21-23.

During this Gospel Age, those who believe the Message of the Gospel, and who consecrate themselves fully to the Lord and whom He accepts by the begetting of the Holy Spirit – these become New Creatures in Christ, and these New Creatures are on trial a second time – their destiny being either everlasting life on the spirit plane or everlasting death. The remainder of the world are still in the condemned condition; or, as the Apostle says, they have not yet escaped the condemnation that is on the world. There is only the one way of escape now – through accepting Christ on the terms of discipleship.

However, we see that God's provision for a second trial includes the remainder of mankind who do not now hear, or who do not now accept Christ and are not now begotten again as New Creatures. The world in general is to have its trial time during the Millennium. Then, "the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the whole earth." Then, "all shall know Him from the least to the greatest." They will not have the opposition of Satan; for he will be bound during that time. They will have the assistance of Christ and of the glorified Church, the Royal Priesthood.

The object of that Millennial Kingdom will be to uplift the world – to bring all the willing and obedient back again to human perfection and everlasting life, and to destroy all the incorrigible ones, who refuse when they have that full and second opportunity. In this connection we are reminded of the words of the poet:

"I wish that there were some wonderful place
Called the Land of Beginning-again,
Where all our mistakes and all our heartaches
And all our poor, selfish grief
Could be dropped, like a shabby old coat, at the door
And never put on again."

The poet's words are to come true, and the time is near at hand. If, as Bible students are realizing, the present European War is a prelude to the anarchy of the great Battle of Armageddon, and is the vestibule to the Kingdom of Messiah, then the time of putting off the "shabby old coat" of present imperfection on the part of mankind in general is near at hand. Surely all who have themselves put off the filthy rags of their own righteousness, and by faith put on the Robe of Christ's Righteousness, can rejoice that the poor world – heathen, Jew, and civilized Gentiles – may all have so good an opportunity as God's **[R5639 : page 63]** love and mercy have provided for them through the great Sacrifice made at Calvary, when "Jesus Christ by the grace of God, tasted death for

every man"; that he who believeth on Him, whether now or in the future, should not perish, but might gain everlasting life.

Not only so, but as Jesus gives all who come unto Him the gracious opportunity whereby they may "try, try again," and gradually demonstrate, cultivate their loyalty to God and to righteousness, so the Bible intimates an opportunity will be given to the world in general. For a thousand years the world will have the opportunity of trying, trying again, peradventure that by the many lessons of that time they may learn righteousness and come fully into accord with the Great King Eternal and His glorious Golden Rule. This the Scriptures assure us respecting the Millennium: "When the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." – Isaiah 26:9.

JONATHAN'S FAITH WAS REWARDED

Our lesson proceeds to tell the story of how Jonathan and his armor-bearer, blessed of the Lord, were victorious over the enemies; and how the Philistines, divided into three parties, mistook each other for Hebrews and slaughtered one another.

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