

PROPHETS & JUDGES

IN THE PROMISED LAND

“The Saviour saw that men were absorbed in getting gain, and were losing sight of eternal realities. . . . Lifting up His voice He cried, ‘What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’ Matthew 16:26. He presents before fallen humanity the nobler world they have lost sight of, that they may behold eternal realities. He takes them to the threshold of the Infinite, flushed with the indescribable glory of God, and shows them the treasure there.” {Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 106}

WEEK 17 - AMALEK

I. A Doomed People

1. What was God’s judgment against Amalek, and why?

2. How does the destruction of this entire nation illustrate God's fairness, mercy, and goodness?

3. What things were the curse of Sodom? What does Sodom's destruction teach us today?

4. What is our obligation to God today?

5. When people fill up the measure of their iniquity, God removes them so that others may prosper by His grace. How does our Father feel about the destruction of the irredeemable?

II. The Final Test

1. *Think about it!* What do you find important about the fact that this was Saul's final test?

2. How did Samuel feel about Saul at this point?

3. What had happened to Saul as a result of following his own will, regardless of the will of God, for so long?

4. How did the spirit of pride affect Saul when God blessed him and when he was reproved? If Saul had obeyed God, how would this have affected the people?

5. When Saul heard God's judgment, he cried out, "I have sinned." But what was lacking in this confession?

6. What were the similarities and differences between Saul's repentance and Aaron's?

7. How is the case of Saul a lesson to us?

A Doomed People**August 24, 1882**

After delivering the reproof at Gilgal, Samuel had little intercourse with the king of Israel. Saul resented the prophet's stern rebuke, and avoided him as far as possible; and Samuel did not intrude his presence or his counsel. But the Lord commanded him to bear another message to the king. God purposed again to work through Saul, to destroy the enemies of Israel. ^[1.1]

Obeying this command, the prophet reminded him that he had been commissioned by the Lord to anoint him king, and that he still spoke by the same authority. Then he declared the divine message. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not." ^[1.2]

The Amalekites were a wandering people inhabiting the wilderness to the south of Palestine, between that country and Egypt. Like most of the neighboring tribes, they were idolaters, and bitter enemies of Israel. Soon after the exodus they attacked the Israelites in the desert of Rephidim, but were signally defeated by Joshua. The Amalekites were not among the nations whose lands were granted to Israel, nor had they received any injury from them. This assault was, therefore, wholly unprovoked. It was also most cowardly and cruel; the foe, not daring to risk an open encounter with the Hebrews, had attacked and slain those who from feebleness and exhaustion had fallen behind the body of the host. ^[1.3]

Moses was commanded to preserve a record of the battle, and also of the final doom of that idolatrous people, as pronounced by God himself: "I will blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven, because [marginal reading] the hand of Amalek is against the throne of Jehovah." The Lord of all the earth had fixed his throne in Israel, and had shown his glorious power and majesty in bringing the chosen people from their bondage in Egypt. When Amalek made an assault upon them, he attacked the throne of God, who determined to vindicate his authority, as a warning to all future generations. ^[1.4]

After denouncing judgments against the Amalekites, the Lord waited long for them to turn from their evil ways; but they went on in sin until their iniquity had reached its height, till their day of probation ended, and divine justice demanded their destruction. That wicked people were dwelling in God's world, the house which he had prepared for his faithful, obedient children. Yet they appropriated his gifts to their own use, without one thought of the Giver. The more blessings he poured upon them, the more boldly they transgressed against him. Thus they continued to pervert his blessings and abuse his mercy. They strengthened their souls in iniquity, but God kept silence; and they said in their hearts. "How doth God know? and is there knowledge with the Most High?" But the dark record of their crimes was constantly passing up to Heaven. There is a limit beyond which men may not go on in sin—

"A hidden boundary between
God's mercy and his wrath." ^[1.5]

When that limit had been passed, God arose in his indignation to put them out of the house which they had polluted. ^[1.6]

Our gracious God still bears long with the impenitent. He gives them light from Heaven, that they may understand the holiness of his character, and the justice of his requirements. He calls them to repentance, and assures them of his willingness to forgive. But if they continue to reject his mercy, the mandate goes forth devoting them to destruction. {1.7}

Thus was it with Sodom. Behold the fairest city of the plain, set in a garden of beauty. To human vision it is a scene of quietness and security. The fertile fields are clothed with harvests. There is an abundance for the supply of every want, almost without labor. The distant hills are covered with flocks. The merchants of the East bring their treasures from afar. The people live for pleasure and make one long holiday of the year. {1.8}

Idleness and riches are their curse. They are absorbed in worldly pursuits and sensual gratification. Yet no visible token of God's wrath hangs over the devoted city. Their last day is like many others that have come and gone. Their last night is marked by no greater sins than many others before it. But mercy, so long rejected, ceases at last her pleadings. The fires of divine vengeance are kindled in the vale of Siddim. The beautiful but guilty Sodom becomes a desolation, a place never to be built up or inhabited. {1.9}

The flames which consumed the cities of the plain shed their warning light down even to our time. They bid us shun the sins that brought destruction upon the ungodly at that day. {1.10}

God requires the service of all his creatures. Everything in nature obeys his will. The measureless heavens are ablaze with his glory. Of all that he has created upon the earth, only man rebels against the Creator. Puny, erring men, the creatures of an hour, dare to enter into controversy with the Eternal, the Source of all wisdom and all power. They who are constantly dependent upon God's bounty, dare to spurn the Hand whence all their blessings flow. There is no ingratitude so sinful, no blindness so complete, as that of men who refuse to acknowledge their obligation to their God. {1.11}

Not only are men dwellers in God's great house, and partakers of his bounties, but they are the objects of his unceasing care and love. He makes it their privilege, through the righteousness of Christ, to call him Father. They may ask infinite blessings without exhausting the treasures of his grace. In their ignorance they may be guided by the counsels of unerring wisdom. In calamity they may shelter themselves beneath the shadow of his throne, and find safety in his secret place. {1.12}

This mighty God pledges his immutable word that those who love and trust him shall not want any good thing. But he declares that he will surely punish the transgressors of his law. The wickedness of the race is not forgotten nor overlooked because God does not at once visit them with judgments. Each century of profligacy and rebellion is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. {1.13}

When the scribes and Pharisees rejected the teachings of Christ, he bade them fill up the iniquity of their fathers, that it might be time for God to work; that the message of glad tidings might be given to others, who would joyfully

receive it. When at last the divine forbearance was exhausted, God's wrath fell signally upon a people who had rejected so great light. {1.14}

The Lord does not delight in vengeance, though he executes judgment upon the transgressors of his law. He is forced to do this, to preserve the inhabitants of the earth from utter depravity and ruin. In order to save some, he must cut off those who have become hardened in sin. Says the prophet Isaiah: "The Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work, and bring to pass his act, his strange act." The work of wrath and destruction is indeed a strange, unwelcome work for Him who is infinite in love. {1.15}

Again, the divine message comes to Ezekiel: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." The very fact of God's unwillingness to punish sinners shows the enormity of the sins that call forth his judgments. And yet to every transgressor of his holy law is addressed that earnest, pleading call, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?" {1.16}

The records of sacred history declare, that while God is a God of justice, strict to mark iniquity, and strong to punish the sinner, he is also a God of truth, compassion, and abundant mercy. While he visits judgments upon the transgressors of his law and the enemies of his people, he will protect those who respect his statutes and show kindness to his chosen. {1.17}

When he commanded that a war of extermination be waged against Amalek, he also directed that the Kenites, who dwell among them, should be spared, because they had shown mercy to Israel in their distress. Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, and a prince among the Kenites, had joined Israel soon after the latter came out of Egypt. His presence and counsel at that time was of great value to the Hebrews. Moses afterward urged Hobab, the son of Jethro, to accompany them in their journeyings through the wilderness, saying: "We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." {1.18}

Hobab declined, choosing to live in his own country and among his own people. But Moses knew that his brother-in-law was well acquainted with the country through which they were to pass, and that he could greatly assist them in their journey. He therefore earnestly entreated: "Leave us not, I pray thee; forasmuch as thou knowest how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be to us instead of eyes. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee." Hobab consented to this; but the journeyings of Israel over, he and his followers forsook the neighborhood of the towns, and betook themselves to freer air, to the wilderness of Judah, on the southern border of Canaan. {1.19}

The promise of special protection and friendship given by Moses to the Kenites, was made by the direction of the Lord. Hence when Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites, special directions were given that the Kenites should be spared. Jethro and his family had been devoted worshipers of the true God; but though the Kenites were still friendly to Israel, and acknowledged the

living God as the ruler of the earth, their religion had become corrupted with idolatry. After this time they degenerated more and more into heathenism, and their influence became a snare to the Hebrews. Hence they were finally visited with divine judgments. {1.20}

Balaam, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold the destruction of both the Kenites and the Amalekites: "When he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish forever. And he looked on the Kenites and took up this parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling-place, and thou puttest thy rest in a rock. Nevertheless, the Kenites shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!"

{1.21}

The Final Test

August 31, 1882

The defeat of the Philistines at Michmash seemed a turning-point in the fortunes of Israel. Though the Lord was displeased with Saul, and purposed to set aside his family, yet he granted him success in battle against the oppressors of his people. No enemy seemed able to stand against him. He made war in turn against Moab, Ammon, and Edom, and against the Amalekites and the Philistines; and wherever he turned his arms, he gained fresh victories. Yet, having missed the opportunity which God had granted him, he was never able permanently to subdue the Philistines. He had sore war with them all the days of his life. {2.1}

When commanded to destroy the Amalekites, Saul did not for a moment hesitate. To his own authority was added the command of the prophet, and at the call to battle the men of Israel flocked to his standard. Two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah were numbered at Telaim. With this force, Saul attacked and defeated the king of Amalek, and overran the country. {2.2}

This victory was by far the most brilliant which Saul had ever gained, and it served to kindle anew that pride of heart which was his greatest danger. The divine edict devoting the Amalekites to utter destruction was but partially executed. Ambitious to heighten the honor of his triumphal return by the presence of a royal captive, Saul ventured to spare Agag, the fierce and warlike king of Amalek. {2.3}

This act was not without influence upon the people. They too felt that they might safely venture to depart somewhat from the Lord's explicit directions. Hence they covetously reserved to themselves the finest of the flocks, herds, and beasts of burden, destroying only that which was vile and refuse. {2.4}

Here Saul was subjected to the final test. His presumptuous disregard of the will of God, showing his determination to rule as an independent monarch, proved that he could not be intrusted with royal power as the Lord's vicegerent. Unmindful of all this, Saul marshals his victorious army, and with the captive king and the long train of flocks and herds—a booty highly valued in the East—

set out on the march homeward. At Carmel, in the possessions of Judah, he set up a monument of his victory. {2.5}

While pride and rejoicing reigned in the camp of Saul, there was deep anguish in the home of Samuel. His intense interest for the welfare of Israel had not abated. He still loved the valiant warrior whom his own hands had anointed as king. It had been his earnest prayer that Saul might become a wise and prosperous ruler. When it was revealed to him that Saul had been finally rejected, Samuel in his distress "cried unto the Lord all night," pleading for a reversal of the sentence. With an aching heart he set forth next morning to meet the erring king. But when he heard that Saul had erected a monument of his own exploits, instead of giving glory to God, he turned aside and went to Gilgal. {2.6}

Thither the monarch with his army came to meet him. Samuel had cherished a longing hope that Saul might, upon reflection, become conscious of his sin, and by repentance and humiliation before God, be again restored to the divine favor. But the king came forward with great assurance, saying, "Blessed be thou of the Lord; I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Saul had so often followed his own will, regardless of the command of God through his prophet, that his moral perception had become dulled. He was not now conscious of the sinfulness of his course. {2.7}

The sounds that fell upon the prophet's ears, disproved the statement of the disobedient king. To the pointed question, "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul made answer, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." The plea here urged was at best but an excuse for covetousness. The beasts saved from the spoil were to be offered by the Israelites in place of their own animals required for sacrifice. {2.8}

The spirit which actuated Saul is evinced by the fact that when proudly boasting of his obedience to the divine command, he takes all the honor to himself; when reprov'd for disobedience, he charges the sin upon the people. Samuel was not deceived by the king's subterfuge. With mingled grief and indignation he declares, "Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night." Then he reminded Saul of his early humility: "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?" He repeats the divine behest concerning Amalek, and demands from the king the reason for his disobedience. {2.9}

Saul stubbornly persists in his self-justification; "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 destroy the Amalekites. 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." Had Saul himself obeyed the command of God, and enforced it upon the people with the same decision that he had manifested in carrying out his own decrees, he would have had no difficulty in securing obedience. God held him responsible for the sin which he basely endeavored to charge upon Israel. {2.10}

In stern and solemn words the prophet of the Most High sweeps away the refuge of lies, and pronounces against Saul the irrevocable sentence: "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. 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." [2.11]

As the king heard this fearful sentence, he cried out, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and thy words because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." Saul was filled with terror by the denunciation of the prophet, but he had, even now, no true sense of the enormity of his transgression. He still persisted in casting blame upon the people, declaring that he had sinned through fear of them. [2.12]

This was the same excuse urged by Aaron to shield himself from the guilt of making the golden calf. But so far from accepting the excuse, Moses sternly rebuked Aaron, in the presence of all the people. As the high priest of Israel, and the representative of Moses in his absence, Aaron should at any risk have opposed the rash and godless designs of the people. His neglect to do this brought upon them sin, disaster, and ruin, which he was powerless to avert. While he found it easy to lead them into sin, he sought in vain to lead them to repentance. Moses afterward declared, "The Lord was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him." His sin would have been punished with death had he not in true penitence humbled himself before the Lord. Had Saul, in like manner, been willing to see and confess his sin, he too might have been forgiven. [2.13]

It was not sorrow for sin, but fear of its penalty that actuated the king of Israel as he entreated Samuel, "I pray thee, pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord." [2.14]

"I will not return with thee," was the answer of the prophet; "for thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel." As Samuel turned to leave, the king, in an agony of fear, laid hold of his mantle to hold him back, but it rent in his hands. Upon this, the prophet declared, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou." And knowing how lightly his words had heretofore been regarded by the king, he adds the solemn assurance, "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent." Saul had gloried in his exploits, as though he were the deliverer of his people. The prophet rebukes this pride by reminding the haughty monarch that God was the strength of Israel.

[2.15]

Even now Saul fears only personal disgrace and the loss of his kingdom. He is far more disturbed by the alienation of Samuel than by the displeasure of God. He entreated Samuel to pardon his transgressions, as if the prophet had authority to reverse the divine sentence against him. He knew that the people had greater confidence in Samuel than in himself. Should another king be immediately anointed by divine command, he felt that his own case was hopeless.

Should Samuel denounce and forsake him, he feared an immediate revolt among the people. {2.16}

As a last resort, Saul entreated the prophet to honor him before the elders and the people by publicly uniting with him in the worship of God. Samuel remained, but only as a silent witness of the service. Without humility or repentance, Saul's worship could not be accepted of the Lord. {2.17}

An act of justice, stern and terrible, was yet to be performed. Samuel must publicly vindicate the honor of God, and rebuke the course of Saul. He commands that the king of the Amalekites be brought before him. Above all who had fallen by the sword of Israel, Agag was responsible as the upholder of the debasing heathenism of his people, and the instigator of their revolting cruelties; it was just that upon him should fall the heaviest penalty. He came at the prophet's command, in the pride of royalty, flattering himself that he could overawe the servant of God, and that all danger of death was past. Samuel's words dispelled his assurance: "As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be made childless among women." "And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord." This done, Samuel returned to his home at Ramah, Saul to his at Gilgal. The prophet and the king were never to meet again. {2.18}

Samuel was a man of great tenderness of spirit, and strong affections, as is evinced by the anguish which he felt when commanded to declare the divine sentence against Saul. Yet when required to execute justice against the wicked king of Amalek, he performed the unwelcome task unflinchingly. He would maintain his fidelity to God, however great the sacrifice of personal feeling. {2.19}

How wide the contrast between the conduct of Samuel and the course pursued by the king of Israel. To serve his own purpose, Saul could be exceedingly cruel; but when divinely commissioned to destroy utterly a rebellious people, he smites only the lesser criminals, and spares the one upon whom the curse of God especially rested. In his pride of heart he flattered himself that he was more merciful than his Maker. By his course of action he declared the divine requirement unjust and cruel. {2.20}

The case of Saul should be a lesson to us, that God's word is to be respected and obeyed. All the crimes and calamities of ancient Israel resulted from their neglect to heed the instructions of their divine Ruler. Here is our danger. We must give diligent heed to what the Lord has spoken, even in apparently small matters. God requires his people not merely to assent to his word, but to obey it with all the heart. To comply with the Lord's instructions when it is compatible with our own interests, and to disregard them when this best suits our purpose, is to pursue the course of Saul. Pride in our own achievements or a stubborn adherence to our own will, renders the most exalted profession or the most splendid service odious in the sight of God. {2.21}

Answer Hints

Section 1: | 1) 1.3–1.4 | 2) 1.5–1.7 | 3) 1.9, 1.10 | 4) 1.11 | 5) 1.15–1.16 |

Section 2: | 2) 2.6–2.7 | 3) 2.7 | 4) 2.9–2.10; 2.4, 2.10 | 5) 2.12, 2.14, 2.16 | 6) 2.13 | 7) 2.21 |

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