OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES:

Later History and Poetry

By Harold S. Bender and Paul Erb

A Bible Survey Course in Five Units

SECOND UNIT

OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

Later History and Poetry

Second Unit of a Bible Survey Course in Five Units

THIRD EDITION

By

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(HISTORICAL STUDIES)

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Foreword to Third Edition

This Bible Survey Course was conceived by the forerunner of the Mennonite Commission for Christian Education, the General Sunday School Committee of General Conference. This committee sensed the urgency of teacher training in the Mennonite Church and adopted a plan of action known as the "Elementary Teacher Training Course." This course led to the preparation of Bible survey manuals, three volumes of twelve lessons each: **Old Testament Law and History,** by H. S. Bender; **Old Testament Poetry and Prophets,** by Paul Erb; and **New Testament Studies,** by C. K. Lehman. These books appeared in January, 1936.

The Bible Survey Course manuals were well received. Within four years the first edition was exhausted. In September, 1940, under the direction of the Commission Secretary of Teacher Training the second edition appeared. In this edition a few changes were made to make the materials more adaptable to training classes. A few corrections of fact were also included.

The Bible Survey Course manuals continue to enjoy widespread use. However, changing needs and requirements have led to this third edition. Requirements for teacher-training courses have been changed from twelve to ten sessions of 45 minutes each. This necessitated the rearrangement of materials which resulted in five volumes of ten lessons each: **Old Testament Studies: Early History and Law; Old Testament Studies: Later History and Poetry; Old Testament Studies: The Prophets; New Testament Studies: The Gospels and Acts;** and **New Testament Studies: The Epistles and Revelation.**

The content has remained much the same except for reorganization, new study questions, addition of maps, and corrections of fact in the light of more recent studies and discoveries.

The revision has been done by C. Norman Kraus of Goshen College under the direction of the Christian Education Department of the Editorial Division of the Mennonite Publishing House and the Curriculum Committee of the Mennonite Commission for Christian Education.

With the new format and with a renewed emphasis upon training for Christian service we hope these volumes will continue to provide the church with a means to more and better Bible knowledge and will prepare men and women to teach the inspired Word of God to His glory.

Paul M. Lederach
Field Secretary
Mennonite Commission for Christian Education

Lesson I *

I Samuel

In the original Hebrew Old Testament the four books now known as I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings were reckoned as a continuous history from the time of the judges to the destruction of Jerusalem. I and II Samuel were one book, and were not divided in the Hebrew Bible until A.D. 1517, although the Greek translation known as the Septuagint had divided them about 200 B.C. In the Greek Bible the book had the name of I and II Kingdoms. The name Samuel is appropriate for the first book because of the prominence of his part in the history recorded in the book. However, he died before the end of Saul's reign (I Sam. 25:1) and does not appear at all in the so-called second book of Samuel.

Author.—Unknown writer of later time who used writings of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad.

Date.—Uncertain.

Time Covered.—115 years, c. 1075-975 B.C.

Contents.—History of the concluding period of the judges, and the first part of the monarchy, reign of Saul, and first part of David's reign.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. Samuel's Life as Prophet and Judge, 1—7.
II. The Early Reign of Saul, 8—15.
III. The Decline of Saul and the Rise of David, 16—31.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. Samuel's Life as Prophet and Judge, 1—7.
  1. Samuel's early life and call, 1—3.
  2. Capture of the ark and judgment of Eli, 4—6.
    a. Capture of the ark at the battle of Aphek, 4:1-11.
    b. Death of Eli's sons and Eli, 4:11-22.
    c. Plagues on the Philistines, 5.
    d. Return of the ark to Beth-shemesh, 6.
  3. Samuel's work as judge, Mizpeh, 7.

* Before beginning this unit refer back to Unit I, *Old Testament Study: Early History and Law,* Lessons I and II which discuss the purpose of the Bible, methods of Bible study, rules of interpretation, the purpose of the Old Testament, and the relation of the Old to the New Testament.

II. The Early Reign of Saul, 8—15.
1. The request for a king, 8.
2. Choice and anointing of Saul, 9—11.
3. Samuel's resignation and farewell, 12.
4. Saul's reign until rejection of Saul because of three failures, 13—15.
a. First failure, assuming the priest's office, 13.
b. Second failure, rash vow, 14.
c. Third failure, sparing the Amalekites, 15.

III. The Decline of Saul and Rise of David, 16—31.
1. David anointed, 16.
2. David's victory over Goliath, 17.
3. Jealousy of Saul and attempts on David's life, 18:1—19:17.
4. David's flight to Samuel at Ramah, 19:18-24.
5. David and Jonathan, 20.
6. David's wandering life as a fugitive, 21—27, 29, 30.
7. Saul and the witch of En-dor, 28.
8. Defeat and death of Saul, 31.

Selections for Reading: 1; 3; 4; 7; 10; 13:8-14; 15; 16; 17:20-50; 20; 26; 31.

The early part of the Book of First Samuel gives the history of the concluding period of the judges, for it includes the work of the judge Eli, who served in this capacity for forty years, and includes the work of Samuel, who was both prophet and judge of Israel. The latter part of the book tells of the establishment of the monarchy under Saul and David. Thus Samuel is the link between two periods in Israelite history, and depicts the nation in transition.

Early Life and Call of Samuel

The familiar history of Samuel, with his consecration to the service of God and his special call from heaven, which fills the first three chapters of the book, introduces in a striking way the story of his wonderful life and character. The incidents told make us feel that we have here the beginning of the life of a man who was to be far more than a civil ruler, a judge, or even a mere reformer. He was, with the help of God, to restore the religious life of Israel and to prepare the way for the establishment of the kingdom. His devoted, faithful life, as well as his work as prophet and judge, must have inspired the people and contributed much to a renewal of faith in Jehovah and obedience to His law. The result of his influence was the formation of groups of prophets, so-called "schools of the

prophets," who were attracted by Samuel's life, associated with him, learned from him, and no doubt served as wandering preachers among the people to aid in the revival and reform which Samuel promoted. His position in the land was unique, for he served by direct divine appointment as both spiritual and political ruler of the nation. In this he was a second Moses, the greatest figure between Moses and David.

The success of Samuel has been attributed in part to his unique birth and childhood, and rightly so. No child in the Bible had the advantages in this respect which Samuel had, and no doubt the story of his life is told in such detail as an example and inspiration to godly parents. Three factors stand out in Samuel's early life: (1) his consecration to the service of God by his mother; (2) his obedient life as a child; (3) his special call from God. All these factors combined to produce in Samuel a man of unusual spiritual power. It soon became evident to the people that the Lord was with Samuel, and that he was indeed a great prophet of God. Let us look briefly at the story of Samuel's early life.

Hannah, Samuel's mother, was a truly noble woman. She had severe trials because of the presence in the home of a second wife, but she did the only right thing to do—she took her troubles to the Lord in prayer. Hannah asked for a son from God and promised to dedicate him wholly to the service of God. She received a direct answer to her prayer. In due time God gave her the desired son. True to her vow, after she had devotedly nursed and trained the child in a way that must have been a great blessing to him later, she brought him to Eli the high priest who took him into his house and gave him daily service at the sanctuary as soon as he was old enough. In the house of Eli Samuel learned much. He learned to imitate the spirit of the devout and pious priest, but learned also to avoid the exceedingly sinful way of life of Eli's sons, encouraged no doubt by his devoted mother who visited him annually. To impress strongly the awfulness of the wickedness of Eli's sons upon Samuel, God chose him as the special agent through whom He sent His message of judgment upon the whole house of Eli, a judgment which was necessary because of the sin of the sons and the negligence of the father. The beautiful story of the responsiveness of the young Samuel to this early call of

God has inspired thousands of children and others to glad obedience to the will of God at all times.

Judgment on Eli's House and the Loss of the Ark

Eli is a pathetic character in Israel's history. He had a rare opportunity, for he served as both high priest and judge for forty years. He himself was a good man, of blameless character, but weak and lacking in aggressiveness and determination, so that even in his own house and among his sons who served in the sanctuary the law of God was broken freely. Lacking proper home training, his sons grew up slaves to appetite and became gluttons and adulterers, whose vile deeds polluted the very tabernacle itself. Pious Israelites went to worship at the sanctuary with great reluctance. Even a special warning from God to Eli did no good; perhaps it was already too late. Finally God through Samuel repeated the warning and prophesied destruction upon Eli's house. At length war broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites, in the course of which Israel was defeated, the sons of Eli slain, and the ark itself, which had been used as a superstitious protection against the enemy, was captured. God had refused to honor this superstitious trust in the ark, but allowed it, the symbol of His presence among His people, to fall into the hands of the enemy. Eli, hearing of the awful happenings, fell backward from his seat, and died of a broken neck. The ark brought nothing but destruction to the Philistines during the time they had it in their hands. They supposed that they had captured the God of the Israelites and offered the ark before Dagon, their god, but the Lord humbled Dagon and his worshipers. After thousands died of a dreadful plague, the ark was returned to Kirjathjearim for twenty years.

During these twenty years Samuel was being quietly prepared by God for the great service which was ahead of him. At the close of the period he appeared at a great assembly at Mizpeh as the leader of Israel, having preached a genuine reformation, a turning away from false gods to a worship of the true God. He led the people in prayer and confession and brought about a great victory over the Philistines. In commemoration of the heaven-brought victory he set up a memorial called Eben-ezer, "Stone of help."

Samuel as Judge

Now the Philistine yoke was thrown off, and from this time forth Samuel was the real ruler of Israel, loved and honored by all the people. He held court as judge in various towns in turn. He was honest and just in all his dealings and, at the close of his life, challenged the world to point to any case of dishonesty or injustice. His record as judge was spotless.

Unfortunately the lesson of Eli's wicked sons seems not to have helped Samuel in the training of his own sons. It was the unrighteous conduct of his sons, whom he had appointed as judges in the south at Beersheba, that led to the demand for a king. Samuel's sons were set aside because of their failure, and as Samuel himself was getting old, the Ammonites in the east and the Philistines on the west were beginning to ravage the land. A strong hand was needed. Too late the prophet Samuel, great as he was, woke up to the failure of his sons and to his own failure. In his busy life he had neglected the training of his sons. May we not say that no business in life is so important to parents as the godly training of the children whom God has intrusted to their care, and whom He wishes to be trained aright, not only that they themselves may be saved, but that they may be useful in the work of His kingdom? No amount of piety and good character in the parents and no amount of busy service in the very best cause, can make up for the neglect of duty in child training.

The Reign of Saul

1. The Choice of Saul. God had told Samuel to protest the demand for a king and to warn the people of the evil that would come with the proposed change. But nothing would satisfy the people except a monarchy; so God allowed the people to have their own way. Thus was the monarchy begun. The warning of God through Samuel was amply justified by the later history of God's people. Through good kings God was able to accomplish much good, but evil and apostate kings wrought great harm. Nevertheless through the royal line of David God planned to bring the Messiah, the great King of His believing people.

The first king chosen was a man of great physical qualities, Saul, who at first, by his tact, moderation, and military ability, seemed to justify the choice. His victory over the Ammonites led Samuel to arrange for a celebration at which a second recognition of Saul as king was publicly made. Samuel made a speech here which once more pointed out for the benefit of both king and people the only safe way, namely, obedience to God.

2. **Reign of Saul Till His Rejection.** From here on Saul's reign was marked by increasing failure. His lower nature began to assert itself more and more, both in self-will and in suspicion and jealousy against Samuel, the appointed prophet of God. Two outstandings acts of self-will finally proved that Saul was unfit to be the ruler of God's people, and brought about the rejection of Saul by God. (1) In the midst of a hot struggle against the Philistines, when Samuel was late in coming to offer promised sacrifices, Saul usurped the place of the priest and offered the sacrifices himself. In so doing Saul threw off the authority of Samuel and the authority of Samuel's God. This disobedience led Samuel to warn Saul of rejection. (2) When God decided that the final day of reckoning for the Amalekites had come, Saul was commanded to destroy completely this people, both man and beast. In the moment of victory, proud, self-willed Saul disobeyed the command and spared the king and the best of the cattle. Samuel could do nothing but officialy reject Saul for his disobedience in the words which echo through the Old Testament into the New and shatter all formal pretensions to religion without obedience: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. . . . Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee" (I Sam. 15:22, 23).

3. **Decline of Saul and Rise of David.** On the rejection of Saul, Samuel was directed by God to ordain young David, the eighth son of Jesse, who was himself the grandson of Boaz and Ruth. In his declining years Samuel withdrew from public life and gave his time more to teaching and directing the bands ("schools") of prophets who came to him. The instruction probably included sacred music and sacred history. David himself was for a short time under the influence of

Samuel and the prophets. Before Saul died and before David rose to prominence, the aged Samuel died, leaving behind him a noble record as prophet (the first of the prophets after Moses), judge, intercessor in prayer, and teacher of young men. Through him again was restored to Israel "the open vision" of God that had been long withdrawn and was now henceforth given to Israel through kings like David and Solomon, and through prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah.

While Saul degenerated, even to the point of temporary insanity, "the Spirit of Jehovah came mightily upon David from that day forward." Saul became bitterly jealous of David and sought to destroy him. The remainder of the Book of I Samuel is filled with stories of the relationship of Saul and David. Several familiar stories are included in the following chapters which need not be repeated in detail here There is the scene where the young harper David soothes the spirit of frenzied Saul, who, living in open and conscious rebellion against the will of God, suffered intensely. In this service David learned to love Saul with an unselfish love that no injustice and cruelty from Saul ever quenched, and thus he became an example of unselfish love to later generations. There is also the thrilling story of the combat of the courageous and skillful shepherd boy, armed with pebbles and sling, with the great iron-armored giant Goliath. But the greatness of David's brilliant victory led Saul to jealousy, and he "eyed David from that day and forward." For several years Saul sought to destroy David, but in vain. God was protecting him. At this time comes the story of the great friendship of Jonathan, Saul's son, and David, one of the most beautiful and touching records of manly and sincere love in all history. Then, an outlaw and fugitive from Saul's court, David fled for safety to foreign lands. His first attempt at refuge led him to trouble and sin, both the result of loss of faith in God. At Nob he lied, and in Gath he acted a lie to feign insanity and to escape from the clutches of Achish in whom he hoped to find a friend and protector. Having regained his faith he came back to Judah, but placed his parents in Moab for safety.

From the time of his return to Judah David lived in seclusion but gathered an increasing company of followers.

The remaining chapters of I Samuel tell the story of Saul's repeated attempts and failures to capture David in various parts of the wilderness country of southern Judah. The dismal story of Saul's wretched jealousy is relieved by two displays of love and mercy by David who twice spared Saul's life when he fell into his power, only to find that Saul did not understand such kindness. Despairing of always evading Saul, David moved to Ziklag, a border city of the Philistines, outside of Judah, where he remained till the death of Saul.

In the midst of Saul's desperate attempts to catch David, he interviewed the witch of En-dor and sought to secure, by sorcery, the counsel of dead Samuel. That Saul thought he received a message from Samuel, and that the prophecy of the message was fulfilled is clear from the record. It must be equally clear, however, that the practice of sorcery was a direct violation of the law of Moses, and both strange and improbable that God, who alone has control over the spirits of the departed, would permit such a violation and grant to Saul by sorcery, what He had refused earlier by dreams and prophets.

The strange happening is explained by many in this way: Samuel actually came forth but not through any power of the witch, who was surprised and frightened at his appearance, as is evidenced by the loud cry which she uttered. According to this view God brought him forth to repeat his former prophecy of doom and to foretell the tragic events that were to occur on the following day.

The closing scene of the book is the final tragedy of the battle with the Philistines on Mt. Gilboa where Jonathan and two other sons of Saul were killed and Saul and his armor-bearer took their own lives. Thus came to an end the tragic career of a man who had the chance to be the first and great king of Israel, who had many natural talents, and had the privilege of the counsel and aid of the great prophet Samuel, but who lost his place through self-will and disobedience, and thus made a tragic wreck of his own life and caused great loss to God's people. Saul will always stand out in Bible history as "the man who might have been." How many workers for God have followed in his steps since his day down to Demas, who loved this present world, and therefore, themselves, more than God's work and God!

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. What three factors stand out in Samuel's early life?
2. What twofold work did Samuel perform in Israel?
3. What identical failure did both Eli and Samuel make?
4. In what sense was the demand for a king a rejection of both Samuel and God?
5. Name three acts of self-will which led to Saul's rejection as king.
6. Quote the verse in which Samuel condemns mere formality in religion.
7. Name two cities where David lived during the time of his flight from Saul.
8. What great friendship is pictured in I Samuel and why is it so inspiring?
9. What was David's attitude toward Saul?

Lesson II

II Samuel and I Chronicles

The books of II Samuel and I Chronicles are here placed together because they cover practically the same material, namely, the reign of David. Since II Samuel is wholly given up to this story (twenty-four chapters), whereas only the last twenty chapters of I Chronicles deal with it (the first nine chapters being devoted to genealogies) it is evident that I Chronicles omits some of the material in II Samuel, although on the other hand it reports some events that II Samuel omits. In general, however, the two accounts coincide, the chief difference being in emphasis. The peculiarities of I Chronicles will be discussed in the part of this lesson devoted to that book.

II Samuel

Author.—Unknown. Writings of Nathan and Gad used as sources.

Date.—Uncertain.

Time Covered.—About 40 years.

Contents.—The reign of David from the death of Saul to the anointing of Solomon as David's successor.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. David's Reign over Judah at Hebron, 1—4.
II. David's Reign over All Israel Until His Great Sin, 5—11.
III. Chastisement of David for His Terrible Sin, 12—20.
IV. Collection of Events and Sayings from Various Dates, 21—24.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. David's Reign over Judah at Hebron, 1—4.
   1. David's lament for Saul and Jonathan, 1.
   2. Struggle between David and Ish-bosheth for the kingship, 2—4.

II. David's Reign over All Israel Until His Great Sin, 5—11.
   1. David's establishment as king, his residence at Jerusalem, and his victories over the Philistines, 5.
   2. David's purpose to build the temple and God's refusal, 6, 7.
      a. Ark brought to Zion, 6.
      b. God's promise to David—the Messianic covenant, 7.
   3. Victories of David, 8, 10.

4. Kindness to Mephibosheth, 9.
5. David's great sin, marriage to Bath-sheba, 11.

III. Chastisement of David for His Terrible Sin, 12—20.
1. Death of Bath-sheba's child and birth of Solomon, 12.
2. Sin and death of Amnon, 13.
3. Absalom's rebellion, 14—19.
4. Sheba's rebellion, 20.

IV. Collection of Events and Sayings from Various Dates, 21—24.
1. Miscellaneous, 21.
2. Song of David, 22.
3. David's last words, 23:1-7.
4. Names of David's mighty men, 23:8-39.
5. Sin of David in numbering the people, and his repentance, 24.

Selections for Reading: 1; 5:1-12; 6:1-19; 7; 9:1-5; 12:1-25; 18; 22—24.

The Book of II Samuel contains the main history of David's reign. It is true that the story of the seven years of his life after his anointing until the death of Saul is given in the Book of I Samuel, and that the last days of his life are related in the first two chapters of I Kings, but his actual reign after the death of Saul and before the anointing of Solomon is included in II Samuel entirely. Yet the David whom we know so well is chiefly the David of I Samuel and not of II Samuel. Out of II Samuel only the story of David's great sin and his suffering because of it, stands out in the memory of the average Bible reader.

David's Reign in Hebron

The first chapter of II Samuel records David's beautiful psalm of sorrow which he composed upon learning of the death of Saul and Jonathan. It reveals to us the warm, sympathetic heart of the sweet singer of Israel as well as his mastery of poetry. But David had more difficult work to do than writing poems. When he came back to Israel after the death of King Saul he was by no means accepted by the entire nation as king. Only Judah and Benjamin accepted him; so he was compelled to confine his reign to these two tribes and make the southern city of Hebron his capital. The reason for this situation was apparently the fact that David had for a time lived in Philistia, and had made himself the ally of Achish, a Philistine leader, and actually went so far as to participate in a raid into his

native land by these hated enemies of God's people. Small wonder that most of Israel at first did not want such a man as king, notwithstanding his anointing by Samuel as the successor to Saul, and in spite of his great popularity at the time of his defeat of Goliath in combat. David had no one but himself to blame for his difficulties. Perhaps if he had not taken two wives he would not have had to flee to Philistia, and perhaps if he had trusted God more he would not have had to put himself into the hands of the heathen king Achish for protection. But once he became intimate with the enemy, he was so entangled that he could not avoid getting involved in the grievous sin of joining in on an attack upon his own people. It is quite probable that in the civil war which resulted from the acceptance, by Israel, of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, as king of the ten northern tribes, the first seeds of the division of the kingdom were sown which were to lead to such a disastrous harvest later on. It never pays to lose faith in God, and it never pays to seek the aid and comfort of God's enemies and fellowship with them. Frequently the sad consequences of such weakness reach far beyond the limits of one's own life.

The victory over Abner's army prepared the way for David's anointing and final acceptance as king of all Israel, although it was some time before his power was fully recognized by all.

David's Reign in All Israel Until His Great Sin

During the time of his war with the northern tribes David found time to do some other important fighting. His first great victory was the capture of the Jebusite fortress of Zion, which had been up to that time regarded as impregnable by its heathen occupants. Henceforth the fortress was known as the city of David, the heart of the renowned city now called Jerusalem. Other important battles led to a series of victories over the Philistines, the ancient enemies of the Israelites, who had doubtless held Israel in subjection ever since the defeat of Saul at Gilboa. These defeats once and for all freed the Israelites from their powerful and dangerous Philistine neighbors.

Other military conquests were made in the course of the following years in several campaigns, against (1) Moab, (2)

Zobah and Damascus, (3) Amalek, (4) Edom, (5) Ammon. By these conquests David greatly extended the borders of the kingdom, and prepared the way for the greater kingdom of Solomon. He established peace and unity within the borders of his kingdom, and by his wise and able reign greatly increased the prosperity of the land. Foreign allies were also won, such as the king of Tyre who sent David men and materials to build for himself a palace. David was a great ruler, possibly the greatest that Israel ever had, both as a warrior-king and as a wise administrator.

But David is far more important in the history of God's people for other characteristics and other deeds than the military conquests and civil prosperity for which he could justly claim credit. He was a great religious leader, a great man of God. Let us notice his success in religious matters.

One of David's first concerns, after his acceptance as king of all Israel and the capture of Jerusalem, was the restoration of the ark of the covenant to its proper place and the establishment of a center of worship for the people. This he accomplished by the transfer of the ark from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. The first attempt to move the ark met with failure, including the death of Uzzah. But after three months' delay the ark was brought with great rejoicing to Jerusalem, and established there in a tent. David himself led the great procession into the city, leaping and dancing for joy. Psalm 24 was probably sung as the ark came to the gates of the ancient city. At the gates a chorus sang:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors:
And the King of Glory will come in."

A voice from within responded:

"Who is the King of Glory?"

The chorus answered:

"Jehovah strong and mighty,
Jehovah mighty in battle."

Soon after this David expressed a desire to the prophet Nathan to build a permanent temple for Jehovah. This righteous desire pleased God so that He promised that David's

throne should be established forever, a promise which marks the beginning of the long series of definite Messianic prophecies making the Messiah a son of David. David's desire to build the house of God himself could not be fulfilled because David was a "man of war," but during all of his later life he was gathering materials for the great temple to be erected by his great son, King Solomon

But not only did David set up the worship of God in the very center of his kingdom; he also set up God in the center of his heart and life And he did this as did no other man of his time and few men of the Old Testament period. For this reason, no doubt, he was called "a man after God's own heart." This does not mean that David's life was perfect, or that everything he did was "after God's own heart." Rather, it means that the motives of his heart were right, that he sought to please God above all else, and that he always confessed his sin and sought forgiveness. He had a clearer vision of God than most other men who lived before or since. He was a man of remarkable depth and sincerity of religious experience.

The great witness to David's religious experience is his marvelous spiritual poetry—the psalms. This great treasury of meditation, prayer, and praise was begun by David as the father of Hebrew psalmody. No doubt the first collection of psalms was made for the use of the worship of God in connection with the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem, as mentioned above. He wrote many of the psalms himself, while others were written, by his associates, his chief musicians, and others. Gradually the book grew into the wonderful collection which we have in its completed form in the Old Testament Psalms.

But David not only was the founder of psalmody, a writer and composer himself; he was also the founder and organizer of the worship of God in the liturgical and musical form in which Israel worshiped God from David's time to the time of Christ. He himself was a gifted musician, the father of Hebrew music.

In spite of his great qualities of mind, soul, and the heart, David was a sinner, and a great sinner. We have already noted his sin of unbelief in his earlier life with its unfortunate consequences. The inspired writers do not hesitate to record for

our instruction the experience of David in a much greater sin, which leaves a deep blot upon his record, for it was a premeditated sin of lust, a sin which involved adultery and murder. He lusted after another man's wife, Bath-sheba, the wife of Uriah, and took advantage of his power and position as king to have Uriah killed by being placed in the front line of battle. But this sin of murder came after the great sin of adultery.

It is difficult to understand how David could have fallen into such gross sin. Jehovah had blessed him marvelously, and David knew the law. He should have remained obedient to the law and thus have been saved from his great transgression. The lesson is clear to everyone—"Take heed lest you fall." Luxury and ease had undermined David's heart, and in a moment of severe temptation he fell. The God of Israel was displeased with David, and David himself lived for a time in terrible unrest under the lashings of a guilty conscience. But he did not yield and confess his sin until Nathan the prophet told him he was the guilty man, by the touching parable of the poor man's precious and only ewe lamb, which the rich king took from him by force.

David repented, as Psalms 51 and 32, doubtless written about this time, show; and he received God's blessed forgiveness. But the evil consequences of his conduct were not wiped out, and the closing years of his life were filled with bitter disappointment and suffering.

The Chastisement of David for His Great Sin

The sense of guilt and God's disfavor was alone a severe chastisement, but definite punishments in addition to this followed. The child born to Bath-sheba died. David's oldest son fell into gross immorality, so that another son put him to death. Absalom, his beloved son, led a rebellion which was a further bitter harvest from David's sinning. Finally Absalom was killed. David's heart was broken by the rebellion of Absalom, and he seemed to lose interest in life. He was aroused out of his stupor for a brief moment by the news of Adonijah's attempt to seize the throne, and he gave his personal attention to the crowning of Solomon, to whom he gave an earnest charge. In his last days he completed the preparation for the

building of the temple. His was after all a sad end to a career in many ways so noble.

Yet in spite of the dark side of David's life, he serves as a type of Christ, both as a persecuted man, and as a king of Israel. He was in many ways an ideal king, as the poem of II Sam. 23:1-7 would indicate, but he was above all a true prophet of God.

I Chronicles

Author.—Unknown, compiler probably Ezra.

Date.—450-300 B.C.

Time Covered.—40 years of the reign of David.

Contents.—Reign of David.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. The Genealogies of the Tribes of Israel, 1—9.
II. The Reign of David, 10—29.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. The Genealogies of the Tribes of Israel, Especially Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, from Adam to the Return from the Babylonian Captivity, 1—8.
II. List of Inhabitants of Jerusalem Before the Captivity, 9.
III. The Reign of David, 10—29.
    1. Overthrow and death of Saul, 10.
    2. David made king over Israel, captures Jerusalem, 11.
    3. David's mighty men, 12.
    4. Victory over the Philistines, 14.
    5. The ark brought back, 13, 15, 16.
    6. David's desire to build the temple denied, the covenant, 17.
    7. David's victories, 18—20.
    8. The sinful numbering of the people, 21.
    9. Preparations for building the temple, 22.
    10. Details of David's organization of officers for worship and government, 23—27.
    11. David's last charge to the people and to Solomon, 28:1—29:21.
    12. Anointing of Solomon and death of David, 29:21-30.

Selections for Reading: 16, 17, 28, 29.

The Book of I Chronicles is the first part of a continuous history which extends through the books of II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It parallels II Samuel as II Chronicles

parallels the books of I and II Kings. The reason for the apparent duplication is to be found in the fact that these books (I and II Chronicles) deal not with the history of all Israel but only with the history of Judah, omitting the stories that deal with the northern part of the kingdom, and later the northern kingdom. Another chief difference lies in the emphasis in these books. In contrast to the Book of II Samuel, I Chronicles (also II Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah) emphasizes the material dealing more definitely with specifically religious questions, particularly with the organization and conduct of public worship at the temple. Much is said about the work of the priests and the Levites, as well as the singers and porters. Genealogy is also emphasized. The viewpoint of the compiler of these books, as he gathered his material from older writings and repeated much that had been given already in the books of I and II Samuel and I and II Kings, is quite clearly that of a man, who, living after the captivity and restoration, probably in Ezra's time, wanted to stir up the devotion of the people to the worship of Jehovah.

It will not be necessary to repeat the history of the book, since the story of David's reign has already been summarized in the discussion of I Samuel. It will be sufficient to compare the contents of the two books. Before doing so, however, it may be worth while to note that the lengthy genealogical tables of the first nine chapters of the book, while quite uninteresting to us, were highly important to the Jews. The prophetic promises led them to become extremely interested in family ancestry. These tables give the sacred line through which the promise was transmitted.

"The history, parallel with that in Samuel and Kings, begins with chapter 10 (I Sam. 31). The whole of the record concerning the attempt to make Ishbosheth king is omitted, chapter 11 showing David established on the throne. The histories then for the most part coincide, special stress being laid in Chronicles on David's appointment for the service of the tabernacle. The campaign against Ammon is mentioned in Chronicles (20), but without the record of David's sin and penitence. The whole account of Absalom's rebellion and death is also omitted in Chronicles, with the insurrection under

Sheba. David's song of praise and his 'last words,' describing an ideal king, are absent from Chronicles. Both contain an account of the king's heroes, the 'three' and the 'thirty' (II Sam. 23; I Chron. 11). David's sin, again, in numbering the people, and its chastisement, are in both the histories (II Sam. 24; I Chron. 21). Then follows in Chronicles an account of the institutions of David's kingdom, military and Levitical (23—27), omitted in the other records. The erection of the altar upon Ornan's (Araunah's) threshing floor is related by both historians, while Chronicles alone records David's preparations for the temple. The troubles of David's old age, the pretensions of Adonijah, and the anointing of Solomon as king in his father's lifetime, are found in Kings alone. Both histories record David's farewell instructions to Solomon, those in Kings referring to his political conduct (I Kings 2), those in Chronicles to the erection of the temple (I Chron. 28, 29), closing with a sublime thanksgiving and prayer" (Angus-Green).

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. What differences are to be noted between the books of the Chronicles and the books of II Samuel and I and II Kings?
2. Where did David make his capital before he conquered Jerusalem, and why?
3. Why did the northern tribes at first refuse to accept David as king after Saul died?
4. In what respects was David a great king?
5. Name two points in which David aided in building up the worship of God.
6. Why was David not allowed to build the temple, and what divine prophetic promise was given to David by the prophet who forbade him to build? Who was the prophet?
7. Why was David called a man "after God's own heart"?
8. What was David's great sin and how was he brought to repentance? By whom? What psalm did he write to express his penitence?
9. How was David punished for his sin?
10. Why were genealogies important to the Jews?

Lesson III

I Kings and II Chronicles 1—20

I Kings

Author.—Unknown, compiled from various records.

Date.—Probably compiled after the captivity, about 530 B.C.

Time Covered.—Death of David to reign of Solomon and end of Jehoshaphat's reign, 120 years.

Contents.—Selected events in history of Judah and Israel after the division of the kingdom.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. Reign of Solomon, 1—11.
II. History of Israel and Judah to Death of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, 12—22.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. Reign of Solomon, 1-11.
   1. Anointing of Solomon, 1.
   2. Death of David, 2.
   3. Solomon's marriage and choice of wisdom, 3.
   4. Solomon's resources and alliance with Hiram, 4, 5.
   5. The building and dedication of the temple, 6—8.
   6. Solomon's glory, wealth, and wisdom, 9, 10.
   7. Solomon's wives, and his apostasy, 11.

II. History of Israel and Judah to Death of Ahab and Jehoshaphat, 12—22.
   1. The division of the kingdom, 12.
   2. The early kings, 13—16.
      a. Jeroboam (Israel), 13:1—14:20.
      b. Rehoboam, Abijam, Asa (Judah), 14:21—15:24.
      c. Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab (Israel), 15:25—16:34.
   3. The ministry of Elijah, 17—19.
      a. The drought, 17.
      b. Victory at Mt. Carmel, 18.
      c. Despondency in the desert, restoration, choice of Elisha, 19.
   4. Reign and defeat of Ahab, 20—22.
      a. Victory over the Assyrians, 20.
      b. Seizure of Naboth's vineyard, 21.
      c. Defeat by the Syrians, 22:1-40.
      d. Reign of Jehoshaphat (Judah), 22:41-53.

Selections for Reading: 2:1-12; 3; 6; 8; 9:1-9; 10:1-13;12;17—19; 21; 22.

Originally, in the Hebrew Old Testament, the two books now known as I and II Kings were one. They were compiled by one author who used records written by prophets and official chroniclers out of which he made selections. The unified book relates the history of the people of God from the death of David to the Babylonian captivity, thus covering a total of 430 years, a longer period of time than that covered by any other book in the Bible except Genesis. The Book of II Chronicles covers the same period as the united Book of Kings, although it gives the history of Judah only, with occasional references to the ten tribes of the northern kingdom.

The Reign of Solomon

Exactly one half of the Book of I Kings deals with history of the reign of Solomon, a total of eleven chapters, but actually very little is told of the personal history of Solomon or of the events of his reign. We do not learn to know Solomon as we do David, and the average Bible reader knows little of Solomon except that he built the temple and was a wise man. Nevertheless a good general picture of Solomon's character and the nature of his reign can be secured from the Book of I Kings.

Solomon was the son of Bath-sheba, the son born to take the place of the child who died as punishment for David's great sin. Though not the eldest son, he seems to have been a favorite of his father. When David was still living, though quite old and feeble, an older son Adonijah attempted to seize the throne. David then arranged for a hasty anointing of Solomon as king by Zadok, the high priest, and Nathan the prophet. Consequently Solomon's reign began before David's death. As soon as possible after David's death the young king Solomon disposed of four chief enemies by execution and greatly strengthened his power. After that Solomon had practically no fighting to do. His reign was one of peace and prosperity.

Solomon tried to continue the policy of his father David and rule wisely after God's heart. His concern for true wisdom to rule aright is indicated in his prayer to God for wisdom, a request which God was pleased to grant. If Solomon had only continued in the ways of his father David, all would have been

well. But unfortunately after a time, as we shall see later, he drifted into grievous sin.

Solomon had inherited a great kingdom from his father David. David had subdued all the nearby enemies and thereby established for many years the peace and prosperity of the kingdom. Under Solomon the kingdom practically covered the territory mentioned in the covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was a great task to rule this extensive territory wisely and well, but Solomon succeeded in doing it. At the very beginning of his reign he gave evidence of his wisdom in the familiar story of the decision as to the ownership of a child claimed by two mothers. But in much greater things Solomon was wise. He chose able officials, maintained a wise and strong administration of the affairs of the nation, erected great public buildings, built a fleet of ships to trade on the Mediterranean and Red seas, promoted commerce with foreign countries, and maintained peace within and without.

All of Solomon's undertakings seem to have been crowned with success, so much so that his fame as a "wise man" spread far and wide. Men came to visit him from near and far. "And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon" (I Kings 4:25).

It is to Solomon's credit that he desired to carry out his father David's plan and establish a suitable, permanent building for the worship of God. For three hundred years the old tabernacle had been used, but it was no longer serviceable, and God's people at this time needed to give expression to their worship of God in a better and more substantial way. However, Christians who live under the Gospel need not make an outward display of religion, but are to worship in simplicity, in spirit, and in truth.

David had gathered much in the way of materials, but had done nothing in construction. Solomon used what David had gathered, and added more, including gifts from Hiram, King of Tyre, and yet it took him more than seven years to complete the construction of the temple. The best workmen from the kingdom of Tyre were employed to superintend the work of construction, and only the choicest materials were used. When

finished, the house of God was a glorious temple, a building that became precious in the sight of the worshipers who cherished it. Its demensions were 20 by 60 by 30 cubits, that is, 30 feet wide, 90 feet long, and 45 feet high. In general the plan was the same as that of the tabernacle, although the dimensions were doubled. The same equipment for worship was installed in the new temple, but either much increased in size or multiplied in number. The new brazen altar was four times as large as the one used previously, whereas the number of candlesticks and tables in the holy place was increased tenfold.

The construction of the temple was very expensive and required the labor of many thousands of men. Much of the labor was performed by Canaanites who were forced into service by Solomon. The walls of the temple were built of stone made ready at the quarry; the roof was constructed of beams and planks of cedar, the floor was laid with cypress, and the walls from the floor to the ceiling were lined with cedar. The whole interior was overlaid with gold, and this gold surface was carved, not only with cherubim, but with palm trees and flowers. Against the exterior of the building on the two sides and the rear, a three-story building was erected, containing rooms for officials and for storage. Before the front entrance a large portico was built, beside which two large and richly ornamented brazen pillars were placed, each 27 feet high. Around the temple two enclosures, called courts, were provided, the inner one called the court of the priests, and the outer one, the great court, called the court of Israel. The inner court was separated from the outer by a low stone wall, and was elevated slightly above the outer court. Solomon's temple was used for approximately 425 years, until it was destroyed by fire in the final capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. During these centuries it was the center of the religious life of the Israelites, their spiritual home. Hither they came for the great feasts, every faithful Israelite making the journey at least once a year. It was for the worship at this temple that many of the psalms were written, and it was here that many of the prophets proclaimed their messages. Here Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, in His holy temple, for here was the place where God met His people.

Upon the completion of the temple a great feast of dedication was celebrated under Solomon's direct personal supervision. The ark of the covenant was brought from the old tent in which it had been resting for many long years, into the holy of holies in the new temple, whereupon the cloud of glory filled the house of God. In the presence of all the great assembled multitude Solomon then took his place before the altar of sacrifice, lifted his hands to heaven, and prayed for God to come to dwell in the house he had built for Him. The long but beautiful and spiritual prayer which Solomon offered, as recorded in the eighth chapter of I Kings, is chiefly a stirring petition to the great covenant God of Israel to hear the prayer that would be offered up to Him in the temple. Following the prayer, Solomon turned to the people and pleaded with them to be true to God and obedient to His commandments. "Let your heart therefore be perfect with the Lord our God, to walk in his statutes, and to keep his commandments, as at this day" (I Kings 8:61). As the crowning act of devotion and praise to God, Solomon offered a great number of sacrifices. According to the account given, 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were sacrificed. II Chron. 7:5. And when the fourteen days of celebration were past, the people "blessed the king, and went unto their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done for David his servant, and for Israel his people" (I Kings 8:66).

It was a day of great rejoicing for Israel when the glorious new temple was dedicated, a high point in the whole history of the people of God. As evidence of His pleasure at what had been done God gave Solomon a definite answer to his prayer in a promise to dwell in the temple, and renewed to him His covenant promise. But again, as always, the promise of a glorious reign and a permanent dynasty upon the throne was conditioned upon faithfulness to God and His commandments. God did not fail to warn His people through Solomon that if they should turn away from following Him and should not keep His commandments, but should go and serve other gods and worship them, then He would cut off Solomon's house and the people of Israel forever. The coming generations were to bring forth the proof again and again of the truth of what God

prophesied to Solomon until finally Israel was cut off from the land that God had given them.

Solomon also built for himself a magnificent palace. He also built enormous stables for his numerous horses. The record says he had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen. I Kings 10:26. He fortified many cities and built storage centers; he laid out gardens and parks. More and more he lived the life of a typical wealthy Oriental despot, and began to forget God and the wisdom of his earlier years. As a result of this he made two great mistakes. He levied heavy burdens upon his overtaxed subjects, thus sowing the seeds for future rebellion, and, what was more serious, he collected a great number of wives and concubines, many of whom were foreigners and heathen worshipers of false gods. "And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart." To please his wives he built many sanctuaries for them in which they might worship their heathen gods. Before long, east of the temple hill, in full view of the sanctuary, columns of incense arose to cruel Molech and lascivious Ashtoreth. No wonder Jehovah became angry with Solomon. For this apostasy Solomon was severely punished. Enemies were raised up to vex him, and through the prophet Ahijah the announcement came to Jeroboam that most of the kingdom, the ten northern tribes, would be torn from Solomon's line and given to him.

Thus in spite of the fact that Solomon had a great father, that he made a good start, that he was a great and wise ruler, that his fame became so great that kings and queens came to visit him, including the queen of Sheba from far-off southern Arabia, Solomon made a miserable failure at the end of his life. Solomon's fall is a sad commentary on human wisdom and human self-confidence. The wisest man of his time played the fool and left the world a bitter example of unfaithfulness to the great God who had given him such a great opportunity.

Solomon wrote down in his best days, in many brief statements called proverbs, much of the distilled wisdom which he had gathered. Over three thousand of these proverbs are credited to him. Many of them were put into the collection of wise sayings which constitute the Book of Proverbs. In these

Proverbs of Solomon are preserved for us many valuable and helpful truths in a form which makes them easy to remember. They constitute a manual of instruction on the virtues of the good life, and are designed to stimulate young people in particular to honesty, purity, and industry.

Solomon reigned forty years, dying about 926 B.C., and little suspecting the tragic history that was to come upon the people over whom he and his father had ruled so well for more than two generations.

History of Israel and Judah to the Death of Ahab and Jehoshaphat

Upon the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam faced a serious crisis, for the people were very much discontented under the burden of the heavy taxation which Solomon had imposed. Even so he might have won them by wise dealings, but he followed the counsel of the younger men, tried to rule as a dictator over slaves, and drove the people to desperation. As Ahijah had prophesied, all the tribes except Judah and little Benjamin openly revolted and chose Jeroboam as king. Thus the unity, and with it the strength, of the Israelites was broken, and the great work that Moses and Joshua, and Samuel, and David had done was undone. From 926 to 721 B.C., over 200 years, the two kingdoms existed side by side, sometimes as friends and allies, sometimes as enemies. In 721 B.C., the northern kingdom fell before the mighty Assyrians and passed into exile, to be forever lost to the people of God. The southern kingdom, that of Judah, continued 135 years longer, until 586 B.C., when it fell under the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian conqueror, who destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple, and carried many of the people captive to Babylon. The remaining chapters in the last half of the Book of I Kings cover about 85 years, somewhat less than half the time to the fall of the northern kingdom, with chief emphasis upon the northern kingdom and with the last six chapters devoted to the intensely interesting and thrilling career of the great prophet Elijah.

Of the four kings of Judah whose reigns are recorded in the Book of I Kings—Rehoboam, Abijam, Asa, and Jehoshaphat—

the first two were wicked kings who brought the people into idolatry, whereas the last two in long reigns put away idolatry, strengthened the kingdom, and maintained peace and prosperity.

During the same time Israel had seven kings, of whom Jeroboam I, at the beginning, and Ahab, at the end, had long and significant reigns, while five kings in between—Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, and Omri—reigned for but short periods. The entire line of seven, ending with Ahab, constitutes a series of wicked, idolatrous kings, constantly engaged in war, sometimes against foreign enemies and sometimes in civil war at home. Jeroboam was responsible for starting off the northern kingdom on the way of apostasy. Fearing that if his people went to Jerusalem to worship, the king of Judah would win their allegiance, Jeroboam set up golden calves at Bethel in the south and Dan in the north, and induced the people to worship Jehovah through these images. He was the first ruler in Israel since Aaron who officially introduced idolatrous worship. He also changed the time of the feast of tabernacles, and permitted anyone who wished to become a priest, thus breaking down the exclusive right of the Levites to this office. The sin of Jeroboam now led Ahijah, the same prophet who had promised him the northern kingdom, to prophesy the complete rejection of Jeroboam and his house. This prophecy soon came true, for Nadab, the only descendant of Jeroboam to reign as king, was assassinated after a short reign.

The most successful ruler of Israel from the military and political point of view was Ahab. But from the religious point of view his record is one of the blackest. The beginning and perhaps the cause of the black record was his marriage to the heathen Jezebel, a princess of Zidon. This marriage, which from the worldly point of view must have seemed to be a great and successful stroke of policy that meant increasing the power and safety of the kingdom, actually was a great and terrible mistake, for it led to a bitter religious struggle. Jezebel, with her superior intelligence and iron will, ruled Ahab, and she decided to change the religion of Israel from the worship of Jehovah to the worship of Baal. For this purpose she imported hundreds of heathen priests to teach the proper rites

and ceremonies of her religion to the people of Israel. Nothing like it had ever happened in all the history of Israel. When the prophets of Jehovah thundered against the foreign gods and their priests, as well as against Jezebel herself, she replied with the sword. The prophets were hunted down by her cruel soldiers. Soon it seemed as though opposition had ceased and that the religion of Baal had displaced the religion of Jehovah.

But there was a mountaineer in Gilead, Elijah by name, whose soul was stirred to the depths and who answered the call of God to be His prophet and go forth as the champion of Jehovah to engage in combat with the heathen powers. God would not let Jezebel have her victory. He would bring her to naught. It was indeed a serious situation, for out of the hundreds of thousands of inhabitants of Israel only 7,000 were found who had not bowed the knee to worship Baal. It was to be a life and death struggle. The issue was this: Were the people of Israel to abandon the faith of their fathers completely and turn to strange gods, or were they to be saved before it was forever too late? The seriousness of the issue is indicated by the introduction of miracles, and we have in this time (of Elijah and Elisha) one of the four miracle periods in the history of redemption when God acted in a marvelous way to witness to Himself. (The other three miracle periods are: the time of Moses and Joshua, of Daniel in the exile, and of Christ and the apostles.)

Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets, though we do not have any written messages from him. His greatness lies in his tremendous courage and in his great obedience to God, although in the matter of courage lay also his greatest weakness. Elijah's first appearance was with a message of judgment before Ahab, when he prophesied a drought as penalty for Ahab's sin in rejecting Jehovah. He withdrew immediately to the brook Cherith, east of the Jordan, where he was providentially fed by ravens, then to Zarephath on the Mediterranean coast, north of Tyre, right in the country of Jezebel. Here too he experienced God's providence in the provision of the miraculous supply of meal and oil that provided for the needs of himself and the poor widow who had befriended him because of her trust in God. A second evidence of God's power came when Elijah restored the widow's dead son to life.

But the greatest demonstration of the faith of Elijah and the power of the true God was still to come in the decisive struggle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal at Mt. Carmel. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to prove that Baal was the true God by calling fire from heaven. They failed. Then at Elijah's command fire fell from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and destroyed the altar. Jehovah had gloriously witnessed to Himself, and four hundred of Baal's prophets, thus proved to be imposters, were slain. The people acknowledged Jehovah and obeyed the prophet, and as a sign of God's favor and blessing upon them, the rains returned.

It was a great day of victory for Elijah. But the same day also brought Elijah's most miserable failure. The man who had broken the power of Baal, quailed before the wrath of furious Jezebel who had vowed to kill Elijah. He fled in cowardly fear to the far south to Horeb, and in his discouragement wanted to die. But here God divinely sustained him for forty days and forty nights, rebuked him in the dramatic incident of the still small voice that succeeded the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, and sent him back to duty. Elijah had learned humility, courage, patience, and faith in this humiliating experience. Henceforth he could not be shaken and accomplished much for God.

His first new step was the anointing of Hazael (king of Syria) and Jehu (king of Israel), that they might be the scourge of God to punish idolatrous Israel. Then a successor to Elijah, in the person of Elisha who was a very apt and faithful pupil, was to be called and trained.

The concluding years of the life of Ahab and Jezebel, as recorded in the last chapters of I Kings, bring vivid scenes of judgment for wickedness. Jezebel plotted the death of Naboth to secure his vineyard for King Ahab. For this God sent Elijah to prophesy the bloody death of Ahab and Jezebel. Another brave prophet, Micaiah, was sent by God to give a second prophecy of death and destruction, when Ahab inquired of the prophet concerning the outcome of the coming great battle with the Syrians. Evidently Elijah was not the only true prophet of Jehovah in Israel. Brave Micaiah deserves to be remembered along with the great Elijah. The end of Ahab, the wicked king, and of Jezebel, the still more wicked queen, fully

proved the divine authority of both prophets, for in the battle with the Syrians Ahab was slain and a few years later Jezebel suffered an ignominious death.

II Chronicles

Author.—Unknown compiler, possibly Ezra.

Date.—450-300 B.C.

Contents.—History of Judah from Solomon to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. Reign of Solomon, 1—9.
II. History of Kings of Judah to the Destruction of Jerusalem, 10—36.
   1. Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat, 10—20.
   2. Jehoshaphat to the captivity, 21—36.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. Reign of Solomon, 1—9.
   1. Solomon's wise choice at Gibeon, 1.
   2. Building and dedication of the temple, 2—7.
   3. Solomon's prosperity and fame, 8.
   4. The queen of Sheba, 9.

II. History of the Kings of Judah to the Destruction of Jerusalem, 10—36.
   1. Rehoboam, 10—12.
   2. Abijah, 13.
   3. Asa, 14—16.
   4. Jehoshaphat, 17—20.
   5. Jehoram, 21.
   6. Ahaziah and Athaliah, 22, 23.
   7. Joash, 24.
   8. Amaziah, 25.
   9. Uzziah, 26.
   10. Jotham, 27.
   11. Ahaz, 28.
   12. Hezekiah, 29—32.
   13. Manasseh, 33:1-20.
   14. Amon, 33:21-25.
   15. Josiah, 34, 35.
   16. Jehoahaz, 36:1-4.
   17. Jehoiakim, 36:5-8.
   18. Jehoiachin, 36:9, 10.
   19. Zedekiah and the captivity, 36:11-23.

Selections for Reading: 1; 7; 9:1-12; 14:1-9; 15; 17:1-9.

As was indicated earlier, II Chronicles was originally united with I Chronicles to form a continuous history, and was written quite a time after the captivity, though just when is not certain, possibly as late as 300 B.C. The purpose of the writer is to emphasize the religious aspect of the history with special emphasis on the matters relating to worship and the temple. For this reason, since only Judah, the southern king-

dom, remained faithful to God, the compiler selected only such matters for his book as concerned the history of Judah. Israel is almost completely ignored.

In accord with the purpose and character of the book the account of the reign of Solomon in the first nine chapters devotes itself almost exclusively to Solomon's activities in connection with the construction and dedication of the temple, giving many more details than the account in Kings.

The chapters which are devoted to the reigns of Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat emphasize one religious side of the activities of these four kings, pointing out the weaknesses of the first two, and the loyalty and faithfulness of the last two. It will not be necessary to go into a detailed report of the material in Chronicles, since there is very little new over and above the material in Kings.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. Why did David have Solomon anointed king before his own death?
2. What great difference is to be noted between the reigns of David and Solomon?
3. What request did Solomon make of God at the beginning of his reign?
4. Point out evidences that Solomon was a wise king.
5. What king aided Solomon in the building of the Temple, and how?
6. Compare the temple with the tabernacle.
7. What plea did Solomon make to the people at the dedication of the temple?
8. What two great mistakes did Solomon make as king?
9. What lesson may we learn from Solomon's fall?
10. Compare the length of the continuance of the two divided kingdoms after Solomon's death.
11. What fundamental mistake did Jeroboam make that cursed the entire history of the northern kingdom?
12. What wicked plan did the wife of King Ahab seek to carry through? Give her name.

13. Name the three great miracle periods of the Old Testament.
14. What characteristic of Elijah was his greatest strength and also his greatest weakness?
15. Why was the work of Elijah so important, and how is his importance indicated by the New Testament?
16. Name another prophet who also prophesied against Ahab (not Elisha).

Lesson IV

II Kings and II Chronicles 21—36

II Kings

Author.—Unknown compiler. Same for I Kings.

Date.—Uncertain, probably before 510 B.C.

Contents.—History of Israel and Judah from the death of Ahab and Jehoshaphat to captivity in 587 B.C.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. History of Israel and Judah from the Death of Ahab to the Fall of Samaria, 1—17.
II. History of Judah from the Fall of Samaria to the Destruction of Jerusalem, 18—25.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. History of Israel and Judah from the Death of Ahab to the Fall of Samaria, 1—17.
   1. Last days of Elijah and appointment of Elisha, 1, 2.
   2. Jehoram's (Judah) conquest of Moab, 3.
   3. Ministry of Elisha, 4—8.
      a. The widow's oil and the Shunammite's son, 4.
      b. The cleansing of Naaman, 5.
      c. Elisha's part in the defeat of the Syrians, 6, 7.
      d. Elisha and Hazael, king of Syria, 8:1-15.
      e. Reigns of Jehoram and Ahaziah in Judah, 8:16-24.
   4. Eleven kings of Israel from Jehu to Hoshea, and five kings of Judah from Joash to Ahaz, 9—15.
      a. Jehu (Israel), 9. 10.
      b. Athaliah (Judah) and the reform by Jehoiada, the high priest, 11.
      c. Joash (Judah), 12.
      d. Jehoahaz (Israel) and Jehoash (Israel), 13.
      e. Amaziah (Judah) and Jeroboam II (Israel), 14.
      f. Azariah (Judah) and the last six kings of Israel, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea, 15.
   5. The captivity of Israel by Assyria, 16; 17.

II. History of Judah from the Fall of Samaria to the Destruction of Jerusalem, 18—25.
   1. Hezekiah's good reign, 18—20.
   2. Evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon, 21.
   3. Josiah's good reign, 22:1—23:30.

4. Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, 23:31-37.
5. The captivity of Judah, 24, 25.
   a. Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, the first deportations, 24.
   b. Zedekiah, destruction of Jerusalem, final deportation, 25.

Selections for Reading: 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 17—20, 22—24.

Israel and Judah to the Fall of Samaria

As indicated at the beginning of Lesson III, II Kings originally formed a part of the unified Book of Kings, just as II Chronicles once formed a part of the unified Book of Chronicles. Also as indicated earlier, at the beginning of Lesson II, the viewpoint of the compiler of Chronicles is different from that of the compiler of Kings, in that after the division of the kingdom, Chronicles concerns itself only with the affairs of Judah, the loyal Davidic kingdom, whereas Kings concerns itself with both Israel and Judah. And again, the writer of Chronicles emphasizes the religious and ceremonial aspects of the life of the people, while the writer of Kings has a broader interest. Yet it should not be forgotten that both books, as well as all the historical books of the Old Testament, have a religious motive; they present the record of the affairs of Israel and Judah in terms of obedience and disobedience to God, in terms of spiritual prosperity and spiritual decline. So it is again in II Kings and II Chronicles. A king is judged by his obedience to God, and his failure is described in terms of disobedience to God. The good king was one like Asa, who "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father," while the king to be condemned was one like Nadab, who "did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin."

I Kings closed with the death of wicked Ahab; II Kings opens with the career of his two sons who successively occupied the throne after him as kings of Israel, Ahaziah (2 years), and Jehoram (12 years). But, although seven chapters are devoted to the period covered by their wicked reigns, we learn very little about the kings or the affairs of the kingdom. The writer has more important things to relate. Just as in the story of Ahab, Elijah was, after all, the chief character, so in this case it is Elijah's successor, Elisha, who occupies the center of

interest. It was probably early in the reign of Jehoram that Elijah was taken up into heaven by a whirlwind. Elisha longed to be Elijah's successor, and God granted his request. After Elijah's ascension, he returned to the Jordan, with his predecessor's mantle, and the waters parted for him as they had done for his great teacher.

The career of Elisha is almost as thrilling as that of the great Elijah, but is somewhat different in nature, as Elisha was different from Elijah in character. Elijah had been a poor man, a rugged prophet of judgment, the avenger and destroyer, who worked and lived alone. Elisha was a man of wealth and culture, magnetic and companionable, the trusted friend and counselor of kings, and the favorite guest of both rich and poor. Elisha was the statesman and religious teacher, his miracles being chiefly works of mercy. Of the eleven outstanding miracles performed by Elisha, only two were miracles of judgment, nine being deeds of mercy. As Dr. Sampey suggests, a comparison between Elijah and Elisha suggests at once the comparison between John the Baptist and Jesus, Elijah comparing to John, the prophet of judgment, Elisha comparing to Jesus, the teacher and doer of good. Still Elijah is the greater character, for he was the one who ranked with Enoch in being translated to heaven without death, and with Moses at the transfiguration, and not Elisha. His service won the decisive victory over heathenism, which alone made possible the continuance of the worship of the true God and the more peaceful labors of a prophet like Elisha.

Let us look briefly at Elisha's work. The group of prophets in Israel who had been stirred up by Elijah's great work recognized Elisha as the successor of Elijah, and followed him as their instructor and leader. With this position of authority and leadership, and clothed with the Spirit of God, Elisha accomplished much. He met no real opposition, unless we should count the forty-two scoffing boys who were cursed by the prophet and as a punishment were torn by two bears. Elisha's servant brought the prophetic office into contempt by his covetousness in asking Naaman, the Syrian general, for a talent of silver and two changes of raiment to pay for the ministrations of the prophet, for which Elisha punished him with leprosy. The rest of Elisha's miracles were deeds of kindness. With his

miraculous power he healed with salt the waters of the Jericho spring, increased a widow's oil, supplied the armies of Israel, Judah, and Edom with water, raised the Shunammite's son from the dead, furnished an antidote for a poisonous plant in a mess of pottage, fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves and a few ears of corn, healed Naaman's leprosy, made an iron axhead to swim, and led the Syrians into Samaria and sent them away again kindly.

Elisha played a part in the political life of Israel, warning the king of the movements of the Syrian enemy, and aiding him to meet him successfully, as well as prophesying during a famine of a time of great plenty and predicting three victories over the Syrians. Finally, after his death, a man hastily cast into his sepulcher was instantly restored to life on touching the prophet's bones. At the close of his life he was a prophet of judgment, prophesying the destruction of Ahab and his whole house, and providing for the anointing of Jehu to execute the judgment.

The terrible judgment executed upon the house of Ahab by Jehu is recorded in great detail. His reform was as fierce as his noted chariot driving was furious. With his own hands he slew King Jehoram. At his command all the sons of Ahab, seventy in number, as well as Ahab's widow, Jezebel, were put to death. Ahaziah, the king of Judah, who was the son of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and who happened to be visiting in Israel, also was slain. The priests of Baal were likewise destroyed. Jehu laid the foundation for a good reign, but failed to walk in the ways of Jehovah, and allowed the continuance of the worship of the golden calves, which had been established by Jeroboam. From the military point of view his reign was a fair success, but the end was after all a failure, for Hazael, the king of Syria, made serious inroads into his territory and began an oppression of Israel which lasted all through the seventeen year reign of Jehoahaz his son.

From this time on Israel was in constant danger from the king of Syria, and later the greater king of Assyria, except for the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam the Second, who succeeded his father Jehoash on the throne (Jehoash son of Jehoahaz had reigned for sixteen years), and reigned for forty-

one years. Jeroboam won great victories, particularly the conquest of Damascus, and restored the kingdom to its former greatness and prosperity until it almost equaled in extent (had Judah been added) the kingdom of Solomon. But, though outwardly prosperous, the reign of Jeroboam formed no exception to the prevailing apostasy and degeneration. It was in Jeroboam's time very likely that Hosea and Joel and Amos prophesied, and that Amos condemned so bitterly the corruption, injustice, ungodliness, and easy living of the prosperous princes and nobles. Hosea also complains bitterly of the unfaithfulness of Israel.

The predicted judgment of God upon Israel was soon to come. Conditions went from bad to worse and in less than thirty years Israel fell, never to rise again. The final ruin of the kingdom was due to the fatal policy of alliance with heathen powers. The next to the last king called in Rezin, king of Syria, to help him in a conflict with Ahaz, king of Judah, who in turn called in Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, to help him, The latter came and conquered the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan, and carried them off into captivity in Media. This was the first captivity of Israel, about 732 B.C. About ten years later the last king of Israel, Hoshea, feeling strong through an alliance with So, the king of Egypt, revolted against paying tribute to Assyria, but merely brought on, by so doing, the final downfall of his kingdom, for Sargon, king of Assyria, came down and destroyed the kingdom in 721, and carried off many of its inhabitants into captivity. This was the second and final captivity of Israel.

But in order to prevent the revival of the kingdom of Israel, the kings of Assyria went still further. They sent settlers over from the territory of the Tigris and Euphrates to fill up the land and intermarry with the people. Thus there was no possibility that Israel could ever be restored. Out of the intermarriage of the new settlers with the remnants of the old population arose the people known as Samaritans in the time of Christ.

What became of the ten tribes who were carried into captivity is not fully known. Much popular superstition has been associated with the theory that they were "lost" and have made

their way into foreign lands, some even supposing that the English people of the present time represent these "lost" tribes. Many of the people never left Israel. Others returned with the various returns after the captivity. Some settled again in Galilee and Perea. Some remained in Babylon and Persia, even as some of the later captives of Judah. The ten tribes are "lost" in the sense that, as tribes, they have never been restored. God's judgment over the northern kingdom was final. It had no part to play in the coming of the Messiah, for its royal line was not of the house of David.

A look back over the history of Israel, from the division at the death of Solomon in 926 B.C. to the fall of Samaria 721 B.C., reveals a sad picture. A total of nineteen kings sat on the throne, representing nine different dynasties or families. All these nineteen kings were wicked; not one was good. All "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed after the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat," the first king. All tolerated the calf worship which Jeroboam had established. During the entire time the connection with Jerusalem and the temple worship was broken.

Yet God did not forsake His people in Israel, even though they had forsaken Him. He sent them a series of good and faithful prophets, many more than He sent to Judah. In the first fifty years after the division five prophets appeared: Ahijah, Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, and Jehu. In the time of Ahab and his sons four prophets appeared, the great Elijah and Elisha, together with Micaiah and Jahaziel. In the later years Jehoiada and Jonah, and Hosea and Amos prophesied. These prophets must have revived many a heart and gathered a company of faithful Israelites about them, even though the number was small. No doubt it was larger in later times than the seven thousand of Elijah's time, but, after all, the people as a whole followed after their wicked rulers, and so finally God made an end of the kingdom, both king and people.

The course of history in the southern kingdom, the kingdom of Judah, was very different from that of the northern kingdom. It was not that the nineteen kings of Judah were all good kings, that there were no failures among them, that the men of Judah were free from idolatry and kept the law

perfectly. No, even the very first king after Solomon, Rehoboam, forsook the law of Jehovah, and had to experience the plundering of the city of Jerusalem and pillaging of the temple by Shishak, king of Egypt. Three kings, Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon, are marked by the writer of II Kings as impious and depraved, while some who were on the whole praiseworthy were guilty of grievous faults (Joash murdered Zechariah, and Uzziah profaned the sanctuary). But in spite of these evident failures the purpose of God was maintained in Judah. The royal line of David, through whom the Messiah was someday to come, was preserved unbroken. The temple and the temple worship were maintained, although at times serious lapses occurred, which were followed by restorations. The last restoration was made by Josiah in 621 shortly before the captivity.

On the whole the internal condition of the kingdom of Judah was prosperous, and few striking events occurred. The arts of peace were promoted; education and farming were stimulated. Jehoshaphat appointed "ministers of instruction" to spread a knowledge of the law throughout the kingdom. Asa had earlier promoted a revival of religion and had purified the land of idolatry. But both Asa and Jehoshaphat were guilty of weakness in making alliances with foreign powers, Asa with Syria, and Jehoshaphat with Ahab.

The Book of I Kings had closed with the death of Jehoshaphat (although a few events out of his life are recorded in II Kings). The alliance of Jehoshaphat with Ahab had disastrous consequences, for his son Jehoram was married to Athaliah, the wicked daughter of wicked Jezebel and Ahab. The names of Jehoram and Athaliah are dark blots on the pages of Judah's history. Jehoram's reign was full of sins and of calamities; men were glad when he was dead. When his son, King Ahaziah, was slain by the reformer Jehu at Jezreel (see above) leaving an infant son to inherit the throne, the wicked grandmother Athaliah seized the throne and ruled illegally for seven years. Her misdeeds led to a miserable train of evils; Baal worship was introduced into Jerusalem and the temple was neglected. Fortunately a revival came under the boy King Joash, who followed the good guidance of the aged high priest Jehoiada. As long as Jehoiada lived Joash was faithful to

Jehovah and governed his people according to the law. Early in his reign he had repaired the temple. But after the death of Jehoiada, Joash fell into idolatry and other sins.

King Amaziah, the next ruler, was ambitious and vain. He had a conquest over Edom to his credit, but was defeated by the king of Israel. Uzziah, his son, on the other hand, was one of the strongest kings Judah ever had. His reign of fifty-two years was the longest in either Israel or Judah (excepting Manasseh's reign of fifty-five years), and was on the whole good. He was successful in war, and built up the country in peace. Toward the close of his reign he was smitten with leprosy for his sacriligious attempt to take the place of the priests and offer sacrifice in the temple.

"In the year that king Uzziah died" Isaiah, the greatest of the writing prophets, received his call to be a prophet. There was a real need for a prophet at this time, for the peace and prosperity of Uzziah's reign had led to a great increase in wealth and luxury with all its accompanying evils of corruption, injustice, and immorality. Men neglected God. There was plenty of work for the young prophet Isaiah to do, and for long years he denounced the sins of Jerusalem, sought to stir up faithfulness to God, warned against foreign alliances, and announced the judgments of God upon Israel and the enemies of God. He brought also great messages of God's redeeming love, of the coming Messiah, the Prince of Peace and Suffering One. His ministry extended through the prosperous reign of Jotham, and into the reign of the weak and idolatrous Ahaz, who was completely under the influence of the heathen party. During the reign of Ahaz, Judah was plunged into idolatry in its coarsest and most cruel forms. To crown the misfortunes, Ahaz got into war with Israel and Syria, and called in the help of Assyria (Tiglath-pileser), to free Judah from the burden of the devastation by which the enemies were wasting the land. At first, although Isaiah bitterly opposed the move, the plan seemed to work. But a few years after the death of Ahaz, Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, invaded Judah with an immense army (711 B.C.). The proud Assyrian, having swept all before him, planned to complete his conquest by the capture of Jerusalem. But Jehovah intervened, and in a miraculous way 185,000

soldiers perished in one night. The prophecy of Isaiah that God would punish Assyria and save Judah was fulfilled. Thus when Israel was being conquered and carried captive by Assyria (721) Judah was spared.

History of Judah After the Captivity of Israel

Hezekiah, the king who followed wicked Ahaz, was one of the best kings of Judah. At the very beginning of his reign he cleansed the temple and made provision for the worship of Jehovah. "And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered" (II Chron. 31:21). Yet he was the king who listened to the advice of his politicians and made an alliance with Egypt to fight Assyria, against the strong protest of Isaiah, and in consequence, but for the intervention of Jehovah by a miracle (as described above), would have been conquered by Sennacherib's powerful army. As conditions became threatening, Isaiah prophesied the captivity of Judah at the hands of Babylon, but also prophesied the return from exile and the restoration of Judah. Micah also prophesied in Judah at this time with much the same message that Isaiah gave.

The years following the passing away of Hezekiah, Isaiah, and Micah, three great and good men whose deaths came near together, were evil years. The Assyrian invasion had caused great distress and suffering. With her great and safe leaders gone, Judah gradually drifted toward captivity even though more than a hundred years passed before the final collapse. The first half of this period, 55 years, was occupied with the long reign of the wicked King Manasseh, who "wrought much evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger." "And Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did evil more than did the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel" (II Chron. 33:9, R.V.). "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (II Kings 21:16). Manasseh's reign was so long and so wicked that he finally succeeded in doing what hitherto had been impossible; he weaned the people away from the worship of the true God, and led them

into idolatry. He sealed the fate of Judah and brought it to the edge of destruction. His son Amon followed his father's example in a short reign of two years.

The reign of the good King Josiah, who ruled for thirty-one years, the last good king of Judah, furnished a brief period of recovery from the terrible days of Manasseh. It was too late to save Judah, yet he did much good. He started to root out idolatry and restored the temple. Hilkiah the high priest found in the temple a copy of the book of the law (c. 621 B.C.) which the pious king received with grief and fear as he learned through its reading by Shaphan the scribe of the high standards of God which Judah had so miserably failed to keep. Because of Josiah's penitence and humility, Huldah the prophetess promised that though the threats of the book of the law should be fulfilled, the evil would not come during the life of Josiah. He renewed the covenant of the people with Jehovah, and thoroughly purged the land of idolatry and superstition, which he smote hip and thigh. The king did all he could to reform the moral and religious life of the people, but though there was outward conformity to the law, the hearts of the people were far from God. It was during this time that Jeremiah began to prophesy in his courageous attempt to hold the people true to Jehovah and stay off the evil day of judgment that was approaching.

After the death of Josiah in 609 B.C. at Megiddo, four wicked and cruel kings followed before the final fall of Jerusalem—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Events took place rapidly. Josiah had lost his life in battle against the Egyptians. His son Jehoahaz was carried captive to Egypt when Egypt was defeated by Babylon at the great battle of Charchemish in 605 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. II Chron. 35:20; 46:2. Judah, which had become tributary to Egypt, fell prey to Babylon. At this time many were carried captive to Babylon in the so-called "first captivity," among them Daniel. Jehoiakim was permitted to remain in Jerusalem as tributary king of Judah. He foolishly revolted, was conquered but died before he could be carried captive to Babylon. His son, Jehoiachin, who ruled only three months, was carried captive to Babylon in the "second captivity," 597 B.C., together

with others, including Ezekiel. Zedekiah, the next king, also foolishly revolted, and brought about the final fall of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar, determined to stop once and for all the continuing rebellions in Judah, laid siege to the city, which he captured in 586 B.C. after eighteen months of siege. It was a terrible catastrophe. Most of the people of Jerusalem were put to death, the children of the king were slain, and the king himself was carried in chains to Babylon, his eyes having been put out. The city itself was burned, the temple destroyed, and the sacred vessels carried off to Babylon. John Bright vividly describes the plight of Judah. "The land was a shambles. Practically every fortified town, including Jerusalem with its temple, had been destroyed by the Babylonians and left in ruins. Most of them were not rebuilt for many years to come. And while the actual number deported was not large, these represented the cream of the country's leadership. In addition we may be sure that thousands had been slain in battle or had died of the rigors of the siege, while other thousands had fled for their lives. Only the poorest of the peasantry, considered incapable of stirring up trouble, were left to harvest the crops."* Besides those who were carried to Babylon, many others migrated to Egypt. Judah was a desolate land drained of its inhabitants. Thus came to fulfillment the great judgment prophesied by the prophets.

It should be noted that, in contrast to Tiglath-pileser's treatment of Israel, the northern kingdom, no settlers were sent in to colonize the country. God, in His providence, kept the land vacant, to be reoccupied by the people upon their return from captivity. Only a small disorganized, desolate remnant was left in Judah to mourn the departed glories of God's house and God's people, and to wait for the coming day of restoration in God's own time.

Thus the southern kingdom also came to an end, in spite of the greater loyalty of the kings and its people to Jehovah, and in spite of the great prophets whom God has sent them—Joel, Obadiah, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah. It was all of no avail. But the time was to come when the great truths contained in the writings of these proph-

* *The Kingdom of God*, Abingdon, p. 129.

ets would live again and their messages of God's everlasting mercy would be fulfilled.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. What determined whether a king was reckoned as good or bad?
2. Compare and contrast Elijah and Elisha.
3. Name Elisha's miracles.
4. How many kings and how many dynasties did each of the two kingdoms have?
5. Give the year of the captivity of Israel and the foreign nation and king responsible.
6. What became of the "ten tribes"?
7. Why was the northern kingdom never restored?
8. What is the fundamental difference in their history between the northern and the southern kingdoms?
9. Name four good kings of Judah. Name also Judah's worst king.
10. Give the dates of the three captivities of Judah, and the foreign nation and king responsible.
11. Why was the land of Judah not colonized in the captivity as Israel was?

Lesson V

Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther

Ezra

Author.—Ezra.

Date.—About 420 B.C.

Time Covered.—538-457 B.C., about 80 years, with a gap of 58 years in the history.

Contents.—The history of the first two returns from captivity, one under Zerubbabel in 538 B.C., together with the story of the rebuilding of the temple; and one under Ezra, together with the story of Ezra's struggle to break up intermarriage with the heathen.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. Return of the Jews, and the Rebuilding of the Temple, All Under Zerubbabel, 1—6.
II. Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem, and the Reforms He Effected in the Question of Intermarriage with the Heathen, 7—10.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. Return Under Zerubbabel and Rebuilding of the Temple, 1—6.
   1. The decree of Cyrus, 1.
   2. List of those who returned, 2.
   3. Rebuilding of the temple, 3—6.
      a. Foundations laid, 3.
      b. Opposition blocks the work, 4, 5.
      c. Temple completed, 6.

II. Return Under Ezra, 7—10.
   1. Decree and letter of Artaxerxes, 7.
   2. The list of Ezra's company and the story of the return, 8.
   3. Ezra's reform and the suppression of mixed marriages, 9, 10.

Selections for Reading: 1; 4; 5; 8:30-36; 9; 10:1-16.

The Captivity

The historical books tell us very little about the captivity itself. The last chapters of II Chronicles briefly describe the final siege of Jerusalem and its fall. They tell of the tragic fate of the last king, Zedekiah, whose eyes were put out and who was carried in chains to Babylon. Earlier his predecessor, Je-

hoiachin, had been carried off to Babylon, where he was kept in prison for thirty-seven years. Jehoiakim also had been seized for transportation to Babylon but died before the plan could be carried out. The fact that three successive kings of Judah had been taken captive suggests that the so-called "captivity" was a process and not one great catastrophe, and this is right.

Both Israel and Judah had gradually drifted into conditions that brought them under foreign influence. Both nations finally made the tragic blunder of seeking alliances with heathen nations, which led to their downfall. The captivity of Israel has already been described. For a period of twelve years (733 B.C. to 721 B.C.) before the final conquest in 721, the Assyrians had repeatedly invaded the territory of the ten tribes and carried off bands of captives, although Samaria the capital did not fall until 721 B.C.

The same process was repeated in Judah, only it lasted almost twice as long. From the time the first captives were carried to Babylon in 606 B.C., when Daniel and others were carried off, until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., twenty years elapsed. Five years after the destruction of Jerusalem a final band of captives was transported to Babylon. All told, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler, sent four expeditions with captives from Judah to Babylon, in 606, 598, 586, 581. And already in the time following the fall of Samaria, about 700 B.C., captives had been taken from Judah to the East. Sennacherib claimed to have taken 200,000 at that time, which is certainly exaggerated. It is impossible to calculate the number of captives from the ten tribes since no figures are given at all. It is easier to calculate the number of captives carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. In Jer. 52:28-30 the prophet says that in three deportations 4,600 people were taken to Babylon. The account in II Kings 24:14-16 gives it as somewhat higher—8,000 or 10,000. The difference in these figures may, as Albright suggests, be due to the high mortality rate during the deportation. At any rate the highest estimate is about 10,000. These seem to have been taken largely from Jerusalem and its immediate environs. The rest of the land was decimated from the previous attacks and the peasantry was left to cultivate the land.

Conditions during the exile are not described in detail, although Jeremiah reports something of conditions in Judah, and Ezekiel and Daniel give some information about conditions in Babylon among the captives. In their exile the Jews enjoyed many privileges, so that their lot was much easier than the lot of those who were left behind. They were permitted to build and occupy houses, keep servants, and engage in business. The experience of Daniel and Nehemiah shows that there was nothing to hinder them from rising to the highest positions in the state. Their priests and teachers were with them, and they had the benefit of the ministry of the great prophet Ezekiel. They were allowed to, and did conduct their worship to Jehovah, and probably established in the East the institutions of the synagogue which later became so important in Jewish history and life. By contrast the people who remained were quite dispirited.

The Return from Exile and the Restoration of Judah

The Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 26:1, 11, 12) had announced that the captivity would last in round numbers seventy years. Daniel evidently reckoned this from the first captivity in 606 B.C.; so about 539 B.C. he began to pray unto God for the restoration of divine favor to His people. Dan. 9. In 538 Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to the land of their fathers and rebuild the temple.

The Return Under Zerubbabel and the Rebuilding of the Temple

The first six chapters of Ezra give the story of the first return, in which a total of about 42,000 persons under Zerubbabel's leadership returned to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus. It is clear that this was by no means all of the captives, and that consequently many must have remained in Babylonia. God intentionally issued no command through the Prophet Ezekiel that all should return. Only those "whose spirit God had stirred" up were to go. The rest, according to the decree of Cyrus, which the book of Ezra records, were to aid their brethren with freewill offerings. Among those who returned were not only Zerubbabel, an heir to the throne of Judah, who was appointed governor by Cyrus, but also Jeshua, the high priest, and many other princes and leaders.

Upon arrival (in 538 or 536 B.C.) Zerrubabel, as head of the civil government, and Jeshua, as head of the priesthood, jointly reared an altar to God, thus restoring the worship which had ceased in 586, fifty years before. By this symbolic act, the two leaders indicated the true nature of the return as a restoration of the old theocracy of Judah of pre-captivity times. Zerubbabel immediately laid the foundation of the temple, but adversaries succeeded in blocking the work, partly by influencing the Persian government, so that the building was not resumed until 521 B.C., fifteen years later. At that time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah led a campaign to resume operations which led to the successful completion of the work five years later, in 516 B.C., by Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Because of the relation of the former to the work, this second temple is often called Zerubbabel's temple. It should not be forgotten that Zerubbabel was the representative of the Davidic monarchy in his time, and also was in the direct line of ancestry of Christ. The new temple was built on the same general plan as Solomon's temple, although the exact dimensions are not known. It did not, however, have the magnificence and glory of Solomon's temple, and the ark of the covenant was no longer in it because it had disappeared at the time of the burning of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. The old men who had seen the glory of Solomon's temple wept when they thought of its superiority to the house they now built.

Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem and the Reforms He Effected in the Matter of Intermarriage with the Heathen

The years that followed the final completion of the temple were hard years for the newly established Jewish nation at Jerusalem. Many trials and discouragements came upon them, and they did not maintain their principles in absolute loyalty to God and His law, particularly in the matter of separation from their heathen neighbors as the law required. For many reasons they were no doubt very glad to receive the reinforcement which a company of earnest Jews from Babylonia brought who came in the year 458 B.C. under the leadership of Ezra. The story of this expedition and its effects upon the life of the Jews in Palestine is told in the latter part of the Book of Ezra. (7-10).

Ezra was a ready scribe of the law of Moses, a man zealous

for the holiness of Jehovah and the holiness of His people. Hence when he heard of the need at Jerusalem, he resolved to lead a company thither to strengthen the hands of the faithful in the Holy City. As in the case of Zerubbabel and the first return eighty years before, so now the king of Persia, Artaxerxes, granted Ezra a decree of authority and support and appointed him as the one to preside over the administration of affairs in Judah. The total number of those in Ezra's caravan is given as about 1,700. Ezra also brought rich presents from Babylon with him.

Upon his arrival in Palestine Ezra sought thorough information about conditions. What he discovered brought intense astonishment and grief to his heart, for he discovered that heathen customs were rapidly coming in among the people, and the chosen nation was fast losing its peculiarity as a people, separate from all others. Upon discovery of this dangerous state of affairs, "Ezra prayed, and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God." The result was a decision by the people to undertake a reformation, with Ezra as the leader whom the people bound themselves to obey. Within two months the heathen women were separated from the people, the broken-down wall of separation was rebuilt, and intermarriage with the heathen was wiped out. Since that day the Jews have been able to maintain this principle with great fidelity.

Nehemiah

Author.—Unknown compiler, large portion written originally by Nehemiah.

Date.—About 400 B.C.

Time Covered.—444-418 B.C., 26 years.

Contents.—Story of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem by Nehemiah and the accompanying great revival.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. Nehemiah's Return to Jerusalem, and the Rebuilding of the Wall, 1—6.

II. The Great Revival, 7:1—13:3.

III. Reforms by Nehemiah on His Second Return from Persia, 13:4-31.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. Nehemiah's Return and the Rebuilding of the Wall, 1—6.
   1. Nehemiah's prayer in Shushan, 1.
   2. Nehemiah's return and the preparation for building, 2.
   3. Work on the walls, 3.
   4. Opposition overcome and the wall finished, 4—6.

II. The Great Revival, 7:1—13:3.
   1. Census, 7.
   2. Revival by the reading of the law, 8.
   3. Confession and covenant, 9, 10.
   4. List of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, 11:1—12:26.
   5. Dedication of the wall, 12:26-47.
   6. Separation of non-Israelites, 13:1-3.

III. Reforms by Nehemiah on His Second Return from Shushan, 13:4-31.

Selections for Reading: 1, 4, 8, 9, 13.

Nehemiah's Return and the Rebuilding of the Wall

The Book of Nehemiah takes up the history of the Jews about twelve years after the close of the Book of Ezra, and gives, in the first six chapters, an account of the refortification of the city which was carried out by Nehemiah. Though the temple had been repaired under Ezra's administration, the walls and gates of the city were yet in the state of ruin in which the Babylonians had left them more than a hundred years before. The people had not yet recovered sufficiently in strength, spirit, and wealth, to undertake this great work. Consequently the inhabitants were exposed to every attack of the enemy. Nehemiah was the man God raised up for their protection to build the wall.

Nehemiah had retained his love for God and His people in spite of the fact that he had received a very high office in the court of the king of Persia at Shushan. He might have preferred to live in the ease and wealth of this office, but when he learned of the affliction of his people in faraway Palestine he was deeply moved by it and gave himself to earnest prayer. Finally, following the examples of Zerubbabel and Ezra, he secured the aid and support of his royal master, the king. He was appointed governor of the city, and set out for Jerusalem with a commission to rebuild the walls, with authority to secure the timber from the king's forest.

The story of the rebuilding of the wall, in spite of the great difficulties that hindered the work, is a thrilling one. Nehemiah had to revive the spirit of the people and stir them up to work unitedly in the great task. In this he succeeded marvelously, for God blessed the work. Nehemiah was an able leader who combined intelligence and industry with faith and prayer. The work was much impeded by two leaders in the rival colony of Samaria, Sanballat and Tobiah, who scoffed, then threatened, and finally attempted to assassinate Nehemiah. Some of the chief men in Jerusalem traitorously conspired with the enemies without. Also the spirit of the people was divided by the heavy and unjust taxation of the nobles and rulers. However, Nehemiah succeeded in improving general conditions, and in spite of all enemies and difficulties, built the walls in these "troublous times" in the remarkably short period of fifty-two days. The completion of the great task was celebrated with a solemn dedication.

The Great Revival

But Nehemiah, as a wise ruler, used other measures to strengthen the nation. He appointed new officers, and improved the administration of government. His chief and greatest work lay in the great revival which he helped to bring about through the rereading of the law by Ezra. With the completion of the wall, a new spirit arose, and a turning to God was evident. Nehemiah saw his opportunity, had Ezra read the law to a great multitude, and used the Levites to help explain it, "to give the sense," that is, to teach and instruct the people. It was a spiritual effort, and not a mere formality. Soon the people were in tears, for they recognized that they had not been keeping the holy law of God. This procedure was kept up for many days until the reading of the law was complete. The outcome was a genuine revival; a wave of devotion to God spread over the people, and they solemnly and joyfully renewed the covenant with God. In the midst of the period of instruction in the law, they were so aroused that they decided to institute an immediate celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, which had been long neglected.

Reform by Nehemiah on His Second Return

After twelve years in Jerusalem, Nehemiah seems to have returned for a time to his home in Shushan. He returned very soon again to Jerusalem, shortly after 433 B.C. Again he asserted his leadership, cleansed the temple of foreigners who had settled within its precincts, particularly Tobiah the Ammonite, and corrected other abuses which had crept in, such as the neglect of the tithes, violation of the Sabbath by trading, and the toleration of intermarriage with the heathen, which was a growing danger in spite of the reform of Ezra some thirty years before. He was aided in his vigorous policy of reform and purification by the staunch support of the prophet Malachi, the last of the prophets of the Old Testament. With the Book of Nehemiah, the history of the Old Testament comes to a close.

Concluding Observations on the Captivity and the Restoration

The captivity and restoration of Judah was a remarkable experience. We marvel that in spite of the complete obliteration of all national life and religious worship in Judah for fifty years, and in spite of the long sojourn of the princes and leaders of the people in a foreign heathen land many miles away, the people of God were preserved, and the redemptive purpose and plan of God was not defeated but was victoriously carried on through. Even the royal line of descent from David to the Messiah was not broken in these troublous and critical years. The explanation, of course, lies in the fact that the entire experience of God's people in this time, both the captivity and the restoration, was the work of God. What happened was according to His will, and was planned to accomplish His purpose.

This is clearly seen from the way in which God overruled political affairs for the benefit of His people. For instance, Judah, in contrast to Israel, was left as a land waste, without inhabitant, not resettled by colonists from Babylonia. It was to be kept pure from heathen elements until the time for the return had come. Notice also the way in which Cyrus, Artaxerxes, and other rulers were moved upon by God to make the return possible and to protect and support it.

The captivity was a judgment upon the people, a punishment for their sin of apostasy, and was intended to sift them like wheat, to purge them as by fire, so that the nation would be purified and better prepared to serve God's purposes for the future. In this judgment Judah was to see clearly that not the nation and the race counted before God, but a heart that was pure and obedient to Him. The godly remnant were to be God's people, henceforth. Rich messages proclaiming these truths were given to the people by the great prophets before, during, and after the captivity. No doubt the lesson was not fully learned, but after this judgment, this experience of purging, the restored Israel was relatively free from the great sin of idolatry. And after the work of Ezra and Nehemiah they were able to maintain themselves as a separate nation in spite of continuously living under the yoke of foreign oppressors (except for the time of the Maccabees) until Christ came.

And that was the chief mission of the new Israel from henceforth. No new revelation was given, no new prophets appeared. It was to be a time of faithful, patient waiting and expectation for the final revelation from heaven of the Messiah who should save His people from their sins and be the world's Saviour.

Esther

Author.—Unknown.

Date.—About 425 B.C.

Time Covered.—About 10 years, near 475 B.C.

Contents.—A story from the life of Esther, a Jewish maiden who became the queen of Persia, the defeat of two plots against Mordecai, guardian of Esther, and the Jews in Persia.

Outline.

I. How Esther Came to Be Queen of Persia, 1, 2.
II. How the Jews Fell Under the Ban of Extermination, 3, 4.
III. The Defeat of Haman's Plot Against Mordecai, 5—7.
IV. The Defeat of Haman's Plot Against the Jews, 8; 9:1-16.
V. Institution of the Feast of Purim, 9:17-32; 10.

Selections for Reading: 2; 4—6; 8; 9:17-32.

The Book of Esther is different from all other books of the Old Testament, for it presents stories, out of the life of the Jews in the distant land of Persia, which are only indirectly related to the redemptive plan of God. Another peculiarity is that the name of God is not mentioned in the entire account. However, this is not so serious as it sounds, for the hand of God is plainly seen in the book, anticipating evil and defeating and overruling it for the benefit of the Jews. The book certainly teaches trust in the providential care of God, and loyalty to the people of God.

The book does not give a complete account of the life of Esther but merely explains how she came to be the wife of Xerxes (Ahasuerus), queen of Persia, as successor to the former queen and thereby came to be in position to save her people from destruction. The heart of the book is the story of the plots of Haman, prime minister of the king, and his defeat through Esther. The first two chapters merely show how Esther was "come to the kingdom for such a time as this," as her guardian, Mordecai, said when the plot was discovered.

Because of the unprincipled character of Haman, Mordecai and other Jews refused the customary signs of respect. Enraged by this, Haman planned for revenge, in his hate plotting not only to accomplish the destruction of Mordecai but of all the Jews in the empire. He secured the king's consent by a heavy bribe and by allusion to the stubborn adherence of the Jews to their own laws and customs, and sought the aid of the mob by an appeal to their greed.

At this point Mordecai appealed to Esther to save her people by intervention with the king. She was at first afraid, but finally, after prayer and fasting, risked her life by coming unbidden into the king's presence. Her great prudence and tact won the day for her. Even though it was too late to recall the decree, the Jews were permitted to defend thmselves, and to attack their enemies. In consequence the plot of Haman came to naught, 75,000 enemies of the Jews were slain, and Haman himself and his ten sons were hanged upon the gallows. The princes and governors of Persia also came to the aid of the Jews, "and Mordecai was great in the king's house."

It is worth while to think of the possibilities involved in Haman's plot. Haman was the prime minister of Persia, an

empire which at that time extended over much of the ancient world, including Babylon—where many Jews lived in exile, and Palestine—where the restored Jewish nation had been struggling to maintain itself for sixty years or more since the return under Zerubbabel. The whole Jewish nation was in peril. If Haman had succeeded, the entire Jewish race would have been wiped out, and the people of God would have perished taking with them the hope of the Messiah.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. Describe the condition of the Jews in Babylon during the captivity.
2. What great lesson was learned by the Jews through the captivity?
3. Name the three great leaders of the Jews in the returns from the captivity.
4. What foreign kings aided the return from captivity?
5. What great reform did Ezra carry through and why was it so important?
6. Compare the work of Ezra and Nehemiah.
7. Why did the captivity come upon Israel and Judah?
8. Did all the Jews return from the captivity? If not, how was it determined who should come?
9. Name the four chief characters of the Book of Esther.
10. What lesson may be learned from the life and character of Esther?
11. Why is the Book of Esther in the Old Testament?

Lesson VI

Bible Poetry and Psalms

Introduction

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and The Song of Solomon are usually spoken of as the poetical books. The poetry of the Bible, however, is not limited to the books mentioned above. The historical sections have occasional poems, and many times the prophets break into genuinely poetic strains. Some are largely poetic, and the whole of the Lamentations of Jeremiah is an elaborate, acrostic elegy.

We should be careful not to think of the poetical and prophetical books as following the historical books in time order, even though they do follow them in the Bible arrangement. Job may have been the first book of the Bible to be written, and all the other books of this group fit somewhere into the historical scheme presented from Genesis to Esther. In fact, for our present purpose we may think of the historical books as a great framework into which we will fit the various poetical and prophetical books as we take them up one by one. Oftentimes properly locating a book in the historical plan is the best means to its understanding.

Poetry is the more-or-less exalted and elaborate form of language which results from feeling deeply aroused. This emotion is always present, but the forms of expression are varied according to period and race. Most of us, accustomed to the traditions of English poetry, think of poetry in terms of rhyme and rhythm and definite stanza patterns. For this reason Hebrew poetry, which does not have rhyme or rhythm or the stanza forms with which we are familiar, does not seem to many a reader to be poetry. This is all the more true because, in most of the versions which we read, the poetry is printed exactly like the prose.

But the Bible does have a great deal of poetry, and it is poetry of extraordinary beauty and power. This Bible poetry has the intensity of feeling which characterizes all poetry. It has the imaginative and majestic language which is fitting

to these feelings. It has in the original Hebrew occasional instances of rhyme and alliteration, and lines of equal length. But the peculiar genius of Hebrew poetry does not consist in mechanical devices, but rather in what has been called "thought-rhythm," or parallelism. It is an arrangement of thought, rather than words; a balance of ideas, rather than syllables. This is by all means the most outstanding characteric of the poetry of the Bible, and an understanding of it is essential to a full appreciation of the poetical books.

Parallelism

The English Bishop Lowth, who in 1753 first named and described this matter of parallelism, also gave us names for the three chief types of parallelism.

1. In synonymous parallelism the second line repeats with slight variation the thought of the first.

> What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
> And the son of man, that thou visitest him?
> —Psalm 8:4.

> The heavens declare the glory of God;
> And the firmament showeth his handiwork.
> —Psalm 19:1.

2. In synthetic parallelism the following line or lines build up or add to the thought of the first line. Block is placed upon block to complete the structure.

> As the hart panteth after the water brooks,
> So panteth my soul after thee, O God.
> —Psalm 42:1.

> I have been young, and now am old;
> Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken,
> Nor his seed begging bread.
> —Psalm 37:25.

3. In antithetic parallelism the thought of the second line is related to the first by being its direct opposite. A contrast is stated.

> Better is a dinner of herbs, where love is,
> Than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.
> —Prov. 15:17.

For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous:
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.
—Psalm 1:6.

Scholars have named other types of parallelism, but they may all be included in the three chief classes which have been named and illustrated.

The parallel thoughts may be built up into groups or stanzas of varying size and form.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labour of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
—Hab. 3:17, 18.

The fining pot is for silver,
And the furnace for gold:
But the Lord trieth the hearts.
—Prov. 17:3.

A special form which is found occasionally in the poetic books is the acrostic. Here the letters beginning each verse or couplet or stanza are arranged in alphabetical order. An outstanding example is Psalm 119, which will be described later.

Parallelism in Biblical poetry has for us a twofold advantage. In the first place, it is an aid to interpretation. If there is a complicated thought or construction in one sentence, the parallel sentence may give the key to its meaning. In the second place, since parallelism is of thought rather than of form, it is not lost in translation. It is exceedingly difficult to carry the beauties of form across from one language to another. But a literal translation of Hebrew poetry will preserve almost without loss the force of the original. For ideas may be translated. Is it too much to say that God so directed the nature of Hebrew poetry that the Bible might be a universal Book, not for one race only, but for all men of all time?

Psalms

General Content.—An anthology of religious lyrics, intended for worship, and used in the temple and synagogue by the Jews, and for private and public worship by the Christian Church.

Authors.—According to the psalm titles, which, though not a part of the inspired text, are ancient and valuable evidence, the authors of the Psalms are as follows:

Moses (90)	1
David (3—9, 11—32, 34—41, 51—65, 68—70, 86, 101, 103, 108—110, 122, 124, 131, 133, 138—145)	73
Solomon (72, 127)	2
Asaph (50, 73—83)	12
Sons of Korah (42, 44—49, 84, 85, 87, 88)	11
Ethan the Ezrahite (89)	1
Heman the Ezrahite (88, also assigned to the sons of Korah)	
Unassigned	50
Total	150

Of the unassigned psalms David probably wrote some, for the New Testament names him as the author of at least two. Tradition assigns Psalms 1 and 119 to Ezra, and others to Jeremiah, Haggai, and Zechariah. Thus while we see that the popular notion that David wrote all the Psalms is incorrect, yet it is true that the "sweet singer of Israel" wrote about half of the Psalms, and became the founder of Hebrew psalmody. For many of the psalms of Asaph and the other temple singers were written through David's encouragement and direction.

The Book of Psalms is divided into five parts which are marked off by the doxologies which occur at the ends of the first four divisions.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

Book I. Psalms 1—41. Psalms of David, to whom all but four are ascribed. In this book the most common divine name is "Lord," which designates the Deity as the Covenant Redeemer of His people.

Book II. Psalms 42—72. Psalms of David and his temple singers, to whom all but four are ascribed. Here the prevailing divine name is "God," which presents the Deity as the Creator and Governor of His world.

Book III. Psalms 73—89. Psalms of the temple singers, to whom all but one are ascribed. "God" occurs nearly twice as often as "Lord."

Book IV. Psalms 90—106. Anonymous Psalms, only three being assigned to authors. "Lord" is the prevailing name.

Book V. Psalms 107—150. Anonymous Psalms and Psalms of David, fifteen being assigned to David, one to Solomon, and the rest anonymous. "Lord" occurs more than six times as often as "God," and a grand doxology closes the entire collection.

Classification (for reference and study)

It is difficult to classify the subject matter of the Psalms, for any one Psalm may fall naturally into more than one classification. The following classification is not exhaustive, but merely indicates the matter of the Psalms as it has appeared to various Bible scholars.

1. Didactic Psalms: 1, 19, 37, 73, 119.
2. Psalms of Praise and Adoration: 23, 103, 145.
3. Psalms of Thanksgiving: 66, 107, 136, 149.
4. Penitential Psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.
5. Historical Psalms: 78, 105, 106.
6. Psalms of Experience: 16, 42, 63, 116, 139.
7. National Psalms: 48, 78, 80, 114, 129.
8. Temple Hymns: 24, 87, 134, 135.
9. Elegiac Psalms: 7, 22, 69, 137.
10. Nature Psalms: 19, 23, 29, 93, 104.
11. Pilgrimage Psalms: 120—134 (sung on the way to Jerusalem).
12. Messianic Psalms: 2, 16, 22, 40, 45, 72, 110.
13. Imprecatory Psalms: 35, 69, 109, 137.

Selections for Reading: Dip in anywhere. All is pure gold. Name your Psalms as you read and live through them.

1. Psalm of the Book.
2. Psalm of the Son.
3. Psalm of the Shield.
4. Evening Psalm.
5. Morning Psalm.
19. The Heaven above and the Law within.
22. Crucifixion Psalm.
23. Shepherd Psalm.
27. Psalm of Deliverance.
29. Psalm of the Thunderstorm.
32. Psalm of Forgiveness.
37. Psalm of Assurance.
45. Royal Marriage Hymn.
46. Psalm of Faith.
51. Psalm of Penitence.
56. Psalm of Tears.
70. Psalm for the Poor.
71. Psalm for the Aged.
73. The Skeptic's Psalm.
76. Psalm of Sennacherib.
80. Psalm of the Broken Vine.

Fill out the gaps and complete the list.

The Glory of the Psalms

Open your Bible in the middle, and you see its heart, the Psalms. It is in a pre-eminent sense the devotional book of the Bible. Not only is it a spiritual commentary on the Old Testament, but it is also a shrine of prayer and praise for the Christian. A number of quotations will show in what high regard the book has always been held.

Perowne: "No single book of Scripture, not even of the New Testament, has, perhaps, ever taken such hold on the heart of Christendom. None, if we may dare judge, unless it be the Gospels, has had so large an influence in molding the affections, sustaining the hopes, purifying the faith of believers."

Athanasius: "An Epitome of all Scripture."

Basil: "The common treasure of all good precepts."

Pierson: "Here every heart-chord is touched and tuned to holy melody."

Bell: "Hoary with the age of from two-and-a-half to three-and-a-half millenniums, they still have the freshness of the dew that fell this morning."

Ambrose: "Although all divine Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms."

Weddell: "The solid gold of Christian experience, the century-old heart cries of love and devotion."

Harman: "Without a parallel in annals of religious literature."

Hooker: "What is there necessary for man to know which the Psalms are not able to teach?"

Milton: "Not in their divine arguments alone, but in the very critical art of composition, they may be easily made to appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy incomparable."

Luther: "A Bible in miniature."

The Hebrew title to the Psalms means "praises." The English title is taken from the Greek and means "composition set to muisc." Both titles are appropriate, for their predominant note is praise, and most of them were written to be sung in public worship. The worship of God, whether in New Testament or Old Testament times, is marked by praise and

thanksgiving and the use of singing. It is a command of both dispensations that we should sing unto the Lord.

This is primarily a book of the spiritual life. It is an expression of all the emotions of the worshiping soul—confession, complaint, petition, thanksgiving, aspiration, joy. It is a handbook of the devotional life. Most of the rest of the Bible may be thought of as God speaking to man; here man is speaking to God. It is here that every experience of the Christian is pictured. There is in this book a supply for every need. A sublime trust in the Lord is the bond that unites all the writers and every psalm in the collection. Fellowship with God is here presented in its possibility and its realization. "To Be Near unto God" is its great objective. "The Psalms are the Christian's map of experience," said Spurgeon. "I have set the Lord always before me" (16:8) is the key viewpoint.

The Psalms thus sustain a very intimate relation to the rest of the Old Testament. In the historical books and in the prophets God's relations to His people are presented in the main objectively. We look upon things from the outside. But the Psalms are subjective. The doors of the temple swing open and we identify ourselves with the worshiper and feel the inner heart of things. The history of Israel is here interpreted in terms of the inner life. The law and the ritual of worship seem no more external forms, but heart-moving means of grace. The righteousness demanded by the law and preached by the prophets takes bodily form in these men who were on speaking terms with God.

The Psalms have a close connection also to the New Testament. The familiarity of the writers of the New Testament with this book is shown by their large use of its language, both in the incidental incorporation of its sentences and phrases and in the many quotations. Nearly two thirds of the quotations brought over from the Old Testament are from the Psalms. And the Psalms in a very real sense anticipate the spirit and the teachings of the New Testament. Here we have a true if not a complete view of God and His government of the world; of man's sinfulness and need of redemption; of Christ the God-man in His suffering and in His glory; of pardoning and purifying grace; of the Spirit which bears in the heart the

fruit of inward piety, of faith, and hope, and love. We find here, in germ, a "compend of all theology" (Bishop Hall). How necessary is this marvelous book as a background for New Testament truth! Small wonder it is that the early Christians, according to the Church Fathers, learned this book by heart, "that psalmody might enliven their social hours, and soften the fatigues and soothe the sorrows of life." And throughout the history of the Christian Church large use has been made of the Psalms in the private devotional life and in the singing, reading, and preaching of public worship.

Christ in the Psalms

Of outstanding interest is the picture of Christ which we have in the Psalms. Our Lord often quoted from this book, applying its words to Himself. They "were sung by Him who, though He 'spake as never man spake,' chose to breathe out His soul, both in praise and in His last agony, in words from the Psalms." His own testimony is, "In the Psalms it is written of me." Let us see what we learn here concerning Christ, although our study must necessarily be brief.

His Divinity. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever" (45:6). In Heb. 1:8 we have, "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand . . ." (110:1). Jesus quotes this passage in Matt. 22:42-45 to prove His divinity.

His Sonship. "The Lord said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (2:7). Heb. 1:5 and Acts 13:33 make clear that the Son is Jesus Christ.

The Incarnation. "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me." For the application of this to Christ see Heb. 10:5-10. Compare also Psalm 8:5 with Heb. 2:7, 9.

His Priesthood. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (110:4). On Heb. 7:17-21 this is quoted and applied to Christ.

His Kingship. Psalm 2 throughout pictures the sovereignty of a Divine Son, and is frequently quoted in the New Testament. We see Christ here not as a suffering Redeemer, but in glorious victory over those who have raged against Him. It finds its fulfillment in the New Testament picture of the

One who shall put all things under Him, and who, when the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, shall reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Psalm 45 also pictures Christ in His kingly aspect as the royal Bridegroom who, joined to His chosen bride, shall sit upon an eternal throne. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). Psalm 72, written either by or for Solomon, contains language which cannot have its primary reference to Solomon or any other Jewish king. "Like a man standing on high ground in a sunset, a glory not his own is on him." Of none but Christ, the Prince of Peace, may it be said that "men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed." Psalm 110, which begins, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool," has been universally recognized by both Jews and Christians to be Messianic. It pictures a priest-king in triumphant reign, and is applied to Himself by our Lord. Matt. 22:44, 45. Compare also Heb. 1:13.

His Betrayal. "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (41:9). Jesus says in John 13:18 that this Scripture is fulfilled.

His Trial. "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not" (35:11). Christ was condemned on the testimony of false witnesses.

His Rejection. "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" (118:22). In Matt. 21:42 Jesus quotes these words to the Jews who were rejecting Him, and Peter applies the same passage in Acts 4:11.

His Crucifixion. Psalms 22 and 69 describe the crucifixion of Christ with startling minuteness. This is the more remarkable when we remember that crucifixion, which the pierced hands and feet denote, was a refinement of Roman cruelty, and unknown among the Jews, who always executed by stoning. Psalm 22 begins with "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and closes with "It is finished" (Hebrew). "It is a psalm of sobs. The Hebrew shows not one completed sentence in the opening verses, but a series of brief ejaculations, like the

gasps of a dying man whose breath and strength are failing, and who can only utter a word or two at a time" (Hodgkin). Almost as if we were reading the Gospels we see here the mockery, the wagging of the heads, the leering taunt, "He saved others," the parting of garments and the casting of lots, the morbid watching, the tongue parched in thirst, the drink of vinegar, the pierced hands and feet, the straining of weight on the joints, the cry of the forsaken, the breaking heart, and the committing of the spirit to God. The rabbis who knew their Scriptures were surely blind at Calvary, or they would have seen these fulfillments.

His Resurrection. "My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (16:9, 10). Peter in his Pentecost sermon said: "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up" (Acts 2:31, 32).

His Ascension. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou hast received gifts for men" (68:18). In Ephesians 4 Paul quotes these words to prove the ascension of our Lord, and His ascension gifts to the church.

It is to be expected that the Psalms would have a great deal to say of Christ; for the struggle between godliness and ungodliness pictured in the Psalms finds its climax in the life and the work upon earth of Jesus, in whose person are combined the qualities and prerogatives of the earthly son of David and the heavenly Anointed One. It is of interest to observe, also, that most of the Messianic prophecies of this book are in the psalms of David or his son Solomon, as if they as types of Christ were alone fitted by office and lineage and by inward piety to speak by the Holy Spirit of the sufferings of Christ and the glory which should follow.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. What is the relation of the poetic books of the Old Testament to the historical books?

2. What is the peculiar characteristic of Hebrew poetry?
3. Name and illustrate the three kinds of parallelism. Find illustrations not in the text.
4. What is an acrostic poem? Can one tell from the English version which psalms are acrostics? Why?
5. Why can Hebrew poetry be translated with little loss of beauty?
6. How many Psalms are there in the collection of that name?
7. Did David write the Psalms?
8. Find from the historical books who Asaph, Korah, Ethan, and Heman were.
9. What is the special significance of the name "Lord" and "God"?
10. For how many Psalms do you have a name associated in your mind with the number?
11. Which of the following adjectives best fits the Psalms: prophetic, historical, devotional, political, didactic, ceremonial?
12. Are the Psalms chiefly objective or subjective? Explain.
13. Explain the connection of the Psalms with the other parts of the Old Testament and with the New Testament.
14. Name three or four Psalms that are Messianic.
15. Which of the psalmists wrote most of the Messianic prophecies of this book?

Lesson VII

Psalms (Continued)

We have seen that the Psalms were not all written at one time nor by one man. One Psalm comes from Moses, at the time when the people of Israel were journeying to Canaan, about 1500 B.C. We know from their subject matter that some of the Psalms were written at the close of the Babylonian captivity, about 500 B.C. The book therefore has a time span of one thousand years. David did not give us the book in its final form, but we may date the beginning of its collection from David's day. We know that David appointed singers, of whom Asaph was chief, to praise the Lord in formal worship. David arranged for the training of a large group of singers, and gave them psalms to be used on various occasions. In the temple worship from Solomon's time on there were Levites who, according to David's plan, had charge of the music. We read (II Chron. 29:30) that there was in the days of Hezekiah a collection of the songs of David and Asaph. There no doubt continued to be additions to this collection, until the days of Ezra, who is credited by tradition with having fixed the form of the Book of Psalms as we have it today. In its completed form, therefore, the book of the Psalms was the hymnbook of the second temple.

As indicated in the classification in Lesson VI the subject matter of the book has a wide range also. There are songs of personal experience and songs of national life; songs relating to specific historical events and songs so subjective as to be lifted above all interests of time. There are Psalms of God's glory in creation, and Psalms in praise of God's Word. Messianic Psalms, we have noticed, present the Anointed both in humiliation and in glory. There are Psalms which may have been written for specific worship occasions, such as the bringing of the ark up to Jerusalem. There is one group, a collection within the collection, known as the Songs of Degrees (120—134). These were probably sung by the people who were on religious pilgimages to Jerusalem. They frequently voice a desire for Mount Zion and the House of the Lord.

Since Psalms is the middle book of the Bible, it contains the middle chapter, Psalm 117. This is also the shortest chapter in the Bible. Its near neighbor, Psalm 119, is the longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. It is also interesting to note that Psalm 118:8 is the middle verse of the Bible. Psalms 1 and 23 are probably the most familiar passages of Scripture to thousands. The Twenty-third Psalm is usually the first connected passage to be memorized by children. With the possible exception of the Lord's Prayer it has had a place in the mind and hearts of Christendom such as no other piece of literature, secular or sacred, has had. It has delighted the childhood and comforted the deathbed of untold thousands.

Poetic Form

The enjoyment of the Psalms may be greatly increased by an appreciation of their poetic forms. It is unfortunate that the Authorized Version does not show in any way the poetic form of the lines. Modern versions improve upon this, and such an edition as Moulton's Modern Readers' Bible, although taking some liberties with the text, shows in a graphic way the effect of the parallelism and the stanza formation. The parallelism which we studied in the last lesson gives us usually the couplet, although often the thought goes on to a third line, making a triplet. These simpler units may then be combined into thought stanzas or strophes of from four to ten lines. These stanzas may be set off with a refrain, repeated after the fashion of modern poetry (Psalm 46). In some of the longer Psalms the stanza formations are built up into magnificent odes. Sometimes one chorus seems to answer another (Psalm 24), or the congregation chants a response to each sentence of the leader (Psalm 136). The most artificial poetic device, and one which is lost in translation, is the acrostic. Seven of the Psalms (25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145) use this device. It may have been used to assist the memory. In the acrostic the letters beginning the successive lines or couplets or stanzas are arranged in alphabetical order, but in some instances some of the letters are omitted or the order is changed.

We shall now proceed to a study of some individual Psalms, which shall be to us an indication of the riches of this book.

Psalm 1. In the text this Psalm is anonymous. By Jewish tradition it is assigned to Ezra, the final compiler of the whole collection. It very effectively serves as a preface to the book, for it places in contrast the condition and the destiny of the pious and the wicked, the lovers and the despisers of God's law. It is thus a summary of the teachings of the Psalms—the conflict between good and evil, with the sure victory of the one and the sure punishment of the other. It is still a frequent practice to place first in a hymnal or songbook a song which sounds the keynote of the collection. In this Psalm the contrast between the life devoted to meditation on the divine law and the life which is willingly subject to the surrounding influences of evil is developed by a beautiful imagery: the tree, rooted in well-watered soil, growing and bearing fruit by means of an inner life and character; and the chaff, winnowed and driven from the threshing floor by irresistible forces from without. "Oh, the happiness," the Psalm begins. It is an ejaculation of strong emotion, and is only enforced by the observation of hundreds of years. What a motivation for a further study of the Word of God! Observe the method of Biblical poetry in the progression of thought in three sets of words of the first three lines: walketh, standeth, sitteth; counsel, way, seat; wicked, sinners, scornful. The nature of evil as well as good is ever progressive and cumulative.

Psalm 19. Every work of literary merit has unity. Especially is it necessary in a lyric poem that one theme and one mood bind the parts together. At first view this Psalm seems to violate this rule. For in verses 1-6 the subject is the firmament and the sun, and the rest of the poem speaks of the law of God and its application to the needs of the heart. Where is the unity? We have here the device of setting side by side two contrasting things without connecting words of any kind, and yet by the very contrast securing unity of effect. Placed in contrast are the heavens above and the law within, the works and the words of God. The two together are a unified revelation of the perfections of God. Just as the heavenly bodies, though speechless (see margin), testify to the whole world of the government of God, so the Word of God meets every need of the human heart. It is of interest to note that the name of the Deity used in connection with the heavens is God,

the Creator God, whose work all may see. But the second part is "the law of the Lord," revealed in those in covenant relations with Him.

Psalm 23. David, the shepherd boy, had abundant opportunity from his own experience to accumulate the imagery of this exquisite shepherd Psalm. How often had he found for his own sheep the abundant pasturage, the satisfying waters, and the safe path! How often against the lion and the bear, and other deadly dangers, had he protected them! Some commentators have seen a change of imagery at verse 5 from the pasture land to the banqueting hall. But others who are familiar with eastern shepherd life see the shepherd to the end, killing the snakes to make safe feeding grounds, anointing the cuts and bruises, bringing the brimming cup to the sick or wounded sheep, and safely enfolding them with protecting kindness. The principle of unity would argue for this interpretation. The Psalm, of course, has a spiritual meaning, picturing "the secret of a happy life, a happy death, and a happy eternity." Jesus has made it more precious by identifying Himself as the Shepherd of the sheep. There may be significance in the fact that the preceding Psalm, the twenty-second, pictures the good shepherd giving his life for the sheep. We look forward to the appearance in glory of our "chief Shepherd" (I Pet. 5:4).

Psalm 24. It was David who captured the stronghold of Jerusalem and converted the ancient heathen fortress into the center of the worship of Jehovah. One of the high points in the life of the Psalmist David was the day in which he removed the ark, the symbol of God's presence, from the house of Obed-edom to the tabernacle on Mount Zion. It is quite generally agreed that this Psalm was used in the ceremonials of that day. The first part would be a fitting chant as the solemn procession begins the ascent of the hill. When the gate is reached, there comes the call to admit the new Monarch of the city, the King of Glory, who is identified as Jehovah, mighty in battle. The effect is heightened with the repetition of the call and the shouting of that dread name, Jehovah-Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts. Twice in II Samuel 6, where the events of this day are recounted, is the Lord referred to by that solemn name. It is the password to which there can be no resistance, and the ark enters and is carried to its resting place. The Psalm thus illus-

trates the holiness and the homage which is required of those who would worship our sovereign God.

Psalm 29. This is possibly the finest nature poem in the Book of Psalms. It is a magnificent description of a thunderstorm sweeping over the land. We see the storm forming over the Mediterranean and hear the distant rolling thunder, the voice of the Lord. Then the storm approaches and breaks in fury. The cedars of Lebanon are lashed and broken in the wind, and the ground trembles in the fury of the storm. The wild animals are terror-stricken; the leaves are blown from the trees. The lightning flashes are separated only by the crack and roll of the thunder. Finally the storm disappears to the south over the land of Kadesh, and the quietness which follows accentuates the effect. But this scene is pictured not for its own sake merely. The awe and the glory of it are a call to worship the God who speaks through the storm, and to repose trust in His protection and His peace.

Psalms 42, 43. These two Psalms, which we may judge because of their common refrain to have been originally one, are an illustration of the frequent note of sorrow and complaint which is found in the Psalms. For life's devotion is never far removed from the universal human grief which needs God's help. The occasion in this case seems to be the exile of the psalmist from the sanctuary of God. The first stanza is filled with despondency: panting, and tears, and the memory of the former happy days. The refrain beginning, "Why art thou cast down?" is an exhortation to hope and an assurance of a future time of joy. The second stanza returns to dejection. He is overwhelmed in waves of trouble. Particularly painful is the cruel taunt of his enemies: "Where is thy God?" Again the refrain reassures his heart. The third stanza is an appeal to God to judge the nation which thus oppresses him. As he prays that God will again lead him to His tabernacle, there comes the glad conviction that he will again praise God at the sacred altar. The light breaks in glorious hope around the third refrain.

Psalm 109. This is chosen as an illustration of the Psalms of imprecation. These Psalms have been a stumbling block to many. How can a Christian, with his heart filled with the love taught in the New Testament, enjoy reading and partici-

pate in feeling such terrible wishes of evil upon his fellow men? We need to remind ourselves that David, to whom this Psalm is attributed, was in his own life relatively free from the spirit of vindictiveness. Remember his kindness to Saul and his house, and to Shimei. These prayers for punishment, therefore, may be thought of as directed not at individuals as such, but rather at evil in a collective or an abstract sense. The language is the sharpened realism of poetic imagery. The hatred is against the system of evil, not the men overcome by it. It is still our duty to hate evil, and long for its overthrow. At the same time we can hope and pray for the salvation of the individuals involved. The New Testament teaches, not that there is no punishment or vengeance, but that it belongs to God. "If we believe that the imprecatory passages are divine, that they belong to Him in whose hands are life and death, the load is lifted off and laid upon One who is strong enough to bear the burden of their reproach" (Alexander). And while we love the sinner, let us fear lest we do not hate sin enough. To the Christian that will be a happy cry: "Babylon is fallen."

Psalm 116. This is a Psalm of experience; one might well say a Christian experience. It begins with an assertion of love for the Lord, a love grounded in what He has done. For when the psalmist was in desperate sorrow of soul, his call to the Lord found a gracious and merciful response. There came to him a bountiful rest, and a deliverance from death, tears, and falling. Whatever other men might do, he resolved to spend his life walking with the Lord. Yes, in the public assembly he would worship and testify to the salvation of the Lord. Free from the bonds of sin, he wished to be the bondservant of the Lord and serve Him in His courts. The Psalm that begins with love ends with praise. It came from a heart that knew God experimentally.

Psalm 119. This is the most elaborate of the acrostic Psalms, and the longest chapter in the Bible. It consists of twenty-two sections, and each section contains eight couplets. Each couplet, or verse, in the first section begins with **aleph,** the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Similarly all the letters of the alphabet are used in their respective sections. In the translation, of course, this does not appear, except for the Hebrew letters printed at the head of the various sections.

Another peculiarity of the Psalm is the occurrence of some synonym for the Word of God in all the couplets except two (vv. 122, 132). This device determines the subject matter: praises of the Word, exhortations to read it and reverence it, prayers for its proper effect upon the heart and life, and complaints against the wicked for despising it. Thus the Psalm, though didactic, has in it both prayer and praise. Ezra, its traditional author, may have written the Psalm for purposes of teaching, since he was a great scribe and teacher. Its acrostic form would agree with this supposition.

Psalm 126. This is one of the Songs of Degrees, which, as we have seen, were sung on the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Some of them seem to have had their origin in the great pilgrimages of the return from the Babylonian captivity, and would continue to be sung in commemoration of that happy time. This Psalm describes the mingled feelings of the people when the way opened for them to return to Jerusalem. In a daze of joy they laughed and they sang. The heathen about them explained their good fortune as the intervention of Jehovah in their behalf; the Israelites acknowledged that this was so. It is always better if we need but acknowledge what the world can see the Lord has done for us. But tears mingle with laughter. The return, we know, was in installments, and we can well imagine the tearful prayers of the ones left behind that the Lord would continue to turn their captivity, that the present seedtime might swell like the rivers of the dry south into a glorious harvest.

Psalm 128. This Psalm, another of the Songs of Degrees, pictures the happy family life of the Jewish people. It is fitting that this theme should be treated in the pilgrimage songs, as the great annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem were family gatherings as well. We recall how easy it was for Joseph and Mary to go a whole day's journey from Jerusalem, supposing Jesus was in the company, and not seeing Him. In this beautiful lyric we see the simple life—its unaffected piety, its daily labors, its family joys, its hope for the future. Of particular interest is the characteristic joy in posterity—the table full of children, with the promise of grandchildren and a peaceful old age.

Psalm 137. This Psalm is an elegy of the Babylonian captivity. An elegy is a poem of mourning, and here we see the

Israelites weeping for their homeland. The willow is often used in literature as a symbol of mourning; it is a fitting tree upon which to hang the harps which they used in their songs of mirth. Then their captors, whether in sincerity or in derision, asked to be entertained with the songs of Zion. Not only did they refuse, but they solemnly abjured musical skill of hand and tongue if they could be so forgetful of Jerusalem as to sing songs of joy in this land of sorrow. This love of the national homeland has by no means departed from the Jew, as is seen by their present return in great numbers to Palestine. The Psalm closes with another of the imprecations. It should be noted here that the destruction of Babylon had been clearly foretold by Isaiah and Jeremiah, and its terrible fate was simply the expression of divine wrath.

Psalm 139. This Psalm is better known than many. Its theme is, "The Searcher of Hearts Is Thy Maker." It is an example of a progress of thought in which the viewpoint changes. In the beginning there is distress at the thought of God's intimate knowledge of men. He is too close; He knows too much. And from this knowledge there is no escape; neither in space nor in time does it have limit. But as the psalmist thinks of God's detailed thought concerning him, even before his birth, the thought begins to turn. This infinite care of the Almighty is a blessing. Without Him he could not live, and God is ever with him. This leads him to renounce all evil, to line up with God, and to pray for the very thing from which he shrank at first—the intimate scrutiny of God. It is a common religious experience to welcome what earlier we had fought.

Psalm 150. Psalms 146-150 are often called the Hallelujah Psalms, because each of them begins and ends with "Praise ye the Lord," which is the translation of the Hebrew word "Hallelujah." The entire group of Psalms constitutes a great festal chorus of praise. The earlier ones of the group, though giving exhortations to praise, are chiefly devoted to stating reasons for such praise. But from 148 on we find chiefly the call to praise. It goes forth to the angelic hosts, and to the heavenly bodies; to all the elements of air and earth; to kings and all peoples; and finally in Psalm 150 every voice of the temple service is summoned to shout with full strength a united "Hallelujah." It is a glorious anticipation of the still more glorious anthem

of praise in which "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands" shall join before the throne of God, ascribing blessing, and honor, and glory, and power forever and ever.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. In what period of Jewish history was the complete Book of Psalms used as a hymnbook?
2. Which is the most loved Psalm? Why?
3. What is an acrostic poem? Which is the longest acrostic in the Psalms?
4. Explain how Psalm 1 is a preface to the entire collection.
5. Which Psalm secures unity by contrast?
6. What is a probable historical setting for Psalm 24?
7. What is a refrain? Name a Psalm that has one.
8. How may a Christian use the Psalms of imprecation?
9. How were the Songs of Degrees used?
10. See if you can find out what Hymn Jesus sang with His disciples just before He went out to the Garden.
11. What does the word "Hallelujah" mean? Where are the Hallelujah Psalms?
12. What connection does Ezra have with the Book of Psalms?

Lesson VIII

Job

Setting.—In the land of Uz, east of Palestine, some time in the patriarchal age, probably before Moses, and possibly before Abraham.

Author.—Unknown; among those conjectured are Job, Moses, Elihu, Solomon, Isaiah, Baruch, Ezra, and Jeremiah.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. Historical Introduction—in Prose, 1, 2.
II. The Controversy—in Poetry, 3:1—42:6.
  1. Job's complaint, 3.
  2. Three-cycle argument with three friends, 4—31.
  3. Speech of Elihu, 32—37.
  4. God's voice from the storm, 38—41.
  5. Job's reply, 42:1-6.

III. Historical Conclusion—in Prose, 42:7-17.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. Historical Introduction—in Prose, 1, 2.
II. The Controversy—in Poetry, 3:1—42:6.
  1. Job's complaint, 3.
  2. Argument between Job and his friends, 4—31.
    a. First cycle.
      (1) Eliphaz—A righteous God punishes sin, 4:1—5:27.
      Job—A plea for pity, 6:1—7:21.
      (2) Bildad—God is righteous, and Job a hypocrite, 8:1-22.
      Job—Admits being a sinner, but not a hypocrite, 9:1—10:22.
      (3) Zophar—The wise God knows wickedness, 11:1-20.
      Job—He knows all that, 12:1—14:22.
    b. Second cycle.
      (1) Eliphaz—The wicked, such as Job, stand wretched and self-condemned, 15:1-35.
      Job—Asserts his innocence and calls on God as his Vindicator, 16:1—17:16.
      (2) Bildad—The calamitous state of the wicked, 18:1-21.
      Job—Forsaken by friends, yet believes God will vindicate him, 19:1-29.
      (3) Zophar—The sure doom of the wicked, 20:1-29.
      Job—Wicked sometimes go free, 21:1-34.
    c. Third cycle.
      (1) Eliphaz—Job has sinned and must repent, 22:1-30.
      Job—Would find God and appear before Him, 23:1—24:25.

(2) Bildad—The greatness and power of God, before whom none is just, 25:1-6.
Job—Insists on his innocency and faith, 26:1—28:28.
(3) Job—Contrasts his former days and present state; closes the argument with assertion of his undeserved punishment, 29:1—31:40.

3. Speech of Elihu—Trials test our goodness, 32:1—37:24.
4. God's voice from the storm. Man cannot know the ways of God, 38—41.
5. Job's reply, 42:1-6.

III. Historical Conclusion—in Prose, 42:7-17.

Selections for Reading: Chapters 1—4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 19, 23, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 40, 42.

"I call this book one of the grandest things ever written with pen," wrote Thomas Carlyle. "The greatest poem whether of ancient or modern literature," was Tennyson's tribute. And this is Luther's opinion: "Majestic and sublime as no other book in Scripture." These men and thousands of others have been drawn to this inspired and inspiring book, not only by its remarkable literary form, but still more by its treatment of a great and persisting human problem—the mystery of suffering. Here we do not have a mere discussion of the problem; the issue is really brought home to us as we see it come to life in the actual person and the concrete experience of the sufferer, Job. That Job is a historical character is attested by Ezekiel's mentioning him in connection with Noah and Daniel (Ezek. 14:14, 20) who are of course historical. James, too, speaks of Job. In the experience of Job the Lord has revealed to us what attitude He would have us take when we face sufferings which we do not understand.

The Situation

The book opens with a picture of Job as a great man of the East, so religious as to win from the Lord Himself the commendation, "a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and avoideth evil." He was also very rich. This combination was just what the wisdom of the time, the wisdom to which Job held, would have expected. For did not a just God reward the righteous with prosperity, and punish the wicked with adversity? Job and his friends, in their happiness and comfort, knew that it was so.

But Job's prosperity does not last. Satan charges before God that Job's righteousness has a selfish motive: he serves God for the good things God gives him. It is to disprove this charge that God gives permission that Job should suffer innocently. And so we see the patriarch, all unconscious of the part he is playing in this great test case of the ages, bow his noble head in sorrow and pain as are taken away from him first his property, then his family, and then his health. Stricken with a loathsome disease, probably one of the worst forms of leprosy, he sits on the ash heap outside the city walls. Although urged by his own wife to "curse God and die," Job without sin submits himself to the inscrutable will of the God he has learned to trust. The stage is set for the main part of the book by the arrival of Job's three friends, who sit for seven days in silent contemplation of his grief.

An Explanation by Job's Friends

But the friends are not thoughtless in their silence. They are reaching their positive conclusion that Job must have sinned to bring upon himself such punishment. They do not come to this conclusion because of any known facts concerning his sin. It is pure armchair logic: Trouble is punishment for sin; Job has trouble; therefore Job must have sinned. It is an orthodox opinion, they feel, necessary for the justification of God in His deeds. They will not let their friendship prevent their defense of God. And so they await their opportunity to speak—not to comfort, but to condemn.

That opportunity comes when Job with deep feeling curses the day in which he was born, and expresses his desire to die. Cautiously, but boldly too, Eliphaz begins the round of speeches that are to continue through many chapters. He clearly states the doctrine that God punishes wickedness, and that the innocent do not suffer. This doctrine, with its obvious application that Job is a sinner, is stated over and over and elaborated in many ways by the three friends, as they go through three cycles of speeches. Each speech is answered by Job, and so we have an elaborate dialogue discussion of the issue which has been raised. The friends insist that Job is a great sinner, a liar, a hypocrite, and urge him to repent and reform. Relying on their dreams, their proverbs of the ancients, and their imper-

fect observation of life, they become dogmatic, vehement, and bitter. Many things that they say are true, but the deadly half-truth leads them into error. They have a loved theory to support, and they bend everything to it. If the facts do not fit, so much the worse for the facts. They are like the geologist who moved the boulders down the mountainside because they were too high up to fit his theory. They cannot bring any definite accusation against Job, but they try to close his mouth with, "It must be so."

Job's Protest and Appeal

Job in his replies pleads for sympathy. He knows all they are telling him. He does not claim sinless perfection, but he challenges his friends to point wherein he has deserved such extreme punishment. Sometimes he becomes sarcastic against these know-it-all tormentors. He condemns them for forging lies against him, and denies that the wicked are always punished here. But more and more Job ignores his "miserable comforters," and becomes absorbed in the problem of his relationship with God. Here Job is puzzled. The things his friends are saying he himself had formerly believed. But the unquestionable facts of his own experience no longer square with the theory. He knows he is suffering greatly, but he also knows that his faithful attitude toward God has not changed. Moreover, his failure to secure understanding and sympathy from man drives him back upon God. He may not understand the dealings, but he has confidence in the God who is doing the dealing. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (13:15). And because he sees that it is only God who can vindicate him before men, he longs to present his case directly before God. The challenges which he wants to present to God seem presumptuous until we remember that Job's very character is being tested. We know what Job did not know—that the integrity and the honesty and faithfulness of an innocent man is to be demonstrated by this great trial. Job cannot be honest and say that he is suffering for his sin, for he knows he is not (10:2, 7). A less worthy man would have denounced the God who deals so unjustly. It was Job's great faith which made him feel that he could find explanation and justification if only he could bring his case directly before God (16:21; 23:3-7). God

could bring the theory concerning this mystery of suffering into agreement with the facts in his case. And he rises to a remarkable expression of faith that after death his Advocate, his Kinsman-Redeemer, shall bring him into the very presence of God (19:25-27).

In the last round of speeches Zophar, the last of the friends, has nothing to say. This probably indicates that they have used up all their arguments and give Job up as hopelessly estranged from God. Job closes the debate with a magnificent protest of his innocence. The cause of his suffering is still a mystery which only God can explain. In this Job is right, but in his zeal to defend himself he becomes pretty much self-centered. In three chapters (29-31) the first person pronoun is used almost two hundred times.

Elihu's Explanation

We may imagine that the discussion has collected a group of listeners. And now, when Job and his three accusers become silent, one of the spectators, a younger man named Elihu, takes it upon himself to carry forward the argument. Some interpreters consider Elihu a messenger of God who explains Job's problem in answer to his prayer. But in view of the fact that his four speeches are met with absolute indifference by Job, and also by the friends, we come to the sounder interpretation that Elihu is self-appointed as the spokesman of God. Very pompously, and with more words than matter, he condemns both Job and the three friends, but tends to agree with the latter in their criticism of Job's self-righteousness. Like the three, he foolishly attempts to justify and explain the ways of God; but he is somewhat nearer the facts than they are in his explanation. He develops the theory that "suffering is one of the voices by which God warns and restores men." Suffering from this viewpoint is seen to have a purifying purpose. This is a long step from the view that suffering is punitive, a punishment for sin.

But all Elihu's argument has no effect on Job. The sufferer has appealed his case to God Himself, and he will accept no decision from a professed spokesman for the Divine Court. His faith waits for the answer from the Judge of all the earth, who alone knows men's hearts and can pronounce with truth con-

cerning them. There is something grand and awful in the endurance of Job, waiting there on that ash heap, his faith literally compelling divine interference in his behalf. God honored that faith as He could not honor the special pleaders who presumed to understand and explain Him.

The Answer of God

In the latter part of Elihu's address he is describing the approach of a great storm. The sound of the thunder shuts him off in his wordiness, and from the midst of the storm God answers, not Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, not Elihu, but Job. All the discussions have been about an absent God; now He is present and audible. Job had prayed, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him"; now God has answered his prayer and has manifested Himself.

The answer of Jehovah is surprising. One would have supposed that God would set all these disputants right by a clear statement of just why the righteous must suffer. But He seems to say nothing about the point at issue. He seems not to have heard Job's challenge at all. Why should God need to argue with men and to explain Himself to them? It is enough that He should show Job and his friends that they have spoken things that they did not understand. This He proceeds to do by facing them, not with the mystery of suffering, but with mysteries far more obvious and more elementary. He challenges them to explain the mystery of His power and goodness in the creation of the physical universe about us, in His management of the weather, the seasons, and the instincts of the animals. The hippopotamus and the crocodile, how perfectly He has adapted them to the life they are to lead on the earth! If men cannot understand the ways of God in the physical realm, how much less in the realm of His moral and spiritual dealings with man.

And so in a sense God does not answer Job's questions at all. The reason for the suffering of a good man remains a mystery. But the happiness and good fortune of men are just as much of a mystery. When we ask, Why do we receive evil? we may also ask, Why do we receive good? It is all in God's hand, and He deals with wisdom beyond the understanding of man. To know that God is good, and to trust Him in the dark—

this is the lesson that Job learns. Humbled and submissive, he repents of his rash words.

Job's Victory

Job's real victory is not merely in learning that his attitude has been more acceptable to God than has that of the friends who condemn him. His major triumph is the fact that God revealed Himself to him. The New Testament tells us that the one who comes to God "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Throughout his trial Job clung to his belief in God, and in the outcome God taught him that He is a rewarder of those who seek. "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee," said Job, and it is in this wonderful assurance for his faith that the greatest blessing to Job came. He had cried, and God had answered. His faith had made him superior to all trials and afflictions.

The prose conclusion tells how God restored Job to a prosperity even greater than that he had known before. This is but incidental to Job's continued trust in God, for the test has proved to the adversary and to all others that Job will believe even in adversity. But this restoration of Job may be thought of as God's refutation of the three friends in "the only language they could understand." It is a beautiful picture to see Job praying for the men who had so abused him and failed him in his need.

If we would truly understand the trial that Job went through and fully appreciate the greatness of his faith, it would be necessary for us to forget all that we have learned from the Bible that would help us in such a situation. For none of the Bible had yet been written, and Job's knowledge of God was only such as he could get through his experiences with God. He had none of the promises that we rest upon. He did not know that "all things work together for good to them that love God." He did not know that the Lord chastens His sons for their good. He probably did not know that there was an adversary who plotted against him and tried to turn his heart from God. There was not written for his learning the truth about the resurrection and the future life of punishments and rewards. Job was sincerely reaching out after God, but it was

pretty much a groping in the dark. All the greater, therefore, is the wonder of his faith.

The Book of Job illustrates the necessity of studying a book as a whole. The book with its entire message is inspired of God, and given for our instruction. But we must be sure to get the entire message. The book is true, but in some isolated parts it is false, for God rejects and condemns the words of the three friends. It is true that they said what they did, but what they said is not true.

Job has important teachings on Christian doctrine.

1. We have here the teaching that Satan is an evil personality, opposed to God and His saints. He works as an adversary, one who accuses innocent men, and tries to turn them against God. Under the permission of God he has power over the elements and over human affairs. He is exceedingly cunning, and works through men to accomplish his purposes. But he can do these things only as God permits. It is comforting to know that, though the adversary is powerful, he is not all-powerful.

2. There are many illustrations here of the attributes of God. His power and wisdom are manifest in the marvels of creation. His holiness is testified to in the sacrifices of Job for the sins of his friends and of his children. His personality is demonstrated in the way in which He asserts His will, and in His manifestation to Job. That Satan was subject to God's limitations shows His omnipotence. In contrast to man's essential ignorance His omniscience shows forth clearly. God shows His justice and righteousness in His fair and discerning judgment between Job and his friends. And for the mercy and love of his God Job's latter days must have been full of praise.

3. The scarlet cord of redemption which runs through the Bible may be said to shine out brightly in Job. In the throes of his spiritual struggle he wonders how a man can be just before God unless there is a daysman, an umpire between them to mediate for them, to "lay his hand upon us both" (9:33). His faith in God leads him to see that there must be, there will be, a **Goel**, a Kinsman-Redeemer who will justify him before God and in the sight of men. From our New Testament viewpoint we can see how perfectly Christ, the Mediator between God and man, fulfills and realizes this prophetic vision of Job.

4. We have a very early suggestion of the teaching developed in the New Testament concerning life beyond the grave when Job answers his own question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (14:14), with the confident assertion that he would see God (19:26, 27). This truth, also, came out through Job's faith that God would justify him on the other side, if not on this side, of death.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. What is the main theme of the Book of Job?
2. Contrast Job in his temporal and spiritual condition at the beginning and at the close of the book.
3. Why did God permit Job to be tested?
4. Why did Job's friends accuse him of being a sinner?
5. Can you approve of Job's speeches concerning himself and concerning God?
6. Give reasons for or against considering Elihu the authorized spokesman of God.
7. Would the teaching of this book be different if Job had died in poverty?
8. What does the book teach about Satan? About God? About Christ?
9. Find examples of remarkable insight about the nature of the universe (e.g., 26:7).

Lesson IX

Proverbs

General Content.—A collection of proverbs and other wisdom literature for the instruction of the young.

Authors.—Solomon, Agur, Lemuel.

Divisions (for general view and memory work)

I. A Preface, in Praise of Wisdom, 1—9.
II. Proverbs of Solomon, 10:1—22:16.
III. Words of the Wise, 22:17—24:34.
IV. Proverbs of Solomon Copied by the Men of Hezekiah, 25—29.
V. Supplemental Writings, 30, 31.
   1. Words of Agur, 30.
   2. Words of King Lemuel, 31:1-9.
   3. In praise of a virtuous woman, 31:10-31.

Subjects Treated (for reference and study)

Because of the miscellaneous character of the book, a logical outline of the subject matter is difficult. Among others, however, the following subjects are referred to here and there throughout the book.

1. Wisdom and its opposite, folly.
2. Industry and its opposite, laziness.
3. Good and evil uses of the tongue.
4. Counsel for the conduct of business.
5. Wine and drunkenness.
6. Friendship.
7. Poverty and riches.
8. Courtesies and civilities.
9. Womanhood, good and bad.
10. Family life.
11. The king—his counselors and his subjects.

Selections for Reading: Chapters 1, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 20, 23, 25, 30, 31.

The Proverb

Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are classed as the wisdom books of the Old Testament. If the Song of Solomon is sometimes included also in this group, it is rather because it has no other convenient company than that it has the same character as the wisdom books. In Israel there developed, in addition to priests and prophets, a group of teachers called "wise men,"

and these wisdom books represent the type of literature which they produced. In form it is marked by the extensive use of the **mashal,** or proverb. In substance it is philosophy, an explanation of things derived from observation, experience, and reflection. Inspiration has made use of this form of literature as well as others to give us the truth which we need to know. It is a particularly forceful form to use, too, for the sharpness and the vividness of the proverb makes it a very effective teaching instrument. It stays in the memory long after the mere abstraction has been forgotten. Jesus used the wisdom forms in His parables and in many of His discourses. There is an aptness to ideas thus presented that one cannot get away from. The form would have special value where many people were unable to read, and thus were thrown back upon oral instruction.

In Job we saw large use made of the proverb. The wisdom of the ancients as expressed in pithy sayings was the chief stock in trade of Job's friends. Job too used many proverbs. The Book of Psalms, however, makes small use of the wisdom forms. In subject matter, too, Psalms is very different from Proverbs. The Psalms, we have seen, were lyrical and subjective; Proverbs is didactic and objective. "Psalms is calculated to make our hearts warm toward God in holy and pious affection, but Proverbs makes our faces shine before men in prudent, discreet, honest, and useful living" (Benson).

The Book of Proverbs names three authors—Solomon, Agur, and Lemuel. Of Agur and Lemuel we know nothing more. Solomon, the literary son of a literary father, was eminently qualified to be the chief author of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. If he is the author of Job, as is possible, almost the entire body of Biblical wisdom centers about him. Solomon, we remember, asked and received from God, a special measure of divine wisdom. He was known among his contemporaries, even in distant lands, for his great learning. He was a philosopher, an architect, a scientist, a statesman, a psychologist. We read that he wrote three thousand proverbs, and many songs. I Kings 4:32. The entire Book of Proverbs is in the spirit of Solomon, and without doubt is from his epoch. There is no reference in the book to idolatry, as there certainly would have been if it came from a later period. That Solomon

in his later life did not exemplify some of the teachings we find here does not argue against his authorship. He is not the only man, we are sad to know, who has taught better than he lived. Inspiration may at times use unlikely means.

This does not mean, of course, that Solomon wrote all the book. Proverbs comes from Solomon somewhat as the Psalms come from David; his is the chief voice and the dominating spirit. There is no reason, either, why Solomon could not have incorporated in proverbs written under his own name proverbs which were the common possession of the school of "wise men." The heart of the book is the longer section of simple proverbs (10:1—22:16). This section is clearly assigned to Solomon. The preface (1—9) may well have been written by Solomon, although it is not definitely ascribed to him. The short section (22:17—24:34) which follows the second division is said to be the "words of the wise," without any individual authors being mentioned. The next division (25—29) is a selection, from the remaining proverbs of Solomon, which was made in the days of Hezekiah, more than two hundred years after Solomon's death. That the selection was made from a written collection is indicated by the word "copied" (25:1). Possibly at the same time the last two chapters were included in the collection.

This book gets its name from the title in the first verse—the word "proverbs." The Hebrew word thus translated is **mashal**. The **mashal** is something more than we understand by "proverb." The word means primarily a likeness or a comparison, and is closely related in meaning to the New Testament word, "parable." It may be a single sentence, as in many of the common proverbs which we know best; but it may be also a lengthy parallel case, such as Nathan's story of the poor man and the ewe lamb. The title of the book, therefore, fittingly describes every part of it even though some parts do not take the form of the concise and filed couplet which is the most common form. But whether long or short, the **mashal** always sets forth in vivid imagery and in clean-cut and polished phrasing the idea to be expressed. Usually the **mashal** is a unit in itself, without any thought relationship to what precedes or to what follows it. Sometimes, however, proverbs about the same subject are grouped together in what has been called a proverb

cluster. An interesting form of the **mashal** is the number sonnet:

For three things the earth is disquieted,
And for four which it cannot bear:
For a servant when he reigneth;
And a fool when he is filled with meat;
For an odious woman when she is married;
And an handmaid that is heir to her mistress (30:21-23).

Sometimes the proverb is developed into an elaborate and beautiful poem, as in the warning cry of wisdom (1:20-33).

Practical Wisdom

The chief interest of the Book of Proverbs is in the practical life. It is a manual of conduct, guiding those who will hear to success in this life. As such, it is the greatest body of moral precepts ever collected. But it is not a secular book. If the life discussed is external, it is also religious. It presents the saint on his feet instead of his knees, but a saint notwithstanding. We have here the "laws of heaven for life on earth" (Arnot). The existence of God and His just government of the world are taken for granted; religion is seen as the great controlling motive in the successful life. There is, therefore, in the book a profound religious spirit. Practical wisdom "resting upon and rising out of religious character" is its chief concern.

Proverbs is for the worshiper of God a truly valuable book. For both the Judaism of the Old Testament and the Christianity of the New Testament are ethical religions. They have an eye, and a keen one, to conduct. Someone has observed that if one gets under the surface of the Bible anywhere, one finds conduct. It is not enough that a man be saved; he must live like a saved man. And so we have here the everyday conduct measured by the familiar standard of righteousness. As in many of the practical sections of the New Testament, the light of lofty religious concepts floods the daily path. The consciousness of God and His way for men is brought into all the affairs of life, even the most secular.

This is seen clearly as we come to understand the wisdom which is insisted upon throughout the book as the chief qualification for successful living. To be wise is not to be "filled and clogged with information" (Genung). It is not to have the

brain loaded with shadowy theories and notions half-understood. It is rather a true appreciation of the meaning of life, the real purpose of existence. It is, to use some of the terms of Proverbs, that understanding, and prudence, and subtlety, and discretion which lays hold on vital and thoroughgoing principles. It is seeing life whole, and not in parts. It is the essential sanity which will not spoil life by foolish choices and rash deeds.

The very beginning of such wisdom, we are told, is "the fear of the Lord" (1:7; 9:10). This fear of the Lord is not a shrinking from Him which comes from guilt, but rather a recognition of Him and of His will. It is reverence and a humble waiting before Him as a learner. The teaching of the wise men is, that the life which leaves God out of account is not sane and is partial and incomplete. Their observation and experience had convinced them of that. Wisdom, then, comes to be identified with piety and religion. To be wise is to be good, and to be good is to be wise. If one knows and serves God, he is in a good way to receive everything that makes life worth while. If he ignores or refuses God, he is sure to miss the best gifts of life. Wisdom is godly conduct; folly is wickedness. The conflict in the book is between two ways of living, which is the same thing as saying two attitudes toward God.

The Two Ways

In the early chapters Wisdom is personified as a woman, a noble lady, seeking to win the confidence and the love of the youths to whom she addreses her appeal. She carries credentials from the Creator, with whom she was associated in the making of the worlds. She describes her house of seven pillars, and her gracious provision for those who choose her ways. Insistently, in every public place, she warns the simple, the fool, the sons of men that they choose not death, but life; not failure, but success.

But as a foil to Lady Wisdom there is another woman, the Strange Woman. For the pictures which we have here of the wiles of the harlot are more than a protest against unchastity, although they are that. The conflict in the book between wisdom and folly is strikingly presented here through a personification. The strange woman, Dame Folly, as a rival of Lady

Wisdom, bids also for the affections of the sons of men. She also has prepared a house, to which she invites the simple ones who walk in the streets. And those who, disregarding the call of Wisdom, yield to her lures, go as an ox to the slaughter. Wisdom calls to a happier way.

This is the main theme of the Book of Proverbs. It is good while reading here to keep it always in mind. And godliness is the main theme also of a good life. Keep that in mind too. To do so puts both unity and a divine dignity into our living.

Along the way, however, there are many places to stop and to notice the contributing themes. The various pictures of the man who chooses Folly rather than Wisdom are both interesting and instructive. There is the sluggard, lying lazily in bed, wishing for a little more sleep; or burying his hand in the dish, too lazy to put it to his mouth; or losing a harvest because it was too cold to plow; or sitting listlessly in the house because of a lion in the streets. There is the fool whose eyes are in the end of the earth, forgetting the here and now. There is the man who became surety for a stranger, and smarts for it. There is the meddling busybody who finds he has caught a dog by the ears. There is the sharpster who haggles in the market, but boasts as he returns with his bargain. There is the hoarder, who is not moved by the sufferings of the poor to sell his corn. There is the contentious wife, whose nagging is as nerve-racking as a continuous dropping of unwelcome rain.

The pictures of the good are no less striking. The good man guards his mouth and is slow to anger. He does not harp on past offenses. He avoids excess and display. He takes a lower seat until called to a higher. He restrains his appetites. He is kind to the poor, thus lending to God. He feeds his enemy, and leaves vengeance to God. His friendship survives adversity. He is particularly happy in his home, with a good wife and obedient children. A favorite passage of the book is the acrostic poem which ends it. It is a gracious picture of a good woman, and glorifies those qualities of character, industry, and domestic purity upon which a happy home life must always rest.

Christ in Proverbs

The New Testament quotes from or alludes to this book fourteen times. Its method of teaching was largely used by Jesus and some of the apostles. There are certain striking parallels, also, between the personified Wisdom of Proverbs and the Person Christ Jesus, who was "made unto us wisdom." The following comparison is adapted from "Christ in All the Scriptures," by Hodgkin.

Wisdom	*The Word*
Prov. 8:23. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.	John 1:1, 2. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.
8:27-29. When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass on the face of the depth: . . . when he appointed the foundations of the earth.	John 1:3. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.
	Heb. 1:2. His Son, . . . by whom also he made the worlds.
	Col. 1:17. He is before all things, and by him all things consist.
8:30. Then I was by him, as a master workman (RV).	Luke 3:22. Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.
8:22. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.	I Cor. 1:30. Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom.
8:30. I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.	Col. 2:3. In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
8:14. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding.	Luke 10:21. Hid . . . from the wise and prudent, . . . revealed . . . unto babes.
2:4. If thou . . . searchest for her (Wisdom) as for hid treasures.	Matt. 18:3. Except ye be converted.
8:5. O ye simple, understand wisdom.	
1:20, 23. Wisdom crieth . . . . Turn you at my reproof.	Matt. 11:28. Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest.
1:33. Whoso hearkeneth unto me . . . shall be quiet for fear of evil.	John 7:37. Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.
8:1, 4. Doth not Wisdom cry? . . . Unto you, O men, I call.	John 6:35. I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger.
9:5. Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled.	Gal. 2:20. The Son of God, who loved me.
8:17. I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.	Matt. 7:7. Seek, and ye shall find.
8:35. Whoso findeth me findeth life.	John 6:47. He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.
8:32. Blessed are they that keep my ways.	John 15:10. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.
8:6. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things.	Luke 4:22. All . . . wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.

There is truly a remarkable parallel between Wisdom crying in the streets, warning and inviting whoever would hear, and with regret watching many choose the ways of death; and Jesus, preaching and teaching on the roads and in the city courts, warning of impending judgment and inviting to life and peace, and watching with tears the rejection that meant death and ruin. With the New Testament conflict between good and evil reduced largely to terms of acceptance or rejection of Jesus Christ, it is easy to see the deeper meaning of Proverbs for us of the Gospel dispensation.

Hodgkin calls attention also to the remarkable sentence in the words of Agur. Agur, disclaiming his knowledge of the Holy One, asks,

Who hath ascended up into heaven, and descended?
Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?
Who hath bound the waters in a garment?
Who hath established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name,
And what is his son's name,
If thou canst tell?

Except by inspiration, the Jews did not speak of the Son of God, for that was to them the language of blasphemy. With what bitter opposition did the Jews of Jesus' day deny His claim that He was the Son of God! Yet here is Agur asking for the name of the Son of God. "The Son of God is come" (I John 5:20), and His name is called Jesus.

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. Find proverbs on the various topics listed under Subjects Treated.
2. Name the wisdom books of the Old Testament.
3. Compare Psalms and Proverbs.

4. What proof is there that the Book of Proverbs was not finally arranged by Solomon?
5. What is a **mashal?**
6. Find other examples of the number sonnet.
7. Does Proverbs think of the happy life in terms of earth or heaven?
8. What do we mean when we say that Proverbs is concerned with ethics?
9. What is the wisdom which is magnified in this book?
10. Find other striking pictures of vice and folly in Proverbs.
11. Find other pictures of virtue and wisdom.
12. Is Proverbs in any sense a book of prophecy?
13. State the fundamental meaning of Proverbs in terms of the Gospel era.

Lesson X

Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon

Ecclesiastes

General Content.—A wisdom book, partly in prose and partly in poetry, in which the problem of the worth-whileness of life is discussed.

Author.—Though Solomon's name does not occur in the book, tradition long held him to be the author from inferences in the book (1:1, 2). "The book may be regarded either as a writing of Solomon himself in his old age, or as words which, though not actually uttered by Solomon, accurately sum up his completed experience, are spoken from the standpoint of his finished course, teach the great lesson of his life as he himself learned it, and express the sentiments which he might rightly be supposed to entertain as he looked at life in the retrospect" (Davis, **Dictionary of the Bible**). Since the viewpoint is Solomon's in either case, the difficult question of authorship need not enter into the interpretation of the book.

Outline (for reference and study)

I. The Problem Stated—All Is Vanity, 1:1-11.
II. A Personal Experiment, 1:12—2:26.
III. Personal Observations, 3:1—7:29.
IV. Reasoning from Experience and Observations, 8:1—12:7.
V. Conclusion—All Is Vanity; Therefore Fear God, 12:8-14.

The miscellaneous character of the book makes outlining very difficult, but the outline given reveals something of the direction of the thought.

Selections for Reading: Chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 11, 12.

The title of Ecclesiastes is brought over from the title given the book in the Greek version. It means one who calls or addresses an assembly; therefore the subtitle "The Preacher." This is a probable meaning of the Hebrew word **Koheleth**, which is translated preacher, in the first verse of the book, and in other places.

Several words and phrases occur over and over throughout the book. "Vanity," which occurs about thirty-five times, means emptiness. It thus expresses the disappointment which is the theme of the book. "Vexation of spirit," occuring frequently with vanity, has a similar meaning—striving after

wind. "Under the sun," occurring twenty-eight times, gives the viewpoint of the book, and is the key to its interpretation. It is human reasoning concerning a problem of human existence. Without the light of heaven life is only disappointment and disillusionment.

Although Ecclesiastes is usually listed among the poetical books, it is actually in a considerable part prose. A philosophic discussion of a problem, such as this is, requires prose rather than poetry. This book illustrates, however, the tendency in Hebrew literature to swing back and forth between poetry and prose. There are some fine poetic gems in the book, notably the remarkable figurative description of old age in the last chapter. This mingling of prose and poetry will be found also in some of the prophetic books.

Ecclesiastes relates itself directly to the other two wisdom books. Its method is different, but like Job, it is concerned with a problem, a mystery of human life. In Job we have the mystery of one who is deprived of the rewards of life. A good man should be successful, according to the teachings of wisdom. The apparent failure of this law is the mystery of Job. In Ecclesiastes we have the mystery of one sated with the rewards of life. Surely success and prosperity will make one happy. But it does not. Why? That is the problem of this book. Ecclesiastes is like Proverbs in that it contains **mashals,** proverbs in a detached and pithy style. But the ruling spirit is different. Proverbs is the viewpoint of King Solomon in the height of his achievement and glory; Ecclesiastes is an old man's disappointed retrospect.

The Futility of Life

The theme of the book, then, is the emptiness of human life as such. The question raised is, What can give enduring satisfaction in this life? The answer is, The external satisfactions, while having a certain worth, are in the end a disappointment. No book of the Bible better illustrates the necessity of getting the message of a book as a whole. Isolated verses of Ecclesiastes give a partial, even a false, view. The entire teaching of the book, however, is true, although it is incomplete and needs to find its complement in the Gospel. Many readers are repelled by the frequent note of skepticism and despair.

The argument is a little difficult to get hold of, and so the book is hard to understand. But rightly understood, there is an evident need for its teachings in the body of inspired truth. Everyone realizes the tendency to become earth-centered in his affections, and it is most necessary to see a reason for transferring our affection to One who abides. We have here a most vivid Old Testament presentation of the New Testament teaching that "the world passeth away, and the desire thereof." "The Holy Spirit uses the book to show the workings of man's spirit, and to reveal the vanity of man's life apart from God."

The theme is thrown into full light at the outset. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity" (1:2). What's the use? Nature about us speaks of constant movement without any progress. The order and regularity are monotonous and wearying. The sun, rising and setting, pants wearily back to its starting place to do it all over again. The wind blows east, the wind blows west—and then it blows east again. The waters from the mountains rush to the sea, and they rush back in clouds in a never-ending circuit. Generations follow one another endlessly. That which seems to be new is but a repetition of the old. Men work for nothing, for nothing abides. Everything is futile.

This futility, this uselessness, is now illustrated by the personal experience of Solomon. If anyone ever had the opportunity to find out whether the rewards of life could satisfy, it was King Solomon. As the head of a great monarchy, he received the honors not only of his own people, but of foreign peoples as well. His name came to be synonymous with wisdom and great learning. His annual income was in the thousands of millions. If he wanted to build something, he built it; if he wanted to do anything, he did it. There was no exterior circumstance that could keep back his hand or his heart from any delight. He tasted earth to the full.

This experience and its consequent disillusionment is recounted for us. We see a life begun with strong desire and high hope tumble into weariness and great disgust. First was the search for wisdom, to which he applied his heart diligently. But all his wisdom could not make the crooked straight, nor supply what was lacking to make life whole. He learned that with wisdom comes also madness and folly, and that "in much

wisdom is much grief." Why should anyone want to be wise? It is only a striving after wind.

And so he turned from his study to the social life. But the banquet table and the foolish social joys soon cloyed his spirit. It does not take long to get enough of sweets. "I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth, What doeth it?" (2:2). To constructive works therefore! Great buildings, and beautiful vineyards, gardens, and orchards, with efficient irrigation systems! An impressive household establishment, with a great show of wealth in cattle and gold! Choruses and orchestras of every variety! But when he took inventory of all he had done he found—emptiness. For the wise man dies as does the fool, and the man of energy leaves his accomplishments to a foolish son—a Rehoboam, perhaps.

Leaving his own personal experience, Solomon lifts his eyes to observe the broader field of human life. We notice only a few of the things that he sees. One is the universal experience of death. This brings a second charge against life. It is not only that life is disappointing, but that there is nothing beyond this life to make up for the loss. At least, so far as man can see, he dies just like the beast; both go to one place. What does it profit to be a man? Again, life is out of joint, all out of adjustment. People in a never-ending stream, and all doing the wrong things, or milling about in confusion and chaos. In religion there is hypocrisy and broken vows. Those who love riches are doomed not to enjoy what they have accumulated. Even while they live their sleep is uneasy, and when they die they can carry nothing away. Who knows what may be called worth while in this brief, shadowy life?

The Satisfaction of the Inner Life

These experiences and observations, and others, are the materials with which the author thinks himself through to a conclusion. For there is a conclusion, and a positive one. Some people are so impressed with the negative and critical attitude toward life that they do not see the development of the other attitude. The book has its sadder, minor key, but it has also a major key, with a clearly positive attitude. This attitude appears early in the book and reappears at intervals until it becomes dominant at the end. This pendulum swing between

optimism and pessimism is one of the things that confuse the casual reader. At first the positive view appears as an island in a sea of despair; but as the argument progresses onward the islands increase in size until the final conclusion has the broad reach of a continent. The pessimism is a point of departure, not a permanent resting place.

A few quotations will reveal the nature of this major note. "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. . . . For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom and knowledge, and joy" (2:24, 26). "He hath made everything beautiful in his time: . . . I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. . . . It is the gift of God" (3:11-13). "It is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour . . . this is the gift of God. . . . God answereth him in the joy of his heart" (5:18-20). "I know that it shall be well with them that fear God" (8:12). "That shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (8:15). Further development of the same idea is found in 9:7; 9:9; and in chapters 11 and 12. Here we see that there is such a thing in life as a gift of God, whose gifts are always good, and that this gift abides to the end of life. That the next life should not be brought into view is to be expected, for the realm of action under consideration is "under the sun." The question of the book is, What is worth while in this life?

And here we find that there is something worth while. It is life itself. Not things, but life; not paraphernalia and equipment, but life. We find here a true recognition of God; one cannot be happy without Him. And we find labor; one cannot be happy without that. The "cheery gospel of work" receives large emphasis. For work gives us a real sense of the meaning of life, and involves unselfish labor for others. It is not merely self-centered. We find also moderation and a control of passions as a condition to happiness upon the earth. For passion quickly eats out the heart, leaving but an empty shell. There is an emphasis in the conclusion, also, on youth as the time when we should consecrate to God the vigor of our life. And there is also the exhortation to leave some things

which we cannot explain to the wisdom of God. The happy life, as we saw in Job, refuses to be disturbed by the unsolvables.

The teaching of the Book of Ecclesiastes is strikingly put in the words of Pierson: "Man is too big for this world." God put somehing into the heart of man that nothing on earth can fully satisfy. As Augustine prayed, "Thou hast created us for Thyself, and our heart cannot be quieted till it find repose in Thee." Men whose affection is for the earth must sooner or later mark time like Chesterfield: "I have seen all, coarse pullies, dirty ropes, behind the scenes, and I think of nothing now but killing time the best way I can." Inner character is the secret of it all. "The aids to nobler life are all within." As soon as joy is externalized, it fades away. On the other hand, an inner nature essentially at one with God cannot be disturbed or disappointed by a change of the world or of time. How wise the life that is spent from youth to old age in such godliness and inner tranquillity!

The beautiful poem at the beginning of chapter 12 deserves notice. It is a picture of old age. Many of the figures are evident in their meaning, others more obscure. We see vividly the trembling hands, the bowed legs, the few remaining teeth, the dimming eyes, the compressed lips, the loss of appetite, the weakened voice, the whitened hair, and finally the failure of the vital organs. This will always be a favorite passage of the Bible.

There are no quotations from Ecclesiastes in the New Testament, nor any certain allusions. The book is a startling commentary, however, on the words of Jesus to the woman of Samaria. "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13, 14).

Song of Solomon

General Content.—A collection of lyric poetry picturing the happy love of a bride and a bridegroom.

Author.—Solomon.

Outline (for reference and study)

The lack of a clear plot makes this another difficult book to outline. The following outline by Weddell indicates with some adequacy the nature of the sequence of the thought:

I. Love's Yearning Call: "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest" (1:7).
II. Love's Ardent Response: "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh" (2:8).
III. Love's Tender Constancy: "I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go" (3:4).
IV. Love's Sweet Confession: "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair" (4:1).
V. Love's Anxious Quest: "I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer" (5:6).
VI. Love's Plaintive Longing: "Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women" (6:1)?
VII. Love's Exultant Triumph: "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (7:10).
VIII. Love's Glad Fruition: "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved" (8:5)?

Selections for Reading: Read the entire book.

The title of this book is taken from the first verse, in which the authorship is clearly ascribed to Solomon. Sometimes it is called Song of Songs, a phrase also in the first verse. This expression is a Hebrew idiom which means a song of greatest excellence, like the phrases, holy of holies and heaven of heavens. The book is also sometimes called Canticles, from the Latin title of the book. It is no doubt the outstanding one of the one thousand and five songs that Solomon wrote.

In this book of eight chapters the deep affections of a man and a woman are expressed in very frank and beautiful language, in the form of dialogue, and using much exquisite, beautiful description of the scenery and country life in northern Palestine. The language is lyrical but bound together by a dramatic spirit.

Various Interpretations

Some commentators think of the book as only a collection of love lyrics bound together without plan. Most Bible students, however, find enough common expressions and common spirit running through the whole to imply a certain amount of plot. But what that plot is it is very difficult to say.

There is no clear indication of who is speaking in the various parts, and so the story has been twisted by the different interpreters into many different forms. The very fact that such great differences in interpretation are possible shows how impossible it is to be certain of the plot.

The theory most widely accepted is that we have a picture of King Solomon winning as his bride a rustic Shulamite maiden. The dialogue presents various episodes in the courtship and honeymoon stages of this romance. According to another theory Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter is presented. Another theory sees Solomon trying to add to his polygamous establishment at Jerusalem a country girl who is already betrothed to a shepherd lover. The girl refuses the offer of Solomon and in the end returns to her true lover.

Each of these theories seeks to find a basis of literal fact for this love story. There can be little question that the book is to be understood as having a historical foundation. Some believe that it has that and only that. They say that we have in this book a beautiful presentation of human love. They feel that its purpose is served and its place in the Bible justified when it has thus glorified human love. This is called the literal school. Then there are those who consider the book as an allegory. They take every human element out of it, believing that it was written in the first place solely for the purpose of picturing the relationship between God and His people. The Jews from the earliest times interpreted the book in this way. In comparison with the other books of the Bible they called it the Holy of Holies. "The whole world does not outweigh the day on which the Song of Solomon was given to Israel," said one famous rabbi. They pronounced a curse on anyone who would use it as a secular wedding song, and prescribed that it should be read only by those who were thirty years of age. From the time of the early church fathers the Christian Church made the book an allegory of the love relationship between Christ and the church. Origen wrote a ten-volume commentary on the Song. St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters. Thomas Aquinas dictated a commentary on this book on his deathbed. It was a favorite study of such a devout Christian as Samuel Rutherford. These men and many others made a mystical and spirit-

ual interpretation of every phrase in the book, often yielding to most far-fetched applications. The allegorists feel that human love would not be worthy of such a detailed study in the Holy Scriptures.

Somewhat between the literalists, who see no spiritual meaning, and the allegorists, who see only spiritual meaning, is the typical school who accept the historical basis of the book in a love experience of Solomon, but who also see in it an effective type of the spiritual relationship between God or Christ and those who have entered into fellowship with Him. This seems to be a better position than that of the literalists, for it does give the book a worth-while content of spiritual truth. It also seems a better position than that of the allegorist, for it avoids the extravagances of individual interpretations. It recognizes that there is not one word in the book which would indicate the intention of being allegorical.

A Picture of Holy and Divine Love

This is not to say that the literal sense of the Song makes it unworthy of an inspired book. The Bible deals with every other phase of human life and why should it not picture also the profound and yet common experience of married love? It is only to a diseased and warped judgment that love seems impure. It is important for us to recognize that the Bible contains all things that minister to the welfare of men, and the love of husband and wife is at the very heart of human happiness. It is true that the Song of Solomon catalogues physical charms in a way that seems a little strange to our western taste. And the intensity of love is a thing that we feel but ordinarily do not talk about. The Song, however, judged by Oriental standards is perfectly proper and chaste. Its language is largely symbolic and, though intimate, is never obscene.

The New Testament does not quote or make definite allusions to the Song of Solomon. A strong argument, however, for the typical point of view is the large use which is made in the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New, of the marriage figure. Isaiah tells of a Maker who is also a husband, and speaks of the divorcement of unfaithful Israel. Jeremiah speaks of Israel being espoused to Jehovah. Hosea made the marriage between Israel and the Lord the dominant note in his prophecy.

Ezekiel, in chapters 16 and 23, makes large use of the same idea. As soon as we enter the portals of the New Testament we hear John the Baptist introducing Christ as the Bridegroom, and Jesus also applies this term to Himself. Several of the parables liken the kingdom to a wedding. The Apostle Paul uses the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, to lift Christian marriage out of the sordid atmosphere of earth to the plane of heavenly reality. The very ground for personal purity is the fact that we are one body with the Lord. The ambition of every Christian for the church is that Christ might find it at His coming "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle." Revelation pictures that glorious event of the future, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, for which the wife shall make herself ready. It is a principle of Biblical interpretation that those types are the safest which the Bible itself makes use of. This large use, then, of the bride and bridegroom figure gives warrant for the typical interpretation of the Song of Solomon.

"Lovest thou me?" was the question of Jesus to the repentant Peter. This is the test question of the Christian experience. To the one who does not know Jesus the language of the Song will seem most extravagant as representing the feeling of the Christian for an unseen Spirit. But thousands of Christians, admitting Christ to the center of the heart and life, have found in this fellowship an affection which no language can express. Peter says, "To you which believe he is precious." It is a universal testimony from those who have found it true. It is a love which anticipates with longing the personal coming of the Bridegroom. It would seem to be more than a coincidence that the Song of Solomon ends, "Make haste, my beloved," and the New Testament ends, "Surely I come quickly. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Questions

(For Review and Discussion)

1. Contrast Ecclesiastes with Job.
2. Find in Ecclesiastes other reasons for feeling the uselessness of life than those mentioned in the chapter discussion.

3. Why should Solomon's testimony to the futility of pleasure be convincing?
4. Would you agree with the statement sometimes made that in Ecclesiastes man's wisdom and not God's revelation is speaking?
5. Does the Book of Ecclesiastes clear up all the mysteries of the world? What is its chief teaching?
6. What is the purpose of introducing the picture of old age in chapter 12?
7. State the theme of the Song of Solomon.
8. What makes the Song of Solomon difficult to interpret?
9. In what three classes do the interpretations of this book fall? Which seems more nearly correct?
10. How can we be sure that the Song of Solomon typifies the mutual love of Christ and the church?