Hebrew Life and Times eBook

Hebrew Life and Times

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FOREWORD

Most histories have been histories of kings and emperors. The daily life of the common people—their joys and sorrows, their hopes, achievements, and ideals—has been buried in oblivion. The historical narratives of the Bible are, indeed, to a great extent an exception to this rule. They tell us much about the everyday life of peasants and slaves. The Bible's chief heroes were not kings nor nobles. Its supreme Hero was a peasant workingman. But we have not always studied the Bible from this point of view. In this course we shall try to reconstruct for ourselves the story of the Hebrew people as an account of Hebrew shepherds, farmers, and such like: what oppressions they endured; how they were delivered; and above all what ideals of righteousness and truth and mercy they cherished, and how they came to think and feel about God. It makes little difference to us what particular idler at any particular time sat in the palace at Jerusalem sending forth tax-collectors to raise funds for his luxuries. It is of very great interest and concern to us if there were daughters like Ruth in the barley fields of Bethlehem, if shepherds tended their flocks in that same country who were so fine in heart and simple in faith that to them or their children visions of angels might appear telling of a Saviour of the world. On such as these, in this study, let us as far as possible fix our attention.

CHAPTER I

SHEPHERDS ON THE BORDER OF THE DESERT

Ancient Arabia is the home of that branch of the white race known as the Semitic. Here on the fertile fringes of well-watered land surrounding the great central desert lived the Phoenicians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Canaanites who, before the Hebrews, inhabited Palestine. So little intermixing of races has there been that the Arabs of to-day, like those of the time of Abraham, are Semites.

The Hebrew people are an offshoot of this same Semitic group. They began their career as a tribe of shepherds on the border of the north Arabian desert. The Arab shepherds of to-day, still living in tents and wandering to and fro on the fringes of the settled territory of Palestine, or to the south and west of Bagdad, represent almost perfectly what the wandering Hebrew shepherds used to be.

The Arabs of to-day are armed with rifles, whereas Abraham's warriors cut down their enemies with bronze swords. Otherwise, in customs, superstitions, and even to some extent in language, the modern desert Arabs may stand for the ancient Hebrews in their earliest period. They were nomads with no settled homes. Every rainy season they led out their flocks into the valleys where the fresh green of the new grass was crowding back the desert brown. All through the spring and early summer they went from spring

to spring, and from pasture to pasture seeking the greenest and tenderest grass. Then as the dry season came on and the barren waste came creeping back they also worked their way back toward the more settled farm lands, until autumn found them selling their wool to the nearby farmers and townspeople in exchange for wheat and barley and some of the other necessaries of life.

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THE SHEPHERD'S DAILY LIFE

Sheep-raising might seem at times a peaceful and even a somewhat monotonous business. The flocks found their own food, grazing in the pastures. Morning and night they had to be watered, the water being drawn from the well and poured into watering troughs. Once or twice a day also the ewes and shegoats had to be milked. When these chores were done it was only necessary to stand guard over the flock and protect them from robbers or wild animals. This, however, had to be done by night as well as by day. On these wide pastures there were no sheepfolds into which the animals could be securely herded as on the settled farms. They slept on the ground, under the open sky, and the shepherds, like those in Bethlehem, in the story of Jesus' birth, had to keep "watch over their flocks by night." So long as no enemies appeared there was in such an occupation plenty of time in which to think and dream of God and man and love and duty. Very often, however, the dreamer's reveries were interrupted, and at such times there was no lack of excitement.

=Wild beasts.=—There were more beasts of prey in Arabia in those days than there are to-day. In addition to wolves and bears, there were many lions, which are not now found anywhere in the world except in Africa. So the sheepmen had to go well armed, with clubs, swords, and spears. We would want a high-powered rifle if we were in danger of facing a lion. The Hebrews defended their flocks against these powerful and vicious beasts with only the simplest weapons. Such fights were anything but monotonous.

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| [Illustration: A *daric, or piece of money coined by Darius, one* |
| *of the earliest specimens of coined money*] |
| |
| [Illustration: *Ancient Hebrew weights for balances*] |
| |
| [Illustration: *Hebrew dry and liquid measures*] |
| |
| Cuts on this page used by permission of the Palestine Exploration |
| Fund. |
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TRIPS TO TOWN

Among the most interesting events in the lives of the shepherds were their trips to town, when they sold some of their wool and bought grain, and linen cloth, and trinkets for the

babies, and the things they could not find nor make on the grassy plains. The raw wool was packed in bags and slung over the backs of donkeys. On other donkeys rode two or more of the men of the tribe. Sometimes, perhaps, a small boy was taken along on the donkey's back behind his father to see the sights. And for him the sights must have been rather wonderful—the great thick walls of the town, the massive gates, the houses, row on row, and the people, more of them in one street than in the whole tribe to which he belonged!

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=The market.=—They took their wool, of course, to the open square where all the merchants sold their goods. Soon buyers appeared who wanted wool. It was a long process then, as now, to strike a bargain in an Oriental town. It is very impolite to seem to be in a hurry. You must each ask after one another's health, and the health of your respective fathers, and all your ancestors. By and by, you cautiously come around to the subject of wool. How much do you want for your wool? At first you don't name a price. You aren't even sure that you want to sell it. Finally you mention a sum about five times as large as you expect to get. The buyer in turn offers to pay about a fifth of what it is worth. After a time you come down a bit on your price. The buyer comes up a bit on his. After an hour or two, or perhaps a half a day, you compromise and the wool is sold.

=Weighing out the silver or gold.=—In those early days there was no coined money. Silver and gold were used as money, only they had to be weighed every time a trade was put through; just as though we were to sell so many pounds of flour for so many ounces of silver. The weights used were very crude; usually they were merely rough stones from the field with the weight mark scratched on them. The scale generally used was as follows:

60 shekels = 1 mana.
60 manas = 1 talent.

The shekel was equal to about an ounce, in our modern avoirdupois system. There was no accurate standard weight anywhere. Honest dealers tried to have weights which corresponded to custom. But it was easy to cheat by having two sets of weights, one for buying and one for selling. So when our shepherds came to town, they had to watch the merchant who bought from them lest he put too heavy a talent weight in the balance with their wool, and too light a shekel-weight in the smaller balance with the silver.

THE HARD SIDE OF SHEPHERD LIFE

The most precious and uncertain thing in the shepherd's life was water. If in the rainy season the rains were heavy, and the wells and brooks did not dry up too soon in the summer, they had plenty of goat's milk for food, and could bring plenty of wool to market in the fall. But if the rains were scant their flocks perished, and actual famine and death stared them in the face. In the dry years many were the tribes that were almost totally wiped out by famine and the diseases that sweep away hungry men. The next year, on the site of their last camp, strangers would find the bones of men and women and little children, whitening by the side of the trail. No wonder they looked upon wells and springs as sacred. Surely, they thought, a god must be the giver of those life-giving waters that bubble up so mysteriously from the crevices in the rock.

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=War with other tribes.=—In addition to their constant struggle to make a living from a somewhat barren land, these shepherds were almost constantly in danger from human enemies. A small, weak tribe, grazing its flocks around a good well, was always in danger lest a stronger tribe swoop down upon them to kill and plunder. There were many robber clans who did little else besides preying on their neighbors and passing caravans of traders. Nowhere was there any security. The desert and its borders was a world of bitter hatreds and long-standing feuds. Certain rival tribes fought each other at every opportunity for centuries with a warfare that hesitated at no cruelty or treachery.

DESERT RELIGION

Such a life of eager longings, fierce passions, and dark despair is a fertile soil for religion. And these early Hebrew shepherds were intensely religious. It is true that in the earliest days the fierceness and cruelty of their wars were reflected in the character of the gods in whom they believed. They thought of them as doing many cruel and selfish things. Yet a people who believe very deeply and seriously in their religion, even in an imperfect religion, are sure to be a force in the world. Hence it is not surprising that three of the world's greatest religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, arose at different times among the wandering shepherds of Arabia.

STUDY TOPICS

It would be well to keep a notebook in which to write the result of your study.

1. Look up in any Bible dictionary, under "Weights and Measures," the approximate size of an "ephah," which was the common Hebrew unit of dry measure, and "hin," which was their common unit for measuring liquids.

2. From the facts given in this chapter, calculate in pounds avoirdupois, the approximate weight of a talent.

3. To what extent does the Old Testament reflect the experiences of shepherd life? Look up "shepherd" in any concordance.

4. What are some valuable lessons which great spiritual teachers among the Hebrews learned from their shepherd life? Read Psalm 23.

CHAPTER II

HOME LIFE IN THE TENTS

Most persons, no matter what their race or country, spend a large proportion of their time at home. The home is the center of many interests and activities, and it reflects quite accurately the state of civilization of a people. In this chapter let us take a look into the homes of the shepherd Hebrews. We shall visit one of their encampments; perhaps we shall be reminded of a camp of the gypsies.

A CLUSTER OF BLACK TENTS

Here on a gentle hillside sloping up from a tiny brook, is a cluster of ten or a dozen black tents. Further down the valley sheep are grazing. Two or three mongrel dogs rush out to bark at us as we approach, until a harsh voice calls them back. A dark man with bare brown arms comes out to meet us, wearing a coarse woolen cloak with short sleeves. Half-naked children peer out from the tent flaps.

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=The inside of the tents.=—Our friend is eager to show us hospitality and invites us to enter his tent. It is a low, squatting affair, and we have to stoop low to enter the opening in the front. We note that the tent-cloth is a woolen fabric not like our canvas of to-day. It is stretched across a center-pole, with supports on the front and back, while the edges are pinned to the ground much as our tents are. There are curtains within the tent partitioning off one part for the men, and another for the women and children. There are mats on the ground to sit on and to sleep on at night.

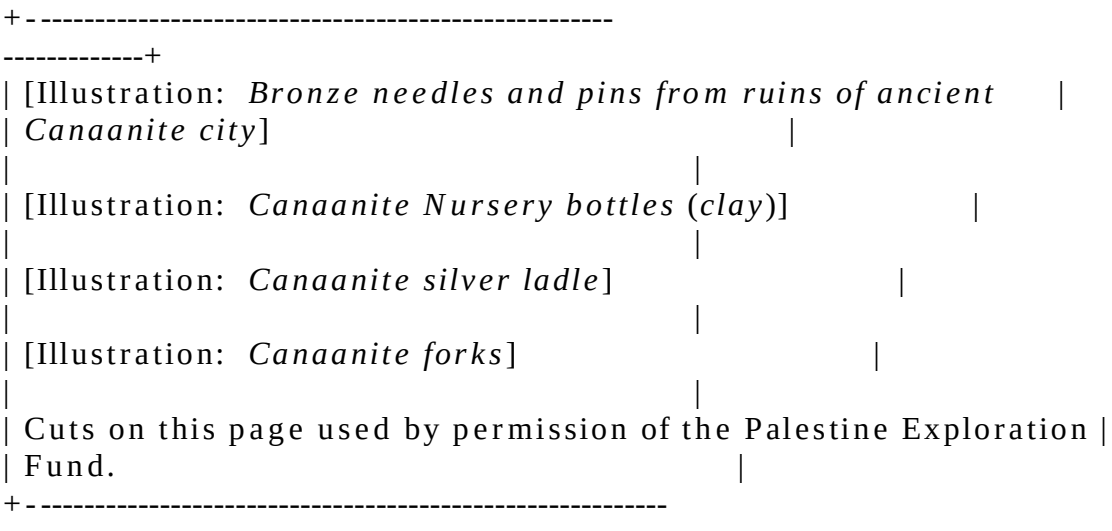
PREPARING FOOD

Like the housewives of all ages, the Hebrew women have food to prepare, and meals to get. Their one great food is milk, not cows' milk, but the milk of goats. A modern traveler tells of meeting an Arab who in a time of scarcity had lived on milk alone for more than a year.

=A meager diet.=—Besides fresh milk there were then as now a number of things which were made from milk. The Hebrews on the desert took some milk and cream and poured it into a bag made of skin, and hung it by a stout cord from a pole. One of the women, or a boy, pounded this bag until the butter came out. This was their way of churning. Cheese also was a favorite article of diet. The milk was curdled by means of the sour or bitter juices of certain plants, and the curds were then salted and dried in the sun. Curdled milk even more than sweet milk was also used as a drink. It probably tasted like the *kumyss*, or *zoolak*, which we can buy in our drug stores or soda fountains.

We would get very tired of milk and milk products if we had nothing else to eat all the year round; and so did these shepherds. They were eager to get hold of wheat and barley, whenever they could buy them. The women took the wheat and pounded it with a wooden mallet or a stone in a hollow in some larger stone. The coarse meal which they made in this way they mixed with salt and water and baked on hot stones before the campfire. Once in a great while it was possible, in this shepherd life, to have a feast with mutton or kid or lamb. But milk and wool were so valuable that the shepherds were very cautious about killing their flocks. It was, you see, a very simple and healthful diet on which these tent-people lived. But one meal was pretty much like another. Dinner was like breakfast, and tomorrow's meals would be just like to-day's. It is not strange that they often longed for a change, and looked with envy at the crops of the farmers in the settled lands beyond the desert.

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CLOTHING

Another occupation at which the women worked all day long was the making of clothing for their families. Most of their garments were made of the wool from their own flocks. First the wool had to be spun into yarn. They did not even have spinning wheels in those days, so a spinner took a handful of wool on the end of a stick called a distaff, which she held in her left hand. With her right hand she hooked into the wool a spindle. This was a round, pointed piece of wood about ten inches long with a hook at the pointed end, and with a small piece of stone fastened to the other to give momentum in the spinning. With deft fingers the spinner kept this spindle whirling and at the same time kept working the wool down into the thread of yarn which she was making. As the thread lengthened she wound it around the spindle, until the wool on the distaff was all gone and she had a great ball of yarn.

=Weaving=.—The ancient Egyptians and Babylonians were experts in the art of weaving. They had large looms similar to ours, and wove on them beautiful fabrics of linen and wool. The shepherds on the plains no doubt bought these fabrics when they could afford them. But they could not carry these heavy looms around with them from one camp to another, and much of the time their own women had to weave whatever cloth they had. The primitive loom they used was made by driving two sticks into the ground, and stretching a row of threads between them, and then tediously weaving the cross threads in and out, a thread at a time, until a yard or so of cloth was finished. Slow work this was, and many a long day passed before enough cloth could be woven to make a coat for a man or even a boy.

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They managed, however, to get along without nearly so much clothing as we think necessary. The little children, through warm days of summer, played around the tents almost naked. And the grown people dressed very simply. There were only two garments for either men or women. They wore a long shirt reaching to the knees. This was made by doubling over a strip of cloth, sewing the sides, and cutting out holes for arms and neck. The outer garment was a sort of coat, open in front, and gathered about the waist with leather belt. This outer garment was often thrown aside when the wearer was working. It was worn in cold weather, however, and was often the poor man's only blanket at night. Women's garments were probably a little longer than those of men, but in other respects the same. As for the feet, they mostly went barefoot. But on long journeys over rough ground they wore sandals of wood or roughly shaped shoes of sheepskin. On the head for a protection against sun and wind they, like the modern Arab, probably wore a sort of large scarf gathered around the neck.

=Making the garments.=—All these garments were cut and sewed by the women. They had no sewing machines to work with, not even fine steel needles like ours. They used large, coarse needles made of bronze or, very often, of splinters of bone sharpened at one end, with a hole drilled through the other. With such rough tools, and all this work to be done, we can be sure that the wives and daughters of Hebrew shepherds did not lack for something to do.

FAMILY LIFE

Among ancient Hebrews family life, from the very beginning, was often sweet, kindly, and beautiful. This is shown by the many stories in the early books of the Old Testament which reflect disapproval of unbrotherly conduct, or, which hold up kindness and loyalty in family life as a beautiful and praiseworthy thing. Take the story of Joseph. It begins indeed with an unpleasant picture of an unhappy and unloving family of shepherd brothers. We read of a father's partiality toward the petted favorite, of a spoiled and conceited boy, of the bitter jealousy of the other brothers, and finally of a crime in which they showed no mercy when they sold their hated rival to a caravan of traders to be taken away, it might be, forever. But the story goes on to tell how that same lad, years later, grown to manhood and risen to a position of extraordinary power and influence in the great kingdom of Egypt, not only saved from death by starvation his family, including those same brothers who had wronged him, but even effected a complete reconciliation with them and nobly forgave them.

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Now, the most notable facts in connection with this story are those “between the lines.” It is not merely that such and such events are said to have happened, but that for generations, perhaps centuries, Hebrew fathers and mothers kept the story of these events alive, telling it over and over again to their children. On numberless days, no doubt, in this shepherd life there were bickering and angry words among the children by the spring or at meal time, or in their games. The older brothers were tyrannical toward the younger, or one or another cherished black and unforgiving looks toward a brother or sister who he thought had done him a wrong. And many a time after such a day the old father would gather all the family together in the evening around the camp fire in front of the tent and would begin to tell the story of Joseph. And as the tale went on, with its thrilling episodes, and its touches of pathos leading up at last to the whole-souled generosity and the sweet human tenderness of Joseph, many a little heart softened, and in the darkness many a little brown hand sought a brother’s hand in loving reconciliation.

=The tribe as a larger family.=—To some extent the desert shepherds of all ages have carried this family spirit into the relations between members of the tribe as a whole. Since they had to stand together for protection, quarrels between tribesmen were discouraged. Moreover, they were not separated into classes by difference of wealth. There were some who had larger flocks than others, but for the most part all members of the tribe were equal. Even from among the slaves who were captured now and then in war there were some who rose to positions of honor. There were no kings nor princes; the chief of the tribe held his position by virtue of his long experience and practical wisdom. The distinction between close blood relationship and the brotherhood of membership in the same tribe was not sharply drawn; all were brothers. This is true to-day of all these desert tribes.

Only a tribe, however, with an unusual capacity for brotherly affection and for making social life sweet and harmonious could have produced a Joseph or the story of Joseph, or would have preserved that story in oral form through the centuries until it could be written down. It is worth while looking into the later history of such a tribe, and seeing what happened to them and how they thought and acted, and what they contributed to the life of the world.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Get some cotton at a drug store, and see if you can spin some cotton thread, with a homemade spindle, such as is described in this chapter.

2. Who had the harder work among the Hebrew shepherds, the women or the men?

3. Find other stories in Genesis besides the story of Joseph which show how the Hebrews felt in regard to the relations between brothers.

4. Compare the home life in America with the home life of the Hebrews. Are American brothers and sisters growing more quarrelsome or more kindly and loving toward one another?

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5. In what way do the oral traditions of a people throw light on the ideals and relationships they most valued?

6. Compare the dietary available to Americans with that of the ancient Hebrews.

CHAPTER III

DESERT PILGRIMS

According to one of the Hebrew traditions recorded in the book of Genesis, the earliest home of their ancestors was Ur of the Chaldees. This was one of the leading cities of ancient Babylonia. It was situated southwest of the Euphrates River, near the plains which were the nation's chief grazing grounds. And it is possible that of the shepherds who brought their sheep to market in Ur some were, indeed, among the ancestors of the Hebrews.

BABYLONIAN CIVILIZATION

Babylonia is one of the two lands (Egypt being the other) where human civilization began. This rich alluvial plain, lying between the lower Tigris and the lower Euphrates Rivers, became the home of a gifted race which at least in its later history through intermarriage was in part Semitic and thus related to the Hebrews. Several thousand years before Christ the people of this land began to till the soil, to control the floods in the rivers by means of irrigating canals, to make bricks out of the abundant clay and with them to build houses and cities. They also invented a system of writing upon clay tablets. These were baked in the sun after the letters were inscribed. Commercial records and written laws and histories were thus made possible and in time a varied literature was created. Whole libraries of these baked clay tablets have been unearthed and deciphered by modern investigators.

=Evidences of ancient culture.=—By B.C. 4000 there flourished on the plains of Babylonia a splendid civilization in many ways similar to ours to-day. The people raised enormous crops of grain and exported it by ship and caravan to distant lands. They had developed to a high point the arts of the weaver, the dyer, the potter, the metal worker, and the carpenter. They had devised a system of geometry for the measuring of their wheat fields and city streets. Through astronomy they had worked out the calendar of days, weeks, months, and years which with modifications we still use. They had erected magnificent temples to their gods. From translations of the inscriptions on their clay tablets we can gain a clear knowledge of their life and customs. Here, for example, is a translation of part of a letter from a son to a father asking for more money: "My father, you said, 'When I shall go to Dur-Ammi-Zaduga, I will send you a sheep and five minas of silver.' But you have not sent. Let my father send and let not my heart be

vexed.... To the gods Shamash and Marduk I pray for my father." If we forget the outlandish-sounding names, how natural this seems! How like our boys was this boy who wrote the queer-looking characters on this bit of clay which we may hold in our hand!

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THE FAULTS OF THE BABYLONIAN CIVILIZATION

With all their gifts and achievements there were certain great evils in Babylonian life. For one thing they were inclined to be greedy and covetous. They lived on a soil almost incredibly rich, and they were constantly increasing their wealth by trade. Babylonian merchants or their agents were to be found in almost every city and town of western Asia and perhaps even as far east as China. Of the vast mass of their written records which have been collected in our museums, the majority are business documents and records of contracts. Many of them tell the story of hard bargains. Professor Maspero declares that these records "reveal to us a people greedy of gain, exacting, and almost exclusively absorbed by material concerns."

=Slavery.=—Moreover, the wealth of the nation was not fairly distributed but was more and more in the hands of the favored few, the great nobles, and their friends. The fields were not tilled by independent farmers. There were, instead, a few great estates which were rented out to tenants. The actual work, both on the fields and in the towns, was more and more performed by slaves. Some of these were captives who had been taken in war. Others were native Babylonians who had been sold into slavery for debt. So it had come about that Babylonian society had set like plaster into a hard mold with the king and the wealthy nobles on top and the poor peasants and slaves below. This state of things was fastened all the more firmly on the people by strong kings such as Hammurabi, who lived about B.C. 2000 and who unified the country under a powerful central government with his own city, Babylon, as the capital.

A SHEPHERD WITH IDEALS

About the time of Hammurabi's reign, if we follow the account related in the book of Genesis, there lived among the nomads on the plains west of the city of Ur a man named Abraham. If Hammurabi ever heard of him, which is improbable, he looked down upon him as of no account. Yet Abraham wielded a greater influence for the future welfare of humanity than all the princes of Babylon. For, discontented with Babylonian life, he was the earliest pioneer in a movement toward a civilization of a different and better type. And the sons of Hammurabi have yet to reckon with Abraham and his ambitions.

=Discontent among the shepherds.=—Many of Abraham's people, no doubt, were discontented in Babylonia. A shepherd's life is monotonous and hard. When they went to market they saw comforts and luxuries on every hand. Yet the money they received from the wool merchants of Ur gave no promise of larger opportunities in life for any shepherd boy. So, at length when Abraham said to them, "Come, let us leave this country," they were ready to answer, "Lead on, and we will follow!" So it came to pass that Abraham's clan set out northwest, toward Haran, in what is now called

Mesopotamia, and finally after some years of migration found themselves camping on the hillsides of Canaan, southeast of the Mediterranean Sea.

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=Ideals represented in Abraham.=—But it is not as a leader of fortune hunters that Abraham is pictured in the Bible. No doubt he and his clansmen hoped to better their condition. But Abraham was a dreamer and a man of deep religious faith. He believed that he was being guided by his God. And he believed that in accordance with God's plan his descendants in the land to which they had come would become a great nation. Best of all, it seems probable that he dreamed of a nation different from Babylonia. Certainly he is described as a different kind of a man from the typical Babylonian. In some respects, to be sure, judging by our Christian standards, he had serious shortcomings. He did not scruple to deceive a foreigner, nor to treat harshly a slave. His ideas as to the character of God were far below those revealed by Christ. Yet he had the Hebrew gift for home and family life. He was a good father to his son. And he put a higher value on personal friendship and kindly family relations than on property interests. When his herdsmen quarreled with those of his nephew, Lot, he said to the latter with dignified generosity and common sense, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee ... for we are brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left." Just what Abraham looked forward to, we, of course, do not know. Probably his ideas were vague. Yet it seems that such men as he must have dreamed of a nation great in faith as well as in material wealth; a nation in which money would not be considered more important than justice and kindness; in which home life might be sweet and loving, free from the fear of want or the blighting influence of greed; and in which the door of opportunity would always be kept open even for the humblest.

At any rate, some centuries after the time when Abraham is supposed to have lived, we find a group of shepherd tribes living in and around Canaan, who believed themselves to be descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, Abraham's grandson, and among whom there was the tradition of a divinely guided pilgrimage from Babylonia to Canaan under Abraham's leadership just as we have described. It is a great thing to have memories of noble parents and traditions of heroic ancestors. These the Hebrews had from the very beginning.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up in any good Bible dictionary, the articles on Babylonia and Hammurabi.

2. Read Genesis 12, 15, and 24 and form your own opinion of Abraham as a husband and father.

3. What was Abraham's most valuable contribution to history?

4. From any map of western Asia, draw a sketch map showing the Nile, Euphrates, and Tigris Rivers, the Mediterranean Sea, and the general direction of Abraham's pilgrimage.

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5. Where in the Bible is found the sentence spoken by Abraham to Lot, and quoted in this chapter?

CHAPTER IV

A STRUGGLE AGAINST TYRANNY

Although they had escaped for a time from Babylonian tyranny, the descendants of Abraham in Canaan found themselves somewhat within the range of the influence of the other great civilized power of that day, that is, Egypt. Egyptian officers collected tribute from rich Canaanite cities. The roads that led to Egypt were thronged with caravans going to and fro. By and by, a series of dry seasons drove several of the Hebrew tribes down these highways to Egypt in the search of food. The story of Joseph tells how they settled there.[1] They were hospitably received by the king (or Pharaoh, which was the Egyptian word for “king"), and were allowed to pasture their flocks on the plains called the land of Goshen in the extreme northeast of the country west of what we now call the Isthmus of Suez. For some decades or more they lived here, following their old occupation—sheep-raising.

=Egyptian civilization.=—Egypt was in many ways like Babylonia. In Egypt too a great civilization had sprung up many millenniums before Christ. In some ways it was an even greater civilization than that of Babylonia. Egyptian sculptors and architects erected stone temples whose grandeur has never been surpassed. Many of them are still standing and are among the world’s treasures. It would seem that there was somewhat more of love of beauty and somewhat less of greed for money among the Egyptians than among the Babylonians.

THE ACCESSION OF RAMESES II

There came to the throne of Egypt about B.C. 1200 a man of extraordinary vanity and selfish ambition known as Rameses II. He wished to build more temples in Egypt than any other king had ever built, so that wherever the traveler might turn people would point to this or that great building and say Rameses II built that. To put up these buildings he enslaved his people, compelling them to labor without pay. To raise the funds for building materials he made war on his neighbors, especially the Hittites in western Asia north of Canaan. Again and again Hebrew children would see the dust of marching armies over the roads past their pastures and men would say, “Rameses is going to war again.” And by and by, weeks or months later, the soldiers would return with tales of bloody battles and sometimes laden with spoils.

=Enslavement of the Hebrews.=—Now, wars usually breed more wars. Rameses having attacked the Hittites was afraid they would attack him. Egypt was indeed very

well protected from attack. There was only one gateway into the country, and that was by way of the narrow Isthmus of Suez. And there were a wall and a row of fortresses across the isthmus. But who were those shepherd tribes living just west of the isthmus inside the gateway? They are Hebrews, Rameses was told. They are immigrants from Canaan. "Look out for them," said Rameses. "If they came from Canaan, they may favor the Hittites and help them to get past my fortresses into Egypt. Let them be put at work so that they will have no time for plots."

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Rameses was planning just then to build two large granary cities near the northeastern border to be a base of supplies for his armies on their campaigns into Asia. One was to be called Pithom.[2]

So one day armed men came to the Hebrew tents and the order was given to send such and such a number of men to work in the brick-molds of Pa-Tum. And they had to go. The women and the children had to care for the sheep while most of their men trod the clay and straw in the brick molds at Pa-Tum and carried heavy loads of brick on their shoulders to the masons on the walls. Of course the sheep suffered for lack of care. The children also pined from neglect. Life for the Hebrews became a grinding treadmill of hardship and weariness and drudgery.

THE BOYHOOD AND YOUTH OF MOSES

During this time of oppression a Hebrew baby boy was by chance adopted by one of the princesses in Pharaoh's court and brought up by his own mother as his nurse. He was given an Egyptian name with the common Egyptian ending Mesu or M-ses, as in Rameses. The boy was given all the educational advantages that the Egyptian palace could offer. But all the time in secret from his mother he was learning the story of his own people and their wrongs, and was being trained to hate their oppressors. One day after he had grown to manhood he went down to the city of Pa-Tum to see the work on the new granaries which were being built. Here he saw one of his own people being flogged by an Egyptian overseer. In a fury he leaped to the man's defense and killed the Egyptian. Of course Rameses heard of it, and Moses had to flee from Egypt into the desert. In the desert he found a shepherd clan related to the Hebrews and lived there for some years brooding over the hard plight of his people.

=Moses' call and the struggle for freedom.=—One day in the desert, Moses heard from a passing caravan that old Rameses II was dead. Like a flame that burned but did not consume the thought came to him: "Now is your chance! The king and his officers will not know about you. Go back to Egypt and lead your kinsmen out to freedom. This is God's call and God will help you."

So back to Egypt he went. First, he undertook to rally his own people, promising the help of their God, Jehovah. It was a dangerous undertaking that he proposed. The kings of Egypt were accustomed to make short work of those who resisted their authority. Moreover, these Hebrews had been slaves for years, and their spirits might have been cowed and broken. Yet they believed in Moses and his assurances and accepted him as their leader.

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Soon thereafter Moses and his brother Aaron went boldly to the palace of the Pharaoh and declared to him that Jehovah, the God of the Hebrews, had commanded that the Hebrews be allowed to hold a religious festival in the desert to offer sacrifices unto him as their God. The plan no doubt was that the people should escape once they were outside the boundaries of Egypt; Moses evidently considered any method justifiable in the effort to outwit the oppressor. But the Pharaoh answered, “Who is Jehovah that I should hearken to his voice to let Israel go?” The request was sharply refused. It is surprising that Moses himself was not arrested and imprisoned on the spot. Perhaps he still had friends in the Egyptian court. Or perhaps the Egyptians had a certain reverence for him as a messenger from a god, even though they did not grant his demands.

=Bricks without straw.=—At first it seemed that Moses had failed. For instead of the longed-for freedom, the toiling Hebrews found that a still heavier burden of work was laid upon them. In the manufacture of sun-dried brick it is necessary to mix straw with the clay in the molds, the fibers giving a tougher quality to the product. Previously the straw for this purpose had been furnished by the Egyptians. But now the order was, “Go yourselves, get straw where you can find it.” So they had to go and hunt through the surrounding fields for old refuse straw, in rotting ricks and compost heaps. Yet the same number of bricks was required as before, with a whipping in case of failure.

The granaries in Pa-Tum and Rameses were excavated many years ago from beneath the sands of Egypt, and their ruined walls may still be seen by tourists. It is noticeable that the upper tiers in the walls are made of bricks of a very poor quality as compared to those in the lower tiers. Evidently, the Hebrews got through the work somehow each day, putting very little straw in the clay, or sometimes none at all.

But they wished they had never heard of Moses, and they reproached him for “making them hateful in the eyes of Pharaoh.” In the first round of the fight Moses and freedom had lost; Pharaoh and slavery had won. But the end was not yet.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up in any good Bible dictionary, the article on Egypt; or read the summary of Egyptian history in some recent general history.

2. Draw a map of Egypt, locating approximately the place where the Hebrews worked.

3. In what special ways was Moses well trained to be an emancipator for his people?

4. Are there workers to-day who are in any form of slavery which may be compared to that of the Hebrews in Egypt?

5. Are there any Pharaohs to-day? Any Moseses?

FOOTNOTES:

[1] See Chapter I, and Genesis 46 and 47.

[2] Exodus I. 1-11, or Pa-Tum in Egyptian; the other Rameses, after the king himself. It was decided to compel the Hebrews to do the work of brickmaking for these new cities.

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CHAPTER V

A GREAT DELIVERANCE

Egypt has never been a health resort. The intensely hot summers breed germs of disease, and also the insects which often carry them. Throughout its history the country has been ravaged periodically by fearful epidemics. A series of these pestilences predicted by Moses and declared to be Jehovah's punishment for the enslavement of the Israelites, made it possible for him to lead his people out of slavery. So severe were the plagues that the government was for a time disorganized. Taking advantage of their opportunity, the Hebrews suddenly gathered up their possessions and set out toward the desert, driving their sheep and goats before them. In spite of the large figures given in some passages of Exodus, other statements indicate that they were not very numerous, a few thousand at most, and they doubtless hoped to slip out past the border fortresses, at night, unnoticed. As they approached the border, however, news came that they were being pursued by a troop of horsemen. This meant, of course, that a watch would be made for them at the fortresses also. They were caught in a trap, and turned in despair upon Moses, who could only once more assure them that Jehovah was leading them, and would somehow open the way.

THE STRONG EAST WIND AND ITS RESULT

That night they encamped on the western shore of one of the shallow bays or lakes at the head of the Red Sea. To the east was the water. North of the lake the wall and the line of fortresses began. Behind them they could already see where their pursuers were camping for the night. In the morning—terror, death, and return to slavery!

=A path through the sea.=—During the night, however, someone came in from the shore of the lake with the astonishing news that it was going dry. A strong east wind was blowing, with an effect often observed by modern travelers, namely, that the comparatively shallow waters were being driven back into the deeper part of the sea. Instantly the word of command was given. With the women and children first and the flocks next, they picked their way through the mud and sand and rocks on the lake bottom, clear across to the other side. The next morning the wind changed, the waters returned, and many of their pursuers were drowned.

The feelings of the Hebrews are expressed in the words of the triumph song in which through all later centuries they celebrated this deliverance:

="I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously:
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.=
* * * * * * * * *

=Pharaoh’s chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea;
And his chosen captains are sunk in the Red Sea."=

INFLUENCE OF THE EXODUS ON HEBREW RELIGION

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It was indeed a notable deliverance, and the Hebrews never forgot it. It affected their ideals and their religion. Immediately after escaping from Egypt they set out across the desert for Mount Sinai, which was considered the home of their God Jehovah, there to offer up sacrifices of gratitude. Moreover, from that time on, every year they brought to mind the story of the great deliverance through a sacrificial feast called the Passover. Under Moses' leadership at Sinai they entered into a covenant with Jehovah. They were to be Jehovah's people forever, and they probably agreed to worship him only, as their national God.

=Monotheism.=—At this time few had come to perceive the truth of monotheism, namely, that there is but one God in the universe, and that all the so-called gods and goddesses are mere superstitions. The Hebrews, at this time, did not doubt the real existence of other gods than Jehovah, such as Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Marduk and Shamash, gods of Babylon. But after the deliverance from Egypt they felt themselves bound to Jehovah by special ties of gratitude, and more and more came to consider the worship of any other god, by a Hebrew as base disloyalty. So the Exodus, and the experiences at Sinai, pointed the way, at least, toward monotheism.

=Justice.=—Of great importance also was the influence of these experiences on their ideas of right and wrong, and their conception of the character of Jehovah. Because they as a nation had been enslaved they were the better able to sympathize with the oppressed and down-trodden. "Remember," their prophets could always say, "that *ye* were slaves in the land of Egypt." And when, in after years, they were unjust in their dealings with foreigners living among them, they were reminded that "Ye were strangers in the land of Egypt."

These ideals were reflected in their conception of their God. Many of their notions about him were crude and unworthy, even late in their history. This was natural and inevitable in the light of the times in which they lived. But in these Egyptian and desert experiences we see a notable beginning of nobler religious ideals. From this time on they were impelled to think of Jehovah, first of all as the God who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, and who had taken their part, humble shepherds as they were, against the mighty Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. To that extent, at least, their God was a God of justice and mercy. Other ideas, which were inconsistent with this, continued for a time, but gradually fell away, until at length great seers arose who proclaimed that God is nothing else than justice and mercy; righteousness is the essence of his character, and that is all he asks of men.

"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne."

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

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According to all the Hebrew records, the covenant at Sinai was embodied in a divinely given Decalogue, or a set of ten short commands, which could be counted off on the ten fingers. Two Decalogues are given in Exodus, as coming from Moses at Sinai. One is in Exodus 34. 17-28. The other is the well-known Decalogue in Exodus 20. The former has to do largely with sacrifices and ritual observances. The latter, with its stern demands for right conduct toward one's fellow men, and for the worship of Jehovah rather than idols, expresses well the new moral and religious impulses which came to the Hebrews under the leadership of their first great deliverer.

In its original form the Decalogue probably read something as follows:

=Thou shalt have no other gods before me.= =Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven (or molten) image.= =Thou shalt not take the name of Jehovah thy God in vain.= =Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.= =Honor thy father and thy mother.= =Thou shalt not kill.= =Thou shalt not commit adultery.= =Thou shalt not steal.= =Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.= =Thou shalt not covet.=

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read in Hastings or any other modern Bible dictionary, the article on "Exodus." Note the testimony of modern travelers on the effect of high winds on the upper part of the Red Sea.

2. Where was Mount Sinai? Look up in Bible dictionary.

3. Draw a map, showing the probable route of the Hebrews after leaving Egypt.

4. What part of the Ten Commandments seems most to reflect the influence of the great deliverance from Egypt? Read Deuteronomy 5. 12-15.

5. Test your memory for the Ten Commandments in their brief form as given in this chapter.

6. The records of the events of this chapter are found in Exodus, chapters 6-12, 14, and 15. Read as much of this as your time will permit.

CHAPTER VI

FROM THE DESERT INTO CANAAN

Once safely out of Egypt, the next problem for Moses and his people was to find a way into Canaan. Through all the centuries the wandering shepherds on the edge of the desert have looked with longing eyes on the fertile valleys and plains of Palestine. To

have a settled, comfortable home, with cisterns of water as well as springs and wells; to have fields of wheat, vineyards of grapes, and gardens of melons and all luscious fruits —this is the picture that haunts the wandering Arab, amid the hardships and monotony of his desert life.

THE LAND OF CANAAN

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During the twelfth and eleventh centuries before Christ there was an unusually good opportunity for nomads to settle in Palestine. Before and after that time there were strong empires in control of the land protecting it from invasion. The Greeks and Romans long afterward built a line of fortified towns east of the Jordan on the border of the desert, whose ruins may be seen to-day. In similar ways the Babylonians and the Egyptians had occupied and defended the country. But just about the time when the Hebrews escaped from Egypt, and for a century and more afterward, both the Egyptian and Babylonian governments were weak. And as the various petty kings of Canaan itself were usually at war with each other, there was no strong government anywhere whose soldiers newcomers would have to face.

=The first invasion from the south.=—Very soon after leaving the mountain of Sinai the Hebrew tribes found themselves on the southern edge of Canaan, in what was afterward known as the South Country, south of Judah. Scouts were sent up as far as the town of Hebron, which was afterward for a time the capital of Judah, to investigate and report on conditions there. They returned with a glowing account of the fertility of the soil. It is even stated in the Hebrew traditions that they brought back as a sample of the crops, one bunch of grapes so large that it had to be carried on a pole between two men.

But with the exception of one of their leaders, a certain Caleb, all the men reported that the cities were strongly fortified and the inhabitants so warlike that an invasion was out of the question. The people adopted this “majority report” in spite of the protests of Moses. It is probable that the life in Egypt, with something of ease and luxury for a time, and then so many years of slavery, had sapped their courage and will power. At any rate, after a brief encounter with some of the tribesmen nearby, they fled in panic into the desert again.

THE WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

There followed, for a generation and more, a period of training somewhat like that which Boy Scouts receive, or should receive, on their “hikes” and camping trips. They learned to be independent and resourceful. It was at times very difficult to find food for themselves, or pasture for their sheep, and there was nothing to eat but the “manna,” which they believed their God provided for them, and which was perhaps in the nature of an edible moss or lichen. At times there was a terrible scarcity of water. Always there was the danger of losing their way on those trackless wastes, and in this matter also they learned to look to their God as their pillar of cloud by day and their pillar of fire by night, guiding them from oasis to oasis in their search for food and pasturage. Then there were wild beasts and poisonous serpents and, worst of all, hostile tribes with whom more than once they had to fight for their lives.

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=Gaining a foothold east of the Jordan.=—All these years of wandering were spent mostly in the desert south of Canaan. Later they worked their way around the lower end of the Dead Sea to the east toward what was later known as the land of Gilead, on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

This region is very fertile and was always noted in Bible times for its fat cattle. But its rolling plains lie open and defenseless toward the desert. Here under Moses' leadership the Hebrews were able to conquer one or two of the petty local chieftains, and thus gained a foothold from which they might some time make a sally across the River Jordan into central Canaan itself.

=The death of Moses.=—In this eastern country Moses died. According to the Hebrew story, Jehovah gave him a view of the land of Canaan from one of the high mountains overlooking the Jordan River, after which death came. And "no man knoweth of his sepulcher to this day." He had been loyal to the divine call which had come to him so long ago in a flame which "burned and did not consume," loyal to the mother who had taught him amid the luxuries of an Egyptian palace not to forget his own people and their sorrows. He had led his people out of Egypt and its slavery in defiance of the proud and mighty Pharaoh. And he had taught them to turn to Jehovah as God of justice and to worship only him.

THE INVASION OF CANAAN FROM THE EAST

It was not long after the settlement east of the Jordan that the Hebrews began to make raids across the river, in part under the leadership of one of Moses' lieutenants, Joshua. The first town they captured was Jericho, down in the hot valley of the Jordan River, a few miles north of the Dead Sea. They had friends within the city, a woman named Rahab and her family. Since this was the first city captured it was considered to be sacred to Jehovah. The pity of it is that, in accordance with the standards of that day, this meant the ruthless slaughter of every living thing within its walls, including men, women, and little children.

=New conquests.=—In these early raids some tribes, led by the men of Judah, went southwest and captured a few towns in the mountains west of the Dead Sea. Others, led by the strong tribe of Ephraim, went northwest. Throughout their later history, these were always the two leading tribes, Judah in the south, and Ephraim in the north. After the victories of the fighting men, the women and children and flocks would follow.

We can imagine these rough warriors, with their untrained boys and girls, swarming into the houses of these little towns and villages. Most of them had never been inside a house before; and they would be eager to look at the furniture and to know the uses of the many strange things: for example, the jar of lye for cleaning, the perfumes on the stand, the earthen vessels for water and milk, the lamps, the baskets made of twigs, the

pots for boiling broth, the oven for baking, in the door yard, and the wine press on the hillside where the grapes were trodden at the time of grape harvest.

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=The right and wrong of conquest.=—One may ask, what right had the Hebrews to attack and kill these people and seize their homes? Ideal Christian standards develop slowly. In these days of which we speak such standards had hardly been thought of. All weak nations were at the mercy of their stronger neighbors, and no one ever questioned the morality of it. It is good to know, moreover, that conquest, after all, was not the chief method by which the Hebrews made themselves masters of Canaan. After they had established themselves, here and there, in certain towns, and certain sections of the country, they gradually made friends with their Canaanite neighbors whom they had not been able to conquer at the beginning. In time their children intermarried with the children of the Canaanites until at last there came to be one nation, which was known as the Hebrews, or the Children of Israel.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read any one of the following sections: Numbers 11. 13-14, 20, 21; Deuteronomy 34; Joshua 1. 6.

2. Draw a map showing in a general way the movements of the Hebrews described in this chapter.

3. Look up in the Bible dictionary, “Manna,” “Spies,” “Kadesh,” “Jericho.”

4. Compare the conquest of Canaan with the treatment of the American Indians by white settlers.

5. How should the natives of Africa be treated in the opening up of Africa to civilization?

CHAPTER VII

LEARNING TO BE FARMERS

The wandering Hebrew shepherds were not savages nor barbarians. In many ways Abraham and his friends were cultured, civilized people; but their civilization was of a different kind from that of the settled farmers and villagers of Canaan. So when the Hebrews crossed the Jordan and gradually fought their way to the highland fields and villages where they were able to settle down and live as farmers and vineyard keepers instead of shepherds, they soon found that they had much to learn. The only teachers to whom they could turn were the Canaanites. Very soon, therefore, they made friends with their Canaanite neighbors.

“Tell us how to plant wheat,” the Hebrews said to them, for example; or, “Will you please show us how to prune these grape vines?” or, “Won’t you give us a few lessons in driving oxen? We can’t make these young steers pull.”

LEARNING TO RAISE AND USE CATTLE

This lesson about the training and care of cattle was one of the first and most necessary parts of their new education. As shepherds they knew all about sheep and goats; and this knowledge was still valuable, for on many a Canaanite hillside goats could thrive where no other animal could live. But as farmers they must also raise cattle, not only because of the milk, and the beef, but because they needed the oxen to draw their carts and plows and harrows. Oxen and asses, not horses, were the work animals of the farmers of those days. Oxen were more powerful than asses. Horses were seldom seen at all. They were used chiefly in war by the great military emperors of Egypt and Assyria.

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| [Illustration: *Egyptian plowing* |
| (Similar to Hebrew Method.)] |
| |
| [Illustration: *Egyptians threshing and* WINNOWING |
| (Hebrews used same methods.)] |
| |
| [Illustration: *Egyptian or Hebrew threshing floor*] |
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| Cuts on this page used by permission of the Palestine Foundation |
| Fund. |
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=Driving an ox team.=—So we can imagine the young Canaanites of those days watching a Hebrew farmer taking his first lesson with a team of oxen. There was a wooden yoke to lay on their necks; there was the two-wheeled farm cart with its long tongue to be fastened to the yoke. There was the goad, a long pole with a sharp point, to stick into the animals' flanks if they should balk. And probably there were many useful tricks to be learned; for example, words like our "Gee" and "Haw" and "Whoa," to shout at the animals when it was necessary to turn to the left or the right or to stop altogether.

Plowing was one of the most difficult of the tasks to be done with oxen. The furrows had to be run straight and true. And the plows were clumsy affairs—not like our shining steel plows to-day—just a long pole with a short diagonal crosspiece, sharpened at the lower end, or tipped with a small bronze share.

CROPS OF ANCIENT CANAAN

The Hebrews raised the same crops as the earlier Canaanites. The leading ones were wheat, barley, olives, grapes, and figs. The two grain crops were, of course, the most necessary to life. They were planted in the early spring, and harvested in the summer. The grain was sown broadcast, by hand, just as Jesus describes in his great parable of the sower.

=Ancient agriculture.=—Harvesting and threshing were done almost entirely by hand. The grain was cut with sickles. Some of the old sickles have recently been found by investigators, buried deep in the mounds where ruined Canaanite cities lie hidden. Some of these sickles are of metal, and others are made of the jawbones of oxen or asses, with sharp flints driven into the tooth sockets. After the grain was cut it was tied in bundles and carried to the threshing floor, which was usually a wide, level space of

hard ground or rock. Oxen were driven back and forth across the grain on the floor, drawing a heavy weight, until all or nearly all the kernels were shaken or crushed out of the heads. It usually

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took several days to thresh all the grain from an average-sized field. Then the straw was raked away, and the grain was left mixed with chaff and dust. The next windy day the winnowers, with large “fans,” or wooden shovels, came and tossed the mingled chaff and dust and grain in the wind. The kernels of wheat fell back and the chaff and dust were blown away. Last of all, the good clean grain was gathered in baskets and bags, and hauled to the farmer’s house, or to the granary, which was a round brick building standing beside or behind his house.

VINEYARDS AND OLIVES

Another new experience of the Hebrews in Canaan was the culture of grapevines. The vineyards were often on hillsides, especially those facing the south, and hence warmed by the early spring sunshine. The soil on these hillsides had to be terraced so that the rain would not wash it away. The vines had to be planted, trained on trellises, and pruned. At the time of the grape harvest many of the grapes, especially of the sweeter varieties, were set aside for raisins. They were spread out on sheets in the hot sunshine until they were dry and wrinkled. Then they were packed away in jars, where they settled into delicious cakes. Figs were dried and packed in the same way.

=The manufacture of wine.=—Many of the grapes were used for wine. The juice of these was trodden out in wine-presses. These were large hollows several feet square, cut in the solid rock on the hillside. There were always two of them, one lower than the other, with connecting passages. The bunches of grapes were piled in great heaps in the higher of the two, and then it was great fun for the boys and girls and youths and maidens to jump barefooted and barelegged among the purple clusters, and trample them until the foaming red juice ran down into the lower of the stone chambers, where it was taken up with gourd dippers and poured into skins. The youngsters would come home with their legs and shirts all stained and spotted red.

=Olive orchards.=—Almost every Canaanite farm had a few olive trees or a small olive orchard. The olives were prized for the oil which was squeezed from them. This oil was used as we use butter, with bread and in cooking. It was also burned in lamps. In fact, it was their chief fuel for lighting purposes.

The olive press was a large stone with a hollow in the top. From the bottom of the hollow, a hole was drilled through to the outside of the stone. Across the hollow swung a wooden beam, one end riveted to a tree or another stone, and the other end carrying weights. The ripe olives were shaken from the trees, and basket full after basket full poured into the hollow stone. Then the weighted beam would be laid across the top, with flat stones under it, fitting down into the hollow over the olives. The oil, trickling out below, was strained and stored in jars.

HARD WORK AND BRIGHT HOPES

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Most of these different kinds of crops called for an immense amount of hard work and drudgery. Think of the weariness of the reapers, swinging their sickles in the wheat or barley all day long under the hot Syrian sun. Think of the winnowers, tossing the grain into the wind. Think of the aching backs of the plower and the sower. Of course there were happy hours, also. It was great fun to ride home behind the oxen, on a cart packed full and pressed down with golden sheaves. The time of treading out the grapes was a festival of laughter, love-making, and song. And in the rainy season, after a year of plentiful harvests, when the granaries and cellars were well stored, there must have been many happy days of quiet rest and play in Hebrew homes.

But most of all, what cheered them on was the hope of better days to come, when their children at least, or their children's children, would not have to toil quite so hard or so long each day, and when the danger of famine and starvation would not loom up quite so grimly as in the old days in the desert when one summer of drought might mean death for all. Here in Canaan, they thought, we will surely be happy by and by.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Explain the following Scripture passages, in the light of the customs described in this chapter: Isaiah 63. 2; Deuteronomy 25. 4; Matthew 3. 12.

2. Psalm 23. 1 draws a great lesson about God from the experiences of shepherd life. What lesson about God is drawn from farm life in Isaiah 5. 1-7?

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| [Illustration: *An Egyptian reaping*] |
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| [Illustration: *Canaanite Hoes*] |
| |
| [Illustration: *Canaanite Sickle*] |
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| [Illustration: *Canaanite or Hebrew plowshares*] |
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CHAPTER VIII

VILLAGE LIFE IN CANAAN

The farmers of ancient Canaan all lived in villages. No farmer would have dreamed of building an isolated house for his family on his own field out of sight of his nearest neighbor as our American farmers do. The danger from robbers would have been too great. Instead of that, the Hebrew farmer lived in the nearest village or town. Early in the morning he went out to his field, and in the evening returned to his home inside the protecting village walls.

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These ancient villages would have seemed to us most unattractive places. The houses were crowded close together. The streets were only narrow crooked lanes between the houses. In the rear room of each house were the stalls of the family ox and ass. The brays of the ass were the alarm clock in the early morning. There was no drainage. Garbage was thrown into the street. There were smells of all varieties. One is not surprised by the frequent stories of pestilences in the Old-Testament history.

=Compensations of village life.=—It seems strange that people who were accustomed to life in the open desert should have ever brought themselves to settle down in these dirty, ill-smelling places. Surely, at first they must often have been homesick for the clean, pure air of the plains. On the other hand, probably most of them were willing to put up with the disagreeable odors and the dirty streets for the sake of being near other people. The desert was lonesome. In the village there was always something going on, something to hear and see, gossip of weddings and courtships and quarrels. Even to-day we find it hard to persuade those who are accustomed to the city to live in the country. Even though their city home may be a dark tenement in the slums, yet they enjoy being in a crowd of their fellow men. The country seems lonesome.

LESSONS IN HOUSE BUILDING

This village and town life, like the work on the farm, was a new school for the Hebrew shepherds, and set many an interesting problem for them to solve. They had to learn to build and repair houses. They were most often built of rough stones set in mud. The mud, when dry, became fairly hard, but not like mortar or cement. It was always easy for a thief “to dig through and steal,” as Jesus so graphically described. Even though no thief came the dried mud was always crumbling, leaving holes between the stones through which snakes or lizards could crawl. In such a house, if a man should lean against the wall, it might easily happen that a serpent would bite him, as the prophet Amos suggests.[3]

=Primitive Homes.=—The floor of the average poor man’s house was simply the hard ground. The flat roof was made of poles thatched with straw or brushwood and covered over with mud or clay. There was seldom more than one room. Often there were no windows; even in the palaces of kings there were in those days no windows of glass. In one corner of the room there was a fireplace where the family cooking was done. There was no chimney, however, and the smoke had to go out through the open door. The door itself was generally fastened to a post, the lower end of which turned in a hollow socket in a heavy stone. When the family went away from home the door was locked with a huge wooden key, which was carried, not in the pocket, like our keys, but over the shoulder. Such keys had this advantage, at any rate, over ours. You could not very well lose them and you did not need a key ring.

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=Houses of the well-to-do.=—Rich men's houses were, of course, more substantially and comfortably built. Real mortar made of lime was used in the walls. There were several rooms, including perhaps a cool "summer house" on the roof, making a kind of second story. One climbed up to these upper rooms by a ladder on the outside. The roof was solidly built and surrounded by a railing, so that on a hot summer evening the family could sit there and enjoy the cool evening breeze. There were windows also, covered with wooden lattice work, which let in light and air.

No doubt every Hebrew father hoped that some day he or his children might live in such a house. Some of them learned the builder's trade and were able to lay stones in mortar and to use saws and axes and nails and other tools for woodwork. Yet when David built his palace, he had to send to Tyre for skilled masons. Evidently in his day the Hebrews had not progressed very far in the manual training department of their new school.

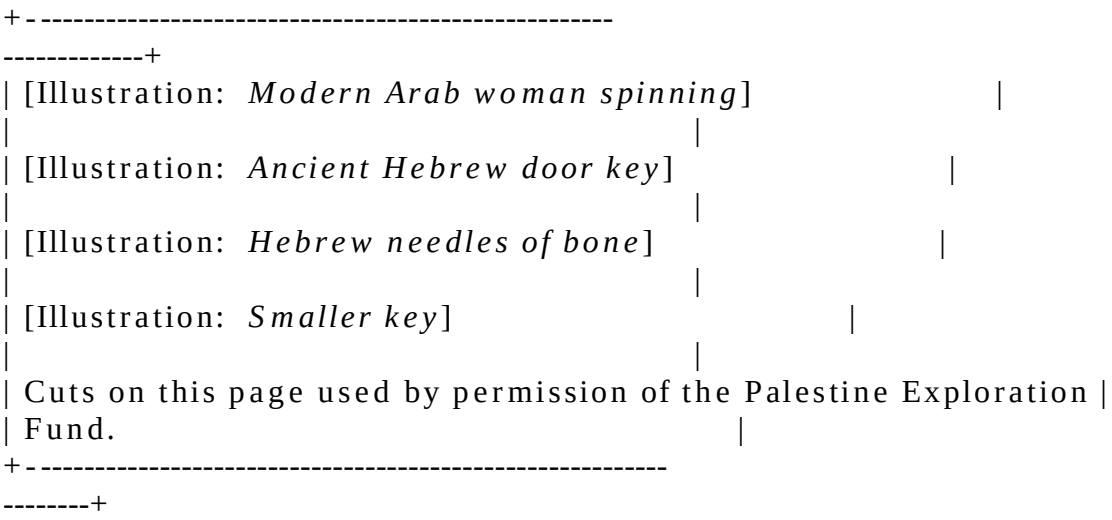
OTHER VILLAGE ARTS AND CRAFTS

Many trades, which with us are carried on in separate shops, were a part of the household work among the ancient Hebrews: for example, spinning and weaving and the making of baskets, of shoes, girdles, and other articles of skin or leather. We will study some of these household activities in another chapter. Other trades, however, even in the early days, were carried on by special artisans who worked at nothing else.

=Trained artisans.=—Metal workers, for example, formed a special trade. Among the excavations of ancient Canaanite cities have been found the ruins of a blacksmith shop. When the Hebrews entered Canaan no one had as yet learned the art of working in iron and steel by means of a forge with a forced draft. All tools and metal implements, such as plowshares, knives, axes, saws, and so on, were made of bronze, which consists of copper mixed and hardened with tin. The blacksmith melted the metals in a very simple and rough furnace of clay heated by charcoal. The bronze itself, although harder than copper, could be worked into the desired shape by hammering and filing, without the use of heat. We who are used to our sharp, finely tempered tools of steel would certainly have found these clumsy bronze affairs most unsatisfactory.

=The pottery shop.=—Another very ancient trade is that of the potter. This worker did not need much of a shop; only an oven in which to fire his products, a pile of clay, and a wheel. This consisted of a frame, in which turned an upright rod on which were two flat wooden wheels, one small at about the height of the worker's hands as he sat in front of it, and the other larger, to be turned by the feet. A heap of clay was placed on the upper wheel, which was then turned by the revolving rod, the potter's feet all the time kicking on the larger wheel below. The whirling mass was shaped by the fingers, according to the plan in the worker's mind.

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How quickly a modern boy would have contrived a different arrangement, with a belt and foot-tread like the one on our mother's sewing machine! But for those days the ancient wheel was ingenious. Many different kinds of Hebrew pottery are found in the excavations: large jars, small cups, lamps of all sizes and shapes and even babies' rattles.

=How Hebrew boys learned a trade.=—The youngsters from the desert had never seen any of these interesting crafts, except perhaps now and then when their fathers had brought them with the wool to market. But now, on a rainy day when there was no work to be done in the field or at home, the boys would go down the street to the blacksmith shop, or to the shed where the old Canaanite potter worked his clay. One of the older boys would say, "Let me see if I can make something," and if the old man was good-natured he would let him try and perhaps would teach him some of the tricks of the trade. By and by the boy would hire out as a potter's helper and in a year or two would set up a little pottery of his own.

So there came to be Hebrew as well as Canaanite potters and blacksmiths. They were proud of their skill in these arts, and as a nation they never were foolish enough to look down on them or to despise those who practiced them. All work was looked on as honorable. The apostle Paul was a tent-maker. Jesus was a carpenter. And in this respect for honest and useful work we may see another reason why the people of Israel have played so remarkable a part in the life of humanity.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Explain the following Scripture passage in the light of the customs described in this chapter. Isaiah 22. 22; Deuteronomy 22. 8.

2. In earlier chapters we have seen how the Hebrew leaders drew lessons about God from shepherd life (Psalm 23), and from farm life (Isaiah 5. 1-7). What lesson did a great prophet learn in regard to God from the experiences of an artisan? (Jeremiah 18. 1-6.)

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3. Why was it necessary to build a tower in a Canaanite vineyard, as suggested in Isaiah 5. 2 and Mark 12. 1?

FOOTNOTES:

[3] Amos 5. 19.

CHAPTER IX

KEEPING HOUSE INSTEAD OF CAMPING OUT

Let us suppose that we have been invited to spend a day or two as guests in the home of one of these Hebrew families who have just settled in Canaan and begun to learn the new arts and customs of the land. It is one of the poorer homes. We have slept through the night on our mat spread on the dirt floor of the house, with our cloak over us to keep us warm. Before daylight we are awakened by the older people moving about in the dim light of the burning wick in the saucer of oil. Soon everyone is awake. The mats are rolled up and piled in a corner. In the early dawn one of the older girls takes a jar on her shoulder and goes for water to the spring, which is outside the village half way up the hill.

If we are expecting to be called to breakfast, we shall be disappointed. There is no regular morning meal, although everyone helps himself to a bite or two of bread from the bread basket in the corner of the room. By and by father and the older boys take the ox and the ass from the shed just back of the one-roomed house (we are lucky if the animals were not kept all night in the house itself) and start for the field. And the women also have their day's work before them in the house. First of all, there is a bag of wheat to be ground into flour.

HOME TASKS

In the desert the wheat or barley, when they had it, was merely pounded between two rough stones such as could be picked up anywhere. The flour, or meal, which was made in this way was not very good. Here in Canaan, each house had a rude stone hand-mill for grinding grain. It consists of a large lower stone with a saddle-shaped hollow on the upper side. The upper stone is somewhat like a large, very heavy rolling pin. The grain is poured into the hollow and the upper stone is rolled back and forth over it while the flour gradually sifts out over the sides on to the cloth which is spread on the ground underneath the mill. It is a monotonous task, and very often two people work it together, one feeding in the grain and the other turning the millstone. This is pleasanter, as each worker is "company" for the other. Perhaps our hostess will let us

roll the millstone for her while she feeds in the grain and sweeps up the flour from the cloth on the ground.

=Baking bread.=—After the wheat is ground into flour there is bread to be baked. On the plains they do not use much yeast-bread, for this requires an oven for baking and one cannot carry heavy ovens from camp to camp. But in Canaan each family has its oven. It is made of baked clay and looks like a section of tiling standing on end, about two feet high, the clay being about an inch and a half thick. There is a cover of the same material. Sometimes the fire is made on the inside and the loaves of dough plastered on the outside. More often the loaves are placed on a baking tray, let down on the inside of the oven, and the fire built all around and over it outside.

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All sorts of fuel are used. Wood is the best, of course, but in that land wood has always been scarce. In the times of the Hebrews, as to-day, dried manure, straw, and all sorts of refuse were used. Jesus speaks of the grass of the field, “which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven.”

=Baking day.=—To-day, while we are visiting, our Hebrew hostess is kneading some dough. She “set it” last night, pouring in some liquid yeast. By and by it is ready for baking. A tray of small loaves about the size of biscuits is placed in the oven, and a great pile of dried grass placed around the sides and over the cover. By and by the fire is lighted from some coals on the hearth; and in a few moments the house is filled with smoke. We all go out on the street until the oven is heated and the smoke has escaped.

WEAVING WOOL AND FLAX

Another household utensil which Hebrew women learned to use in Canaan was the heavy loom. This consisted of a low horizontal frame, with a device for separating the odd and even threads of the “warp” while a shuttle was drawn through them, carrying the yarn for the “web,” or the cross threads. With this kind of a loom it was possible to weave much more rapidly than when one had to insert each thread, plaiting it over and under, by hand. There is, no doubt, one of these looms in the house where we are visiting.

=Making linen out of flax.=—In the desert almost all garments were made of wool, especially in the case of the poorer tribes, who could not afford to buy linen. In those days the use of cotton was probably unknown. Now everyone knows how it feels to wear a flannel shirt on a hot summer day. And one of the things which drew the Hebrew shepherds to Canaan was the hope of raising a little flax on each farm, and spinning it into cool, soft linen garments for the hot summers. So it may be that a part of the work in the house we are visiting to-day is to soak some of the stalks of flax in water, or to beat out from them the long fibers, or to spin and weave some of these fibers into cloth.

PREPARING DINNER

Of course the main business of each day in the household then, as now, is to get dinner ready. There is a light lunch about noon for the women and children. To-day perhaps we have some bread and milk. But as the sun begins to sink in the west we know that before long the men folks will come home hungry. We must have dinner ready for them when they come. If it has been a good year, even poor families in Canaan can have a fairly good meal. There is no meat, unless perhaps a lamb or a kid has been killed, especially for us as guests. But there is the curdled milk, and bread with olive oil and other things which shepherd folk never have. Here’s a steaming kettle of beans or

lentils. How good they smell! And here are some bunches of raisins and figs, just as sweet and luscious as those which we buy in the fruit stores in America. The figs in our stores may have come from that very country of which we are studying.

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=Serving the meal.=—Soon the father and the boys come home. The ox and the ass are fed in the stall behind the house. The mother spreads a cloth on the ground and on it places a small stand about eight inches high, which is their only dining-room table. The pot of beans is placed on this stand, and the bread and other good things on the cloth around it. We all sit down on the ground and begin to eat.

Fingers were made before forks. For the beans, however, we need a spoon, and here are some shells from the beach that serve admirably for that purpose; and we all dip into the same dish on the little stand. By and by, when all is gone but the liquid, we sop that up with pieces of bread. When every crumb is picked up and eaten, we all lift our eyes to heaven, and the father repeats a prayer of thanksgiving to God. Dinner is over. The sun has set. It is growing dark, and soon it will be time to go to bed.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Explain the following Scripture passages in the light of this chapter:

Judges 16. 13; Deuteronomy 24. 6; Matthew 24. 41.

2. Read Proverbs 31. 10-31 for another picture of daily life in an ancient Hebrew home. What is said in this chapter about the making of beautiful as well as necessary things, and about the doing of kindly deeds?

CHAPTER X

MORAL VICTORIES IN CANAAN

On the whole, Canaan was a good school for the Hebrew shepherds. New arts to learn, new crops to raise, new kinds of cloth to spin and weave, new kinds of food to cook—all this helped to make life more interesting and worth while. But there were other lessons which newcomers might learn which were not so wholesome.

Wine drinking, for example, was a habit which the wisest of the Hebrews always feared. The wine which they made in those foaming wine-presses was, of course, mild and harmless as compared with the distilled liquors of modern times. But even Canaanitish wine could deaden men's consciences and make them more like beasts than men. "Wine is a mocker," said one of the sages who wrote the book of Proverbs, "strong drink is raging, and he that is deceived thereby is not wise."

IDOLATRY IN CANAAN

Canaanite religion was to a large extent an unwholesome influence. The Canaanites worshiped many gods. Each village had its Baal, or lord, who had to be bribed with burnt offerings of fat beasts, or (as they thought) the soil would lose its fertility and the crops would fail.

=Dangerous examples.=—These sacrificial rites were carried on in the shrines or “high places,” one of which stood outside almost every village and town. They often were accompanied by dances and other performances which were licentious and degrading. The Hebrews, of course, were pledged to worship only Jehovah. Moreover, during these first centuries in Canaan they were very poor, and had little time for the carousals which went on at the “high places” in the name of religion. Corruption usually comes with wealth and luxury. Poverty and hardship are often useful safeguards. But from the beginning these heathen rites were a temptation and a snare in the lives of the Hebrews.

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CANAANITE BELIEFS ABOUT THE WORLD

There are certain questions which awaken the curiosity of everyone. How did this wonderful world come into existence? How is it that you and I happen to be here? How did things in general come to be as they are? Some of these difficult questions are to-day being partly answered by careful students of science. In ancient times there was little or no science, yet in every country there were certain answers to these questions handed down from generation to generation and generally accepted as true.

=Idolatrous stories of creation.=—When the Hebrews entered Canaan they naturally were inclined to accept the ideas of the earlier inhabitants of that country, whose knowledge in regard to many matters was far beyond theirs. The Canaanites in turn had got most of their ideas from the leading civilized nations of that day, the Egyptians, and especially the Babylonians. From these sources had come certain stories about the beginning of things.

Babylonian traders in the inns of Canaan used to tell a story of the creation of the world, and also about a great flood which the gods once sent upon the earth.

=How the Hebrews retold these stories.=—The best men among the Hebrews knew that these stories were imperfect. Their forty years training in the wilderness had made them wise in the ways of God. This wisdom enabled them to sift the wheat from the chaff. They retold these stories, omitting the error, and retaining the truth. Thus we come to have the wonderful stories of the creation and the flood as we find them in the Bible.

=How these stories were handed down.=—In the earliest days of the settlement in Canaan very few Hebrews, if any, could read or write. Possibly Moses understood the Egyptian picture-writing, or the wedge-shaped letters of the Babylonian clay tablets. The Hebrew letters, however, in which the books of the Old Testament afterward were written, were invented by the Phoenicians, and the Phoenicians passed on their invention to the old Canaanites.

After the Hebrews came it was not long before ambitious Hebrew boys and girls were staring at the queer marks in the inscriptions which they found here and there, over the gates of Canaanite cities or on the tombs of Canaanite kings. Gradually they learned to spell out syllables, words, and sentences, and then they learned to copy these same letters, so that in time the Hebrews were making inscriptions and books of their own. Among the earliest of these books was one containing the stories of the creation and the flood. They had been handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another, until finally they were gathered into a book. This became a part of the book of Genesis in our Bible.

NEW TENDENCIES TO SELFISHNESS IN CANAAN

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Another and different kind of temptation which the Hebrews met in Canaan was the tendency to forget their own tribal brothers as they scattered here and there and settled down, each family with its own little farm. There were some, naturally, who were more successful as farmers than others. And those who were unfortunate were not always the lazy or thriftless. Sickness or accident or some pest which attacked the grain or the cattle would sometimes wipe out the entire property of one of those little peasant farmers and leave him and his children face to face with starvation and death. Now, in the old days in the desert, as long as the tribe had a crust of bread or a drop of water, the weakest and poorest could count on a share. But here in Canaan the poor, the widow, the orphan, did not always feel so surely the sheltering arms of kindness and brotherhood.

=Humane laws enacted.=—Yet the spirit of Moses still lived and made its power felt. Certain laws gradually came to be accepted during this period when the Hebrews were learning to be farmers which were a special protection to the poor and helpless, just as the great leader would have chosen. We can imagine how these laws were first proclaimed by the chiefs of the clans and the elders of the villages wherever there were men who remembered how, years before, the whole nation had been poor and oppressed and enslaved. Here are some examples:

> ="Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry."=

="If thou lend money to any of my people with thee that is poor, thou shalt not be to him as a creditor; neither shall ye lay upon him usury. If thou at all take thy neighbor's garment to pledge, thou shalt restore it unto him before the sun goeth down; for that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? And it shall come to pass when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious."=

> ="Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbor, nor rob him; the wages of a hired servant shall not abide with thee all night until the morning."=

There is one law which illustrates especially well how the best men among the Hebrews tried to meet the new temptations of Canaan in the spirit of kindness and justice which they had learned from Moses.

="When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleaning of the harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the fallen fruit of thy vineyard. Thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger."=

It was already the custom among the Canaanites to leave the grain in the corners of the fields uncut, and not to pick up the scattered gleanings, which fell from the arms of the harvesters, and to leave

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on the ground the fruit that fell of itself from the vines and fruit trees. With the Canaanites this was on account of a superstition; the gleanings and the grain in the corners of the fields were for the Baal, or god of the field. If they were taken he would be angry. The Hebrews kept the old custom, but with a different aim—not to keep the Baal in good humor, but to make life a bit easier for the poor and unfortunate among their own neighbors. It was in accordance with this law that Ruth, although a foreigner, was allowed to glean after the reapers in the barley field of Boaz of Bethlehem, and thus obtained food to keep herself and her mother alive. So among these lowly people were being laid the foundations of that greater and better civilization for which Moses had prepared the way, and of which Abraham had dimly dreamed.

STUDY TOPICS

1. What parts of this chapter illustrate the special talent of the Hebrews for discovering good in things partly evil?

2. How could this talent be used in our American life? For example, in the matter of moving picture shows?

3. Read Leviticus 19. This chapter contains laws which were made during the period of the settlement in Canaan. Which of them seem to you to be in the spirit of Moses?

CHAPTER XI

LESSONS IN COOPERATION

After the Hebrews began to be settled in Canaan, not only were they tempted to neglect the poor and unfortunate; they also failed to stand together against their enemies. Each tribe and clan seemed to care only for its own safety.

The men of Judah in the south, the Ephraimites in central Canaan, and the Naphtalites in the northern hills, and Gilead and Reuben across the Jordan—each group tried to fight its own battles. Often they fought with each other. There was a bloody war between the men of Gilead, and their cousins, the Ephraimites on the opposite side of the Jordan. The Ephraimites crossed the river and attacked the Gileadites, and were badly beaten; when they tried to get back home again, they found the Gileadites holding the fords of the river. Each fugitive was asked, “Are you an Ephraimite?” If he said “No,” they would order him to say “Shibboleth” (a Hebrew word). And if he said “Sibboleth” (the Gileadite dialect), and did not pronounce it exactly right, then they would kill him.

This was only one example of the many wars between the tribes. There was no central government to keep the peace. This age in their history is sometimes called the period of the Judges. But these judges did not rule over the whole land. Most of them were

only petty champions, each of whom helped his own tribe to defend itself against its enemies.

SISERA AND DEBORAH

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In this disorganized state they would have been an easy prey to any strong enemy; and before long, an enemy came. In the fertile plain of Esdraelon, which cuts across Palestine just north of the central highland, there was a group of Canaanite towns which the Hebrews had not as yet conquered. These were organized into a kingdom by a warrior named Sisera, who at once began to reconquer those parts of the country which now belonged to the Hebrews. It was a bitter time for the tribes that were settled around the Plain of Esdraelon. Those villages which were perched on the mountain sides held out for a time, but the inhabitants dared not go down into the valleys. They could not take their grain to the market. The valley roads were all deserted except for bands of Sisera's troopers. Each year Sisera grew stronger, and more of the Hebrews submitted to him. In a little while there would have been none left to call themselves Hebrews and to keep up the noble traditions and hopes of Moses and Abraham.

=A wise and patriotic woman.=—If only the more distant tribes had come to the help of those that bordered on Sisera's kingdom, if only all the Hebrews had stood together, they could easily have defended themselves. But no one seemed to see this, or had faith enough to try to accomplish anything in this way "until Deborah arose." One day there came up through the sheepfolds of the Reubenites this remarkable woman whose name was Deborah. "Come to the help of your brethren across the river," she said, as she told her story. "Come to the help of Jehovah, by helping his people."

At first the Reubenites seemed greatly moved by Deborah's words. Certainly, they would come, whenever Deborah and her friends were ready. So the brave woman was encouraged and went to other tribes, to all of them one after another. But not everywhere was she successful. Many said: "Why should we go up and help your people? Suppose Sisera wins, he will come and punish us. We will stay here where we are safe." Even the Reubenites, whose first resolves had been so brave, changed their minds, and "stayed in their sheepfolds, listening to the pipings of the flocks."

=The battle by the Kishon River.=—After many weeks of tramping, however, Deborah was able to get a few of the tribes really organized. Ephraim, Benjamin, Naphtali, Zebulun, Issachar, and some smaller clans all promised to send troops and did send them. An army was gathered under a captain named Barak. The Canaanites under Sisera came out to fight them, and the battle took place on the flat fields of the Plain of Esdraelon. It looked like a victory for Sisera. He had charioteers as well as foot soldiers—troops of men in heavy war carts, from the axles of which extended sharp blades like scythes.

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But Deborah had called to her people in the name of Jehovah. And Jehovah seemed, indeed, to be on their side. We may well believe that it was the spirit of God that put it into the hearts of Deborah and Barak to delay the battle until there should be a rainy day. When the clash finally came there was a heavy downpour. The flat plain became a swamp. The war chariots sank into the mud and were helpless. The Canaanites became panic-stricken and fled in terror. Many of them were drowned in the attempt to cross the Kishon, which is usually a shallow creek, but on that day was a deep and swiftly flowing torrent. Sisera, himself in flight, was killed by a woman in whose tent he tried to take refuge. The battle was won for Jehovah's people. The Hebrews could still be free and independent, and they had learned a valuable lesson—the necessity for cooperation.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Judges.

2. With the help of a map showing the location of the various tribes in Canaan, find the ones which were most in danger from Sisera, whose kingdom was in the Plain of Esdraelon.

3. With the help of the map, explain why it was not easy for Deborah to persuade the Reubenites and the Gileadites to enter this war.

4. What arguments would you have used to persuade them?

5. Could you use the same arguments in favor of the League of Nations and our membership in it, as a nation?

CHAPTER XII

EXPERIMENTS IN GOVERNMENT

After Sisera was conquered, the Hebrew tribes which had combined against him immediately fell apart, relapsing into the same state of disunion and disorganization as before. And very soon other enemies took advantage of it to plunder and kill.

=The Midianites.=—Among the most harassing of these enemies for a time were the Midianites, who lived as nomads, roaming over the deserts just as the Hebrews themselves had done except that they made their living chiefly by robbery. Every spring just after the wheat and barley had begun to sprout, covering all the fields with a carpet of the brightest green, bands of these nomads would drive their flocks across the Jordan and turn them loose on the young grain while the men stood guard in armed bands. In the summer and fall after what was left of the grain had been harvested and

beaten out on the threshing floors they would come again and steal the threshed grain, taking it away in bags on the backs of camels.

Sometimes the Hebrews would keep the wheat and barley unthreshed with the sheaves piled up in grain ricks and would thresh it out, a little at a time, in the low, half-concealed wine presses, which were dug in the rock. No one's life was safe where these marauders were in the habit of coming, and no family could be sure of food to carry them over the winter months.

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GIDEON, THE ABIEZRITE

In the tribe of Manasseh there was a little clan called Abiezer. One night a band of Midianites came on camels and raided the villages of this clan, killing some of the people, and carrying away whatever they found of value. They then fled back across the Jordan River to the desert before enough Hebrew men could get together to resist them.

=The counter-raid.=—In the heart of one young man, the brother of some who were killed, God planted a sudden determination to put a stop to these murders and robberies. He called for volunteers to pursue this band across the river, and when some three hundred had responded they set out in hot haste, down the hillsides into the plain of the Jordan, up the slopes on the eastern side, and out onto the plains where the Midianites supposed they were safe. It was hard to track them over these solitary wastes; and they had their swift camels. But Gideon trailed them; stealing up at night, he surprised them. They fled in terror leaving much spoil, and for many years the Hebrews were not molested by this particular tribe of desert wanderers.

=The kingdom of Gideon.=—Out of this experience the Hebrews in central Canaan gained another lesson in cooperation; and they made up their minds to profit by it. Here is a man, they said to themselves, who can lead us to victory against our foes. If we all agree to do as he says we can all stand together, each for all and all for each. So they came to Gideon, and asked him to be their ruler. He refused at first, but it is clear that he finally accepted and really became king over some of the tribes and clans of central Canaan. One of his sons, a certain Abimelech, seized the kingdom after Gideon's death and proved to be a selfish tyrant. He was killed by his enemies, and that was the end of the dynasty of Gideon. "How can we have unity and cooperation under a strong leader," the Hebrews asked themselves, "and not at the same time be in danger of slavery under a ruthless tyrant?" That was a difficult question.

THE PHILISTINES

Meanwhile a national enemy far more dangerous than any previously mentioned had begun to threaten their existence as a people. About the same time that the Hebrews settled in Canaan there had landed from ships on the southwestern coast some newcomers of another race, perhaps akin to the Greeks; they were called Philistines. They quickly became a rich and powerful nation, holding the coast towns of Gath, Askelon, Gaza, Ashdod, and Ekron. They were ambitious to become masters of the whole land of Canaan. Their soldiers, in well-trained bands, built forts and established garrisons here and there, in the leading towns, and compelled the Hebrews to pay tribute.

At the same time they did not protect the country from other enemies. For example, there were the Amalekites on the southern border, who were robber-nomads, just like the Midianites on the east. There were the people of Ammon, a town east of the Jordan. From these and other petty enemies the Hebrews suffered much, and the Philistines did nothing to help them. All they cared about was the tribute. “O for a leader like Deborah and Gideon!” the Hebrews once again began to cry.

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=The messengers with the raw meat.=—One day messengers came hurrying through the towns and villages of central Canaan bearing sacks or baskets of raw beef chopped into small squares. To the leading men of each village, they handed a piece of the bloody flesh with this message: "This piece of ox flesh is from Saul, the son of Kish, of Gibeah in Benjamin. As this flesh is cut into small pieces so will the flesh of the men of your village be chopped up if you do not come at once, armed for battle, to help our brothers in Jabesh in Gilead east of the Jordan, which is besieged by the Ammonites." "Who is Saul?" many asked, and few could answer. Some perhaps were able to explain that he was a brave and able young farmer, a friend of a prophet named Samuel, in the tribe of Benjamin. But it was the raw meat that persuaded them to obey the summons. Here is a real leader, they said, a man who means what he says. And two or three nights later an army of Hebrews, with Saul in the lead, came dashing in among the tents of the Ammonites who were besieging Jabesh and put them to flight. The Gileadites were saved; and for years to come they remembered Saul with gratitude.

THE KINGDOM OF SAUL

Shortly after this victory there was a great gathering of the Hebrews of Benjamin and some of the neighboring tribes and Saul was elected as king. Would he also become a tyrant? Would he make their children slaves and take the best of their flocks and herds and wheat and oil, leaving them in poverty while he lived in luxury? There were many who thought so. The prophet Samuel, himself Saul's friend, warned them of the danger although he helped to make Saul king. But the danger from the Philistines was so great and they had suffered so much from their enemies on account of their lack of unity that they were willing to take the risk of organizing themselves as a kingdom under Saul.

=The first victories over the Philistines.=—Soon there came a summons to battle. The first encounter turned out well for the Hebrews. One of Saul's sons named Jonathan was especially brave and skillful as a leader, and was much loved by the people. Other victories followed. More and more clans and tribes flocked to Saul's standard. A young man from Judah, named David, became famous as a captain and was made the chief commander of Saul's armies. The Philistines were not driven out from their forts, but they were held in check and the sky seemed brighter. There was a chance now for victory and peace. Everyone was hopeful for better things. When the soldiers came back from fighting the Philistines, the women would go to meet them with songs and dances. One of their songs ran like this:

="Saul has slain his thousands
And David his ten thousands."=

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=Saul's jealousy.=—When Saul heard of this couplet he was jealous. "They gave more glory to David than to me," he thought. "One of these days, they will make him king in my place." His son Jonathan did not share his fears. He loved and trusted David. But from that time forward Saul hated David, and finally drove him out as a fugitive. Instead of fighting the Philistines he spent all his strength chasing David from town to town and from cave to cave. Of course the Philistines took advantage of this quarrel between the two ablest men among their foes and came back with a strong counter attack. Saul's own life was forfeited and that of Jonathan also in a disastrous defeat. The Philistines were masters once more. Saul's kingdom also had proved for the most part a failure.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Locate on the map the Midianites and the Philistines.

2. Why would it have been a calamity for the world if the Philistines had conquered the Hebrews?

3. Study carefully the parable of Jotham (Judges 9. 8-15). In the light of this shrewd illustration, why is it hard to get *good* men to run for political office, even to-day?

4. If we should undertake to have an *entirely different kind* of mayors, aldermen, governors, Presidents and so on, perhaps really good men would accept these offices. What kind?

CHAPTER XIII

THE NATION UNDER DAVID AND SOLOMON

After Saul's death his son Ishbaal fled across the Jordan where the Philistines were not yet in control, and was accepted as king by the East Jordan tribes. More and more, however, the hearts of all the Hebrews turned toward the young David, who, under the Philistines, to whom he paid tribute, now became king over the tribe of Judah in the south.

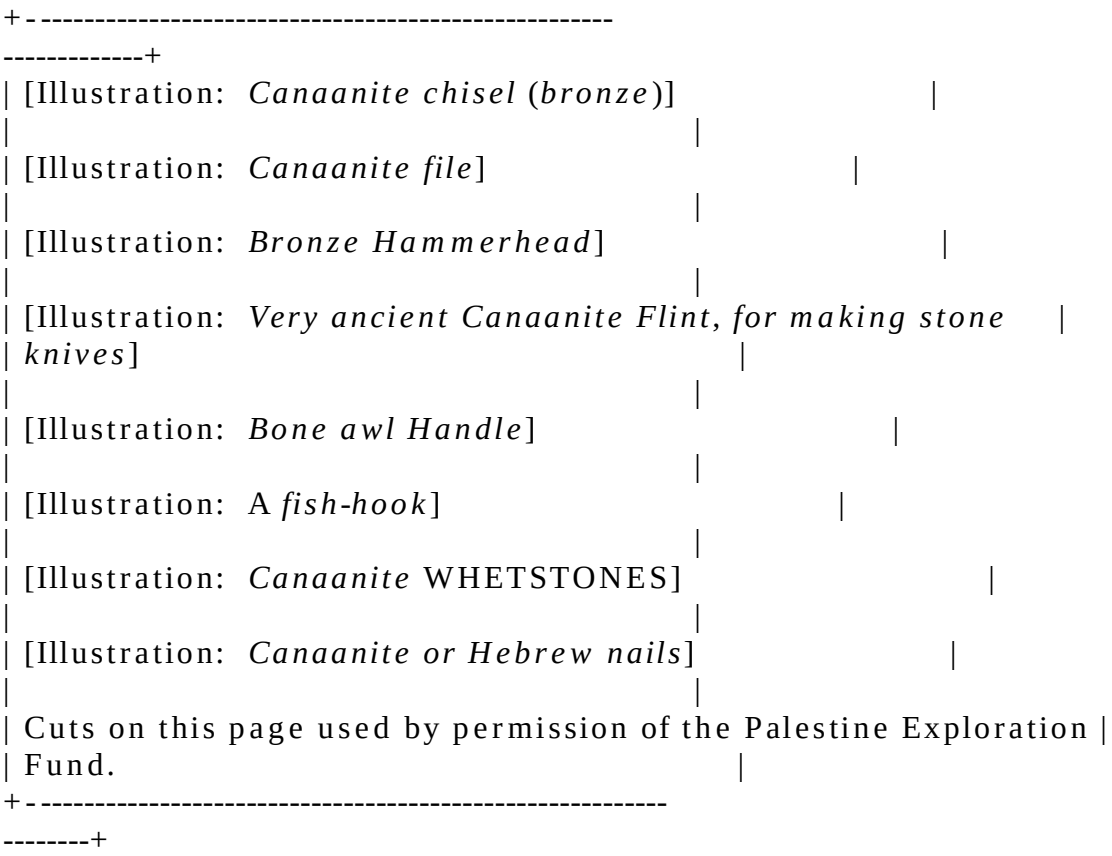
DAVID AS A LEADER

David was a born leader. Physically he was an athlete. With his sling he could throw stones straight, as Goliath, the Philistine giant, discovered to his sorrow. He had the gift of winning friends, even among those who might naturally have been his enemies, for example Jonathan and Michal, son and daughter of Saul, and Achish, the Philistine king. His followers with few exceptions were deeply devoted to him, risking their lives,

sometimes, to gratify his slightest wish. He was wise in his dealings with men, knowing when to be stern and when to be lenient.

=The nation united under David.=—For a few years there was more or less of war between the followers of David and the followers of Ishbaal. David did not like this war. He had no heart for fighting his own kinsmen, the people of the north. His method was to win them over without conquest. His chief difficulty in this was to restrain his own followers. Fighting always leads to more fighting. A bitter personal feud flamed up between Joab, David's chief general, and Abner, who was the real power in the other kingdom. David did not dare to punish Joab, yet he plainly showed his displeasure. When finally Ishbaal himself was murdered in his sleep, David put the assassins to death.

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By this policy he pleased the people, both in the north and in the south. And after seven years of division the leading men of all the tribes came to David at Hebron, in Judah his headquarters, and made him king over the entire Hebrew nation, north, east, and south.

=David's victories.=—Soon after this David declared his independence of the Philistines. War broke out and for a time it went against the Hebrews. But in the end they were able to rally their resources under their new leader, and inflicted two crushing defeats on their old enemies, which made them instead of the Philistines once and for all the masters of Canaan.

From the Philistines David turned against the other petty enemies who had so often taken advantage of the weakness of the Hebrews. Already, while a vassal of the Philistines, he had thoroughly punished the Amalekites, in the deserts of the south; and now he gave the Ammonites and Moabites and other enemies on the east a taste of Hebrew warfare. Before many years passed they had all learned their lesson, and there was peace in Canaan.

PROGRESS IN CIVILIZATION

During all those years when the Hebrews were fighting for existence life in their little villages and towns had been anything but pleasant. Not only was there constant danger from human enemies and from famine, there was also a lack of the comforts and pleasures of civilized life. There were no books to read, no musical instruments to play on, and few opportunities for any kind of recreation. They had only coarse, rough clothing to wear, and coarse, ugly furniture for their homes.

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=The development of commerce.=—Now that peace and security had been achieved, David did much to make the daily lives of all his people happier. One way was through commerce. The great merchants of those days were the Phoenicians, the people of Tyre and Sidon, whose daring sailors steered their ships into every harbor on the Mediterranean Sea and even out upon the stormy Atlantic and up to the tin mines of Britain.

Very wisely David made a treaty of friendship with Hiram, king of Tyre, and as a result Phoenician artists and artisans came down to Jerusalem and helped to beautify the city. Phoenician wares also began to be peddled in all the towns of Canaan: fine linen fabrics, such as the Hebrews did not know how to weave; beautiful jars and cups, such as Hebrew potters had not learned to fashion; jewels of silver and gold and precious stones, over which Hebrew maidens hovered with longing eyes. Soon one could see that the homes in these little towns of Judah and Benjamin and Ephraim were cleaner and better furnished, and the people were more neatly dressed. Commerce of the right kind is always a blessing.

=Education.=—Better than fine clothes and jewels and furniture are the things that feed the mind. David himself was a skillful harpist, and no doubt this helped to make harp-playing popular. On one occasion the ark of Jehovah, the sacred chest which had been carried in the desert, was brought up to Jerusalem. It was accompanied by a chorus of singers and a band of instrumental players, “with harps and lyres and cymbals.” In the worship of the temple at Jerusalem music from this time on had an important place. And all up and down the land here and there, one could hear in humble homes the tinkle of harp strings; and boys and girls who liked music could learn to play.

If not in David’s time, then very soon after, the first Hebrew history books were written. These contained stories which had been handed down from generation to generation; stories about the beginnings of things; stories about Abraham and Moses and other early heroes.

There were, of course, only a few copies of written rolls of stories, as compared with the millions of volumes which are constantly being turned out to-day by our great printing presses. But these few were much read, and those who read committed many of the stories to memory so that they could repeat them again and again in their home circles. In this way life grew more rich in pleasure and interest for many a Hebrew youth and maiden.

DAVID’S SUCCESSOR, SOLOMON

After David’s death his son Solomon was made King. He also encouraged commerce, both by land and by sea. His ships sailed down the Red Sea to India, and back, and

over the Mediterranean Sea to Spain. They brought back, according to the author of First Kings, “gold and silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks.”

=Solomon’s folly.=—Alas for the happiness of the people, Solomon was a different kind of a man from his father. Like so many other sons of good kings he was spoiled by too much luxury and too little discipline. He had the reputation of being very wise, but in reality he was very foolish. His chief ambition was to have splendid palaces, and to make a great display of riches, like the kings of Egypt and Babylonia.

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In order to build these fine buildings and have great numbers of servants it was necessary to extort the money from his people by heavy taxes. They were also compelled to labor without pay in his quarries and elsewhere. So with all the increased wealth in the land and with all the seeming progress in civilization, the common people were really wretched—almost worse off than in the old days of disunion and confusion and fear.

=The disruption of the kingdom.=—As a result of this cruelty and oppression, the northern tribes, after Solomon's death, rebelled against his son Rehoboam, who seemed likely to become even more of an oppressor than his father. The tribe of Judah in the south remained faithful to the family of David. So the nation was split in two parts, which were never reunited.

If only all kings could be like David! He indeed was far from perfect; he was guilty of some very wicked crimes. But on the whole he came nearer than most kings to the best ideals of the Hebrews for their rulers: a man "from among thy brethren: ... neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold, ... that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, ... and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand nor to the left."

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up Joab in a good Bible dictionary, and see how much David owed to this extraordinary man for his success.

2. Read 2 Samuel 23. 13-17, as a good example of the devotion and loyalty David was able to awaken in his followers.

3. With which did David do the more for the happiness of his people, with the sword, or with his harp?

4. Why did Solomon grow up with selfish and extravagant habits and ideals? Read 2 Samuel 11, 12 for an explanation.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WARS OF KINGS AND THE PEOPLE'S SORROWS

The Hebrews did not greatly better themselves by the division of the kingdom and by the revolt of the northern tribes from Solomon's son. There were still kings both in the north and in the south. And all they cared about was glory and luxury for themselves.

AN ERA OF PERPETUAL WAR

In order to get glory and wealth these kings made war on neighboring countries. For a long time there was war between the northern and southern Hebrews. There were long and very bloody wars between the Hebrews and the Arameans, whose kings ruled in Damascus. There were many wars between rival candidates for the throne among the Hebrews themselves. Especially was this true in the northern kingdom where, during the two hundred years of its separate existence, there was a revolution on an average every thirty or forty years. In such cases all the members of the existing royal family would be assassinated and all persons who defended them or were suspected of sympathizing with them were put to death. After the murder of hundreds and sometimes thousands the new upstart conqueror would proclaim himself king.

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=Famine and pestilence.=—These constant wars not only brought wounds and death and sorrow to many homes, they also kept all the people poor and increased the deadliness of the other great historic curses of humanity, such as famine. The money and labor spent on war might have been used in terracing hillsides and fertilizing fields, so that in times of drought the crops would not wholly fail and starvation and death might thus have been pushed back a little further from the cottages of the poor.

Wars also bring disease. In those days, epidemics of disease were frightfully common at best. They knew nothing about sanitation. Even in the most important cities, sewage and garbage were dumped in the streets. Leprosy was an everyday sight. Rats and other vermin swarmed everywhere except in the palaces of the rich; and when the soldiers came home from war, bringing with them typhus fever or cholera or the plague, the people died like flies.

=The dynasty of Omri.=—Among the best of the successors of David and Solomon were Omri and his son Ahab, in the north. They made peace with the southern Hebrews in Judah and renewed the old alliance with Tyre. They built as their capital the beautiful city of Samaria. Ahab especially was greatly admired as a brave warrior and as a king who on the whole tried to serve his country well. Yet even Ahab was a despot. His own glory and wealth were to him of chief importance, and his people's needs and sufferings secondary.

BACK TO THE DESERT

Under these conditions it was natural that many people should look back with longing to the olden times, especially to the time of Moses, before the people had left the desert and settled in Canaan. All these newfangled ways, they said, are evil. They have brought us only trouble. Especially bad is the worship of these Baals instead of Jehovah, the God of our fathers. No doubt Jehovah is jealous and angry and has brought war and famine and pestilence upon us for just this reason. Many, indeed, who did not altogether object to the civilized customs of Canaan were uneasy in their minds because of the worship of the Baals. When Ahab made his alliance with the king of Tyre he had built, in Samaria, shrines to the Baal of Tyre. This was in accordance with the religious ideas of those days. When two countries made an alliance there was supposed to be an alliance between their gods. But the Hebrews had made a special covenant to worship no other gods but only Jehovah. So there were many who were opposed to the worship of the Baals.

=The Rechabites.=—One Hebrew clan known as the Rechabites, actually became nomads again and did all they could to persuade others to do the same. They gave up their houses and lived in tents. They pledged themselves to drink no wine or strong drink, and they were enthusiastically devoted to the worship of Jehovah only. Naturally they hated Ahab for bringing in the worship of the foreign gods of Tyre. They did much

to cause the overthrow of the dynasty of Ahab in favor of a general named Jehu, who was pledged to drive out the Phoenicians and their gods.

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THE PROPHETS

There were also certain specially religious people, called prophets, some of whom saw the evils which were ruining the happiness of the people and fought against them. In the earliest days, these men who were called prophets were much like the soothsayers of other nations. They were supposed to have a special power of speaking revelations from God. Sometimes they went into trances. Sometimes they caused exciting music to be played in their hearing. Most of them spoke what seemed likely to be popular with their hearers. For example, once when Ahab wanted to start a new war against Damascus, he sent for prophets and some four hundred were brought to him. "Shall we go to war or not?" he asked. All but one, knowing that Ahab's heart was set on the matter, answered, "Jehovah says, go to war, and he will give you victory."

=Micaiah.=—The true prophets, however, were men of truth who worshiped Jehovah and waited for his teaching. Such a man was Micaiah. When Ahab asked him, "What do you say?" his answer was like the others. But his manner was so sarcastic that the king kept asking him. He finally declared that Jehovah had revealed to him that the proposed expedition would end in disaster. For this Micaiah was thrown into a dungeon. But his prophecy came true. The Hebrews were defeated, and Ahab himself was killed.

=Elijah.=—The greatest leader in this movement back to the desert and to Moses, was a prophet named Elijah. He was like the Rechabites in his aims. He was dressed like a desert nomad and his whole life was given to the cause of the old desert religion. He had a very clear understanding as to what was best in that religion. It was not merely because Jehovah might be jealous of other gods that Elijah fought against Baal worship, but also because Jehovah really stood for justice and righteousness as against the unrighteousness of the Baals. Elijah was not only a champion of Jehovah; he was a champion of the poor against their oppressors, a champion of the common people against the despotism of kings, as is so vividly and thrillingly illustrated in the story of Naboth's vineyard.

=Elisha.=—Elijah's work was carried on after his death by another prophet named Elisha. He also seems to have been a friend of the common people. Many traditions of his helpfulness to them are recorded in the second book of Kings. But his chief aim was to overthrow the dynasty of Ahab. It was Elisha who, with the help of the Rechabites, launched the revolution of Jehu.

=A disappointing outcome.=—Jehu was really no better than Ahab. He was willing to drive out the priests of the Phoenician Baal, and he offered many sacrifices to Jehovah. But his chief ambition was for himself. Instead of bringing peace and justice to the poor, suffering, war-scourged people, his reign was horrible for its bloody killings. No one was safe from his murderous jealousy.

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There was needed something more than a mere revival of the “old time religion” of Moses. There had to be purer and nobler ideas of Jehovah, a better knowledge of the real nature of Jehovah and of what Jehovah demanded of men, and of the kind of worship which would please him. Till then there was little hope of happiness for men and women and little children.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read 2 Kings 6. 24-30 for a vivid picture of the sufferings of the common people of Israel, as a result of constant wars.

2. Read 1 Kings 20. 1-34 for some light on Ahab as an able king. What qualities are displayed by him, in the narrative of this chapter?

3. Look up Rechabites in the Bible dictionary for a more complete narrative about them.

4. Is war more of a curse to the common people to-day than in ancient times, or less? Why? What classes still suffer most from war, the rich and powerful or the common people?

CHAPTER XV

A NEW KIND OF RELIGION

Among all ancient peoples, including the Hebrews, a large part of religion was the burning of animal sacrifices on altars. Whenever a sheep or lamb or kid was slaughtered for food the blood was poured out on the sacred rock, or altar, in which the god was supposed to dwell. Afterward the fat was burned on the same rock. It was believed that the god in the rock drank the blood and smelled the fragrant odor of the burning fat.

=Whole burnt offerings.=—On special occasions, such as a wedding, the birth of a child, the beginning of a war, or the celebration of a victory, the entire animal was burned on the altar. The first-born calves, or lambs, or kids of any animal mother were also regarded by the Hebrews as sacred and were burned as whole burnt-offerings to Jehovah.

SACRIFICES IN CANAAN

After the Hebrews settled in Canaan they adopted other kinds of sacrifices. Grains and fruits were offered as well as animals. Wine and oil were poured on the altars. Baked cakes were burned. One sheaf from every harvest field of wheat or barley was

supposed to be waved back and forth before an altar of Jehovah. This was a sort of religious drama by which Jehovah was thought to receive a share of the grain.

=Religious feasts.=—In Canaan also the Hebrews observed certain religious festivals, which corresponded to the early, middle, and late harvest seasons; they were called respectively, the “Feast of Unleavened Bread,” the “Feast of Weeks” (or Pentecost), and the “Feast of Tabernacles.” All of these were joyous occasions somewhat like our Thanksgiving Day, and at all of them each family offered to Jehovah some part of the products of their fields.

PRIESTS AND THEIR DUTIES

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The altars where these sacrifices were offered were in charge of a special class of men, the priests. In the early days, in Canaan, there was a little temple, or shrine, outside each town and village with one or more priests in charge of it. Sometimes wealthy men had private shrines and hired their own special priests. It was the business of these men to know just how a sacrifice must be offered in order that it might be pleasing to Jehovah. There were certain rules and regulations handed down from generation to generation. There were certain kinds of animals which could not be offered. It was important to know just what parts of each victim were to be burned. The various meal offerings had to be prepared in a certain way. Yeast could not be used, nor honey.

=The increasing number of priestly rules.=—As the centuries passed more and more rules were worked out by the priests. This was their whole business in life, and, of course, they made much of it. More and more different kinds of offerings were invented; for example, incense, which was the burning of herbs which made a sweet-smelling smoke. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, especially Leviticus, are largely composed of these rules for sacrifices. The animals had to be washed, killed, and skinned, according to certain directions. The blood had to be disposed of according to strict rule—some placed in the horns of the altar, some on the priests, some on the worshiper bringing the offering, and so on. And the more there were of these rules, the more priests there had to be to remember and enforce them. Thus it came about that all too frequently sacrifices came to be the chief thing in religion. Religion meant sacrifices and not much else.

THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM II

Jeroboam II, who reigned over the northern kingdom of Israel for some forty years, beginning about B.C. 790, was in some ways like Ahab, who lived a century earlier. He was victorious in war and brought peace and prosperity to his nation. These years of peace brought little happiness, however, to the common people of Israel. They had already become so poverty-stricken during the long years of petty but cruel wars, under the earlier kings since Solomon, that they were practically at the mercy of a small class of nobles and wealthy merchants who grew richer all the time while the people grew poorer.

=Evil days.=—These rich men used false weights and measures. In buying wheat from the farmer they would use heavy weights, and get more than was right; in selling to the poor of the cities they used light weights, and so gave out little for much. They corrupted courts and judges, so that no poor man could get his rights. They charged enormous rates of interest for the money which the poor were obliged to borrow. All over the land the mass of the people were living in hovels and selling their sons and their daughters into slavery to keep from starving, while the rich men and their families lived in luxury and in wasteful, extravagant display.

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None of this shameful injustice seemed to weigh heavily on any man's conscience, for they were careful to keep up all the sacrifices to Jehovah. And was not Jehovah showing his pleasure by granting them these long years of peace and prosperity? They forgot the old lessons of Jehovah's justice which the nation had learned from Moses. Even Moses, according to their traditions, had given laws about sacrifices and offerings. These seemed to be the essential thing. So they kept on offering up costly sacrifices at their great temples and shrines, with stately and gorgeous ceremonials, and thought to themselves, "How pleased Jehovah must be!"

AMOS

There came one day to King Jeroboam's own shrine at Bethel a man in the garb of a shepherd and speaking in the name of Jehovah, like the prophets. But what strange words are these which he utters?

="I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your ... meal-offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace-offerings of your fat beasts. Take away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."=

What this shepherd prophet was proclaiming was a religion in which burnt-offerings, or sacrificial ceremonies of any kind had little or no place, but which expressed itself in justice and righteousness toward one's fellow men. What Jehovah wants is not sacrifices at all, he said, but to stop cheating the poor: to throw away your false balances, and set free the slave.

=Amos' dire forebodings.=—In many addresses, as reported in the book which bears his name, with bitter and thrilling eloquence Amos tried to drive home this great message to the hearts of his fellow countrymen. He warned them that unless they heeded, disaster would come to the nation. For as surely as Jehovah demanded justice, so surely would he punish injustice. Terrible are his pictures of the calamities with which the guilty Israelites would be visited. Nor did he appeal wholly to fear. There is now and then a pleading note in Amos. Honest and burning indignation and threats are indeed most common in the pages of his book; yet listen to this:

="Thus the Lord God showed me: and, behold, he formed locusts in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth ... and ... when they made an end of eating the grass of the land, then I said, O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand? for he is small."=

There speaks the shepherd pleading for his little sheep—"How can Jacob stand, for he is small?"

THE RESULTS OF AMOS' WORDS

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Amos' mission to the northern kingdom seemed to be a failure. He had come up from his sheep tending, in his home in Tekoa, in Judah, because he felt burning within him a message for his people. But he soon went home. The chief priest at Bethel drove him out. And apparently the people did not care. No doubt even the poor people in whose cause Amos had so eloquently spoken were shocked by his words. "What, are not our sacrifices holy and pleasing to Jehovah? Would he have us stop offering up burnt-offerings? That is almost blasphemous."

=Bread upon the waters.=—Yet there were some who listened. And the proof is found in the existence of the book of Amos in the Bible. Some one cared enough to preserve and copy the first manuscript of Amos' sermons and to make still other copies. Another proof is the fact that within that same century three other supremely great religious teachers caught up his great idea of a new kind of religion and repeated it in new and wonderfully convincing ways. Of these other prophets we shall learn more in the chapters to follow.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Glance over the book of Leviticus, also the latter part of Exodus, and the book of Numbers. How important did the Hebrews evidently consider the carrying out of sacrifices?

2. Look up in the Bible dictionary Jeroboam II and Amos. Find out more (1) about the times in which Amos lived and (2) about his personal history and character.

3. Read as much as you can in the book of Amos: chapters 1 and 2 and 7 and 8 are most important for our study.

4. Are religious ceremonies ever substituted to-day for the religion of justice and right? If so, explain how.

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW KIND OF WORSHIP

Amos seemed to think of sacrifices and burnt-offerings as mere formalities which distracted men's attention from the thing of real importance, namely, just and righteous dealing between man and his neighbor.

There was another prophet who lived a little later than Amos. Perhaps as a youth he heard Amos speak. This was Hosea, who probably came from Gilead east of the Jordan. This man saw even deeper into the truth of religion than Amos, and his

messages wonderfully completed and rounded out the great true words which the older prophet had so bravely spoken.

THE GOOD AND THE EVIL IN THE OLD SACRIFICES

The old religion of sacrifices was by no means wholly evil. When a family in those days sat down to a happy feast and gave some of everything in gratitude to Jehovah, God really was there, not in the sacred rock, but in their love for one another and for him. When they poured out libations and burned fat on the altar, God was indeed glad, not because of the smell of the smoke or because he enjoyed drinking the blood, but because his children were grateful.

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=Wrong ideas of God.=—On the other hand, these sacrifices, when misunderstood, tended to give people a wrong idea of God as one who was greedy for food and gifts. There was the greater danger of this wrong idea because of the character of the priests who were supposed to represent Jehovah. Many of them were very greedy indeed. The story of Eli's sons in 1 Samuel 2. 12-17 is an illustration. The priests were supposed to receive for their own personal support a part of all the gifts which were brought to the shrine. But the sons of Eli made it the rule that whatever came out of the meat kettle on a three-pronged fork stuck in by the priest should belong to him. Very often, it is plain, the priest got everything. And naturally the people came to think of Jehovah as like his priests—as a Being who cared only for gifts.

=A worship based on greed.=—The worship of such a god, or of a god who was thought of as being of such a character, would, of course, be very far from the love and adoration which we Christians are taught to offer to our Father, and was really far from the kind of worship advocated by devout Hebrews. It would be a sort of bargain-hunting worship: the people to bring gifts of the fat of lambs and libations of blood and wine, and the god to give them in return good crops of wheat and oil, and figs and grapes, and an abundance of silver and gold. If Jehovah would give these things, then worship Jehovah. If other gods and Baals would give more than Jehovah, worship them.

In short these sacrifices, as Hosea saw, were a kind of worship, and no worship is a mere formality, but is a vast influence for good or for ill. Because of these wrong ideas the sacrifices had come to be more and more an influence for evil. And you cannot have a righteous and happy human family in which men are just and kind to each other, without a true worship, growing out of a true idea of God.

HOSEA'S EXPERIENCE AND MESSAGE

This young man from the lovely, grassy plains and valleys east of the Jordan had had an experience which taught him much. He was by nature a man with a loving heart. He loved his native land with a burning patriotism. By and by there came to him, as to most young men, the experience of a passionate love for a beautiful girl. All the deep wells of tenderness in Hosea's loving heart were hers, and she became his wife. For a time they were happy; then little by little it became clear that this woman, Gomer, did not really love him as he loved her. She only wanted his money. And when she could get nothing more from him, or could get more elsewhere, she left him. She was like the woman in Kipling's poem, "The Vampire," "she did not care." It hurt Hosea. For a time the light of the whole world seemed darkened for him.

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=Reading a meaning in sorrow.=—Then like a flash the thought came to him; Jehovah is just like me in this regard. He wants love, not gifts, from his people, a love which on their part does not fawn for other gifts from him in return, like the cupboard love of kittens purring for cream. He loves his people Israel just as I love Gomer. That is why he asks us not to worship these other gods, the Baals; not because he is jealous but because he is good. He wants us to learn a different kind of worship altogether—a worship which is not prompted by greed but by love.

With his whole soul aflame, Hosea poured these new ideas into the ears of his countrymen.

> ="I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God
> more than burnt-offerings."=

These great words were quoted by Jesus himself in one of his controversies with the Pharisees; they are one of the supreme utterances of human literature.

STORM CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON

This new insight of Hosea helped him to interpret hopefully the troubles which at that time were coming thick and fast upon his people. The forebodings of Amos were coming true. The kings of Assyria were ambitious. They had set their hearts upon a great Assyrian empire extending from Babylonia to Egypt. For more than two centuries each new king at Nineveh sent his conquering armies farther west and south. Already in Hosea's day they had more than once invaded northern Israel and had taken away tribute. And the leaders of the nation did not have the brains or the character to avoid a conflict with this merciless and resistless foe.

=Jehovah loving even in punishment.=—Amos had declared that Jehovah would surely punish his people because of injustices and wrongs which they were inflicting on one another. Hosea agreed, but was able to go further, and say that in these very punishments which were now coming Jehovah was still showing not his anger but his love. He was punishing in the hope that his children might learn their lesson and return to him in love.

=Fall of the northern kingdom.=—The nation, as a nation, seemed to pay no attention to Hosea's pleadings. They went right on living their selfish and greedy and lustful lives. And in B.C. 721, as a result of provoking the Assyrian king Shalmanezer to a fresh attack, the land was again invaded and the city of Samaria was captured and sacked. Thousands of the northern Hebrews were carried away as exiles to other lands and never returned. The northern kingdom was a failure. The religious ideals and dreams of Abraham and Moses had not yet been fulfilled. The common people had had little opportunity for happiness or growth in knowledge and goodness. But the southern

kingdom still existed. And many a disciple of Hosea, some of them carrying scraps and rolls of papyrus on which his sayings were copied, fled to Jerusalem, and there sowed the seed of his great message of a God not only of justice but of love.

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STUDY TOPICS

1. Read Genesis 4. 1-15. In this story of Cain and Abel is there any hint as to how even an animal sacrifice might be true worship?

2. Look up Hosea in the Bible dictionary, or in the chapter on Hosea in Cornill, The Prophets of Israel. Find out more about the times in which he lived and about his personal history.

3. Read what you can in the book of Hosea. This is rather hard reading, but chapter 11 is not very difficult, and gives a good idea of Hosea's style.

4. Which kind of prayer counts more for the happiness of all, prayers for personal advantage, or prayers of love and gratitude to our Father?

CHAPTER XVII

JEHOVAH NOT A GOD OF ANGER

There are other mischievous delusions in regard to the character of God which we find among all races in the early childhood of their history. They think of their gods not only as greedy but as having arbitrary whims and as often falling into fits of unreasonable and cruel anger.

EARLY IDEAS OF JEHOVAH'S ANGER

The Hebrews were not entirely free from these wrong notions in their conception of Jehovah. Even in the story of Moses, for example, there is a strange narrative which declares Jehovah "met Moses and sought to kill him" and would have killed him except for the ceremonial rite which his wife Zipporah performed.

=The story of the ark and the men of Beth-shemesh.=—Similar to this is the story of the wanderings of the ark in 1 Samuel. This ark, or sacred chest, was regarded as the special dwelling place of Jehovah in Canaan, his permanent home supposedly being on Mount Sinai in the desert. When the ark was captured by the Philistines a plague broke out in every city where it was taken. Finally it was placed on a new cart with specially chosen cows to draw it, and sent back toward the Hebrew border, and in the course of time it reached the Hebrew town of Beth-shemesh. And we read that "the sons of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the men of Beth-shemesh, when they looked upon the ark of Jehovah. So he smote among them seventy men."[4]

SACRIFICE AS A PROPITIATION OF JEHOVAH'S ANGER

It was just this idea of Jehovah as subject to fits of anger which prompted many of the old sacrifices. It was not merely that Jehovah was greedy and could be bribed with gifts to grant favors, but also that he was dangerous when his anger was stirred and hence sacrifices were necessary to placate him.

=Human sacrifices.=—An even darker side of the picture is the existence of human sacrifices, even among the Hebrews, in the worship of Jehovah. The pathetic story of Jephthah's daughter is the most conspicuous example. This warrior had promised to sacrifice to Jehovah whatever first came out to meet him, if he returned victorious from war. Alas, it was his own daughter! Yet he did not dare to break his vow.

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The story of Abraham and Isaac also proves that human sacrifices to Jehovah were not unknown among the Hebrews. In this story Jehovah finally intervenes and allows Abraham to offer up a ram instead of his own son. Yet the story implies the belief that Jehovah might demand of a father that he kill his own son and burn him on the altar. These ideas continued to be believed even down to the time of the prophets, Amos and Hosea, and the others about whom we will study.

THE PROPHET MICAH AND HIS MESSAGE

About the time that Hosea was finishing his sad career in the north another prophet in the south caught up the torch of light and truth. His name was Micah. Like the two great men who preceded him, Amos and Hosea, his heart was stirred to pity and indignation by the sufferings of the poor and by the injustice and luxury of the rich and powerful. In plain, direct, and fiery sentences he denounced these evils and foretold punishment. Because of these things, he declared that “Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.”

Micah was especially bitter against those men who made religion their business, and used it as a means of oppressing the poor—the prophets who proclaim a holy war against those “who put not into their mouths,” that is, those who do not give them presents. The priests, Micah says, “teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money.”

=Micah’s great message.=—It was, of course, the existence of superstitious fears in the hearts of the people which made it possible for the priests and the prophets to join with the rich nobles in preying upon them. “You give me this or that,” “You pay for this sacrifice or that—or I will call down a curse upon you from Jehovah. Some dreadful misfortune will come upon you.” With one great word whose throbbing pity for the ignorance and sorrow of men makes it another of the great utterances of human lips, Micah cut the root of all such fears. Jehovah is not that kind of a God, he declared. He does not break out in fits of rage. He does not need to be wheedled back into good nature by costly offerings, perhaps even sometimes with the costliest offerings of all, one’s own darling children.

="Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."=

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read the stories of the ark, referred to in this chapter. See 1 Samuel 6. 1-20; 2 Samuel 6. 1-9. What other way of explaining the death of Uzzah and of the men of Beth-shemesh occurs to you rather than the anger of Jehovah? In the case of the men of Beth-shemesh, read 1 Samuel 5, with its clear indications of contagious disease.

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2. How has modern science helped to free mankind from the curse of superstitious fear?

3. Look up Micah in the Bible dictionary, and find out all you can about his personal history and work.

4. Are superstition and wrong religious beliefs ever made the means of extortion and oppression to-day? If so, how?

FOOTNOTES:

[4] 1 Samuel 6. 19, Greek version.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONE JUST GOD OVER ALL PEOPLES

THE MESSAGE OF ISAIAH

The destruction of the northern kingdom by the Assyrian armies struck fear into the hearts of the Hebrews of the sister kingdom in the south. No one had dreamed that such a thing could happen. It is true that from the beginning of the terrible onrush the Assyrians had been almost irresistible. All the little nations which had stood in their way had been swallowed up.

Moreover, the prophets Amos and Hosea had plainly foretold that some such calamity would be sent upon Israelites by Jehovah on account of their sins. But very few of them believed these brave and lonely preachers of the truth. “Jehovah send the Assyrians against us! Why, that is absurd! We are Jehovah’s people, and he is our God. What has he to do with the Assyrians? He may chastise us, but not by sending foreign armies to conquer us. What would he do if we should be conquered? He would have no nation to worship him.” So they reasoned.

=Jehovah too weak to protect his people?=—When, therefore, the Assyrians actually did come marching down from the Euphrates River, hundreds of thousands of them with their gleaming armor and their multitudes of horses and war chariots, and besieged and captured the city of Samaria, leaving it a ruin, most of the Hebrews, north and south, were sick with fear and bewilderment. For them with their false notions it could mean only one thing: their God, Jehovah, was too weak to protect his people against the greater gods of Nineveh. The Assyrians said to them:

="Let not thy God in whom thou trusteth deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly: and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them?... Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim?"=

Against such taunts as these, the Hebrews, with their mistaken beliefs, could bring no answer.

THE CRAZE FOR FOREIGN GODS

With their faith in Jehovah breaking down there was a great running here and there after other gods and strange religions. Instead of trusting quietly in Jehovah's watchful care many of the people resorted in their terror to soothsayers and mediums, to "wizards that chirp and mutter." Jerusalem seems to have become almost as full of them as the cities of the Philistines, which had always been famous for their fortune-tellers and necromancers.

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=Alliances with other nations.=—Another favorite way of seeking safety was through alliances with other nations and their gods. According to the beliefs of that age, when two nations made an alliance their gods were included in it. To overcome the Assyrians, therefore, it would be necessary to make an alliance with some other nation whose gods were very powerful. So the people of Jehovah began to "strike hands with the children of foreigners." The rulers of Jerusalem set about making coalitions with the other nations of western Asia: with the Philistines, the Syrians, the Phoenicians and, most of all, the Egyptians. The gods of the Egyptians were supposed to be especially strong: Osiris and Isis were the chief of their deities and they were believed to be the gods of the underworld—of Sheol, or Hades, the abode of the dead. So when these poor ignorant politicians at Jerusalem finally did succeed in arranging for an alliance with the crafty and deceitful kings of Egypt they said to themselves: "Now we are safe. The Assyrians cannot hurt us now. We have made a covenant with Death."

THE STATESMAN-PROPHET, ISAIAH

It is good to know that among many misguided people there was one man whose wisdom of the eternal Truth of God made him stand like a rock while the multitudes ran to and fro in uncertainty and despair. Isaiah was a comrade and co-worker in spirit with the prophets named in the three preceding chapters, Amos, Hosea, and Micah. It is by no means impossible that he had listened to the sermons of Hosea, and thus caught from him his inspiration. He must certainly have known Micah personally, for they lived and preached only some twenty-five or thirty miles apart—Micah in the village of Moresheth and Isaiah in the city of Jerusalem.

=Isaiah's message.=—Isaiah's special message to his people was that all the nations of the world are subject to the righteous rule of the God of righteousness, Jehovah; and that the attempt to find safety for their nation by alliances with other nations and their gods was utterly foolish and wrong. Undoubtedly this message found a response in the hearts of those who remained faithful to Jehovah.

This message grew out of the great and splendid ideas as to Jehovah's character which Amos and his successors had been working out: that he was a God of righteousness and love, not greedy for burnt-offerings, not flaring up into fits of anger, and needing to be soothed and mollified by peace offerings; but a God who asks only for justice and fair-dealing among men, and for true love in response to his own. Isaiah repeated these great truths to his own people in Jerusalem in glowing words whose eloquence is unsurpassed. For example:

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="Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow....=

="I will turn my hand upon thee, and will thoroughly purge away thy dross, and will take away all thy tin: and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city."=

=Isaiah's originality.=—The prophets and leaders who came before Isaiah had not fully grasped the idea of a God of all nations instead of one. Amos and Hosea had only caught glimpses of it. Before their time, even the greatest of the leaders of Israel had thought of Jehovah as for the most part the God of Israel only. But now in the midst of the terror of cruel armies and ruined cities and smoking fields, when no one knew what to believe or where to look for comfort and protection, this great Isaiah was able to realize that Jehovah, the God of righteousness and justice and love, was *the God of all humanity*. There were no limits to his realm. All tribes and kingdoms and races were subject to his holy law. The Assyrians are but "the axe that he hews with." His providence rules over all. Whatever wicked men may say or do, his will is done in the end. His plans are brought to pass.

=Isaiah's faith.=—With such a God as this in whom to trust, Isaiah was able to show himself to his countrymen as a wonderful example of the power of faith. When they were panic-stricken he was calm. "Thus saith the Lord God, ... In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Do not rush off to other nations and other gods. They will fail you. Most likely they will selfishly betray you. Only do the will of the just God, who rules the nations, and quietly trust him. Do that and no evil can befall you. He is all-wise and all-powerful, and he is good.

So at last, the religion of the one All-Father, which we call *monotheism*, was born in the mind and heart of a man, and began to be clearly proclaimed by human lips.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up "Isaiah" in the Bible dictionary.

2. Read Isaiah 6. 1-8 for his own story of the experience which led him to be a prophet.

3. What parts of this story in Isaiah 6. 1-8 express the idea of one great God of all nations? Look up "Monotheism" in the dictionary.

4. Read chapter one or chapter five of the book of Isaiah for a good example of his eloquent preaching.

CHAPTER XIX

A REVISED LAW OF MOSES

Amos and the great prophets who followed him met with the same fate as many other pioneers—only a few of their hearers heeded their words, or even understood them. But four great leaders in one century—Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah—could hardly fail to make some real impression on the minds and lives of their nation. Isaiah was perhaps the most influential, partly because the others before them had prepared the way and partly because he himself lived and preached to the people during a long period of time—more than forty years.

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=Isaiah's disciples.=—Another reason why Isaiah exerted so great an influence was that he organized little groups of his disciples into circles for study. These groups met together from time to time, and read aloud the sermons of Isaiah and the other prophets, and talked about how to apply them to their lives. We can see them seated in a circle in the evening on the floor of one of those little homes opening into a narrow Jerusalem street. There would be a candlestick in the center, or an upturned bushel measure, with a candle on top of it. The circle would be composed of men; but on the outside eagerly listening would be women and children. One of the men in the circle would be seated by the candle reading from a roll of papyrus on which were written the sermons of one of the prophets.

THE EVIL DAYS OF MANASSEH'S REIGN

It is well that these reading circles were started, for they kept alive the new truth of the reformer-prophets during the reign of a bad king, Manasseh. This man's father, Hezekiah, had favored the prophets. But Manasseh, who became king when Isaiah was an old man, was opposed to all these new ideas. Most of the people of Judah probably agreed with him. They still clung to the belief that the one sure way for a nation to be prosperous was to offer sacrifices to the most powerful gods. Now the kingdom of Judah, in spite of all their worship of Jehovah, was still subject to the empire of Assyria. Great sums had to be paid every year as tribute. "What fools those prophets are!" men said, as they talked together in the streets. "See how much stronger the Assyrian gods are than Jehovah!" "Last month I had to pay ten shekels for the tribute!" "If we want to prosper, we must worship the gods of Assyria."

=Manasseh's persecution.=—Manasseh therefore proceeded to introduce the worship of the moon-god, and the sun-god, and other deities of Nineveh. He even set up altars to these divinities in the temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem. When the disciples of the prophets spoke against all this he had them seized and killed, until he had "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood." Many a good man who had listened to the reading of Isaiah by candlelight in one of those reading circles now had to hide himself in some closet or cistern from the soldiers of Manasseh. There is a tradition that the aged Isaiah himself was put to death during this persecution.

Not all of those who opposed Manasseh were killed, although they were finally compelled to keep silence. Those little study circles still held meetings in secret to read and talk and pray; and they kept looking forward to a time when a different kind of a man would be king, and when they would be able once more to lead the people into the way of justice and true worship.

In one of these little groups a remarkably wise plan was suggested. Let us take the laws which have been handed down to us from Moses, it was said, and work them up into a sermon. Every one reverences Moses. Let it include the farewell address which

Moses is said to have spoken to his people just before he died, and put into it all the laws of Moses, and let us show what they really mean. And by and by when Manasseh is dead we may be able to read it to the people, and perhaps they will listen.

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THE WRITTEN LAW

=The new law book—Deuteronomy.=—So they wrote the new book, and it is preserved in our Bible as the book of Deuteronomy. We find in it all the old laws which had been handed down from early times, and which were called the “laws of Moses.” And we find on every page sentences which show the influence of the great prophets, from Amos to Isaiah. Isaiah’s influence is perhaps the most plainly seen, especially his teaching that the people should worship Jehovah alone as the one ruler of the world. In Deuteronomy also we find a very solemn and emphatic commandment bidding us love and worship only Jehovah, the one true God. This is the commandment which Jesus called the first and greatest of all.

> ="Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."=

Such a law as this of course forbade all those covenants with other gods which Isaiah denounced.

=Laws helping the oppressed.=—All the prophets had been on the side of the poor and the weak, against the rich and powerful who oppressed them. The authors of the book of Deuteronomy tried to shape this new law so as more fully to protect the poor. They made stronger all the older laws which were intended to make life a little easier for the weak and unfortunate, and they added others: for example, laws protecting debtors against greedy and merciless creditors, and laws forbidding the extremely harsh penalties which poor men were sometimes made to suffer by rich judges.

There was an ancient law requiring that any Hebrew who had fallen into a state of slavery on account of debt must be set free after seven years. The new law book included this law, and added that the master must not send him away emptyhanded at the end of the seven years, but must give him food and clothes enough to keep him alive while he looked for a chance to work and earn money for himself. The new law also protected fugitive slaves from other countries. They were not to be returned to their owners.

=A compromise.=—All of the four reformer-prophets whom we have studied had condemned the offerings and animal sacrifices of the old worship, not only because of the idolatry and other heathen and immoral practices connected with them, but also on the ground that Jehovah did not want sacrifices anyway, but only justice and love.

But the authors of the new law did not abolish sacrifices altogether. They provided that all the small shrines, called “high places,” such as at Hebron or Gibeon, and all up and down the country should be destroyed, but that sacrifices should be offered at

Jerusalem and only there. The old-time religious feasts, such as the Passover, could no longer be celebrated at home. All the people must come up to Jerusalem for them. No doubt it was thought that this would help to put down idolatry.

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THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW LAW

Manasseh reigned fifty-five years. It was a long, weary time of waiting for the disciples of the prophets. The new law book was put away in one of the closets of the temple for safe-keeping. The years went by and most of the men who helped to write it died. At last, however, the end came for Manasseh. After a short period his grandson, Josiah, who was only eight years old, became king. The boy's older relatives and friends were all against the ideas of old Manasseh and on the side of the prophets. Little by little the principles of the prophets were put in practice. Among other things, orders were given to tear out from the Jerusalem temple the images and altars to the sun-god and the moon-god and other emblems of Assyrian worship. The temple was also cleaned and renovated. While the carpenters were at work the new law-book was discovered in the chest where it had been hidden and was brought to the young king and read before him.

=Josiah's reforms.=—Josiah was deeply impressed and gave orders that the reforms called for by the new law should be carried out. Officers went all up and down the villages and towns of Judah tearing down the little temples, or "high places," where so much heathenism had been practiced. And the people were told that several times each year they were to bring their sacrifices to the temple at Jerusalem. Those were also good days for the common people. There was a king now who "judged the cause of the poor and the needy." Many a poor debtor, when his crops failed, appealed to the king's court in Jerusalem and he himself and his children were saved from slavery and their home from ruin.

The reform only lasted a few years—some twelve or thirteen—and then King Josiah was killed in battle, and much of the old heathenism and greed and injustice came back again in a flood. But the memory of the good days did not quickly fade. It was the first great triumph of the teachings of the prophets—the men who kept alive the true ideals of Abraham and Moses.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read any part of Deuteronomy 1-5. Select any passages which seem to you truly eloquent.

2. Read Deuteronomy 12. 10, 11. What place is referred to by the author, when he writes, "The place that Jehovah your God shall choose, to cause his name to dwell there"?

3. In the light of the history in this chapter, which is the more likely to change human history, a battleship or a Bible class? Explain.

CHAPTER XX

A PROPHET WHO WOULD NOT COMPROMISE

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The new law-book seemed a great victory. Yet sometimes victories are more dangerous than defeats. They lead to self-satisfaction. This was certainly the case with this victory of the authors of Deuteronomy. The people were careful to offer up their sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem, and very few offerings were brought to the old village shrines. But the real kernel of the truth which the prophets had proclaimed was in danger of being forgotten. This was the truth that *no* forms of sacrifice, *no* solemn religious feasts are of any account in the sight of God unless accompanied by simple justice and brotherly kindness between neighbors. This was the state of affairs against which one more great reforming prophet was raised up to fight—Jeremiah, of the little town of Anathoth, five miles north of Jerusalem.

A CONVERSATION IN A JERUSALEM STREET

To understand clearly what Jeremiah's message was and why it was needed let us listen to a conversation between two citizens of Jerusalem. This one is imaginary. But there must have been many, in reality, very similar to this.

First citizen: Did you hear of my good fortune? I have just got a fine piece of ground for almost nothing.

Second citizen: How?

First citizen: I had loaned some money to an old farmer, and made him pledge me his field as security. Last summer the Babylonian soldiers came through that valley and burned all the wheat and barley stacks. So the old man couldn't pay back the loan. He tried to tell his story to King Jehoiakim, but the king drove him from the palace. So I went and took his field.

Second citizen: What would the prophets have said to a transaction like that? Did not Isaiah call down woes from Jehovah on those who took away poor men's fields?

First citizen: I have just offered a sacrifice to Jehovah.

Second citizen: I suppose, then, it is all right. But did not the prophets speak against sacrifice, unless one remembered justice and mercy?

First citizen: Yes, but they were speaking of the old sacrifices on the "high places," at the village shrines. Everyone knows they were heathen shrines and hateful to Jehovah. I offered my sacrifice at the temple yonder, just as we are told to do in the law of Moses, which King Josiah's servants found in the temple.

Look! Why is all that crowd gathered over there in the temple yard? Let us go and see what is happening. I heard some one say, that a certain Jeremiah who calls himself a

prophet, was to speak there to-day. All my friends who have heard him say that he is a false prophet.

(They reach the edge of the crowd. Jeremiah is standing on the steps of the temple, addressing the people, as follows:)

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="Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow ... then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from of old even forevermore. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, ... and come and stand before me in this house, ... and say, We are delivered; that ye may do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?"=

JEREMIAH'S MESSAGE OF A HEART RELIGION

It is clear that Jeremiah was fighting the same old battle that Amos and the other prophets had fought against a religion of mere empty ceremonies. But the battle had grown even harder, because the old false practices had been accepted as though they were just the kind of religion that Amos had preached. The people said, "We are keeping the law of Jehovah," and so they were satisfied with themselves.

=The law to be written on the heart.=—Jeremiah saw that this mistake had come from relying too much on a written law. Something more than an outward law was needed before men could succeed in living together as brothers. It is so easy to keep the letter of the law, or to think one is keeping it, while we lose the spirit of it. What is needed, Jeremiah said, is a changed heart. Again and again he cried to the people, "Oh Jerusalem, cleanse thy *heart*." And in one of the great chapters of the Bible, the thirty-first of the book of Jeremiah, he looks forward to a time when Jehovah and his people should be bound together in a new covenant—not a covenant written on tables of stone like the one which Moses wrote at Sinai:

> ="But this is the covenant that I will make ... after those days, saith the Lord. I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their hearts I will write it."=

The apostle Paul saw this promise fulfilled by the love which Jesus Christ awakens in men's hearts, so that they gladly and eagerly do the will of God. On account of this prophecy of Jeremiah our Christian Bible is called the New Covenant, or (from the Latin) the New Testament.

JEREMIAH AND THE BABYLONIANS

In Jeremiah's time (a decade or so before and after B.C. 600) the Babylonians had taken the place of the Assyrians as the rulers of the world. There was a powerful king, Nebuchadrezzar, on the throne of Babylon. And the existence of the kingdom of Judah

depended on submission to him. But, just as in Isaiah's time a century before, there was now a party in Jerusalem who were constantly plotting to rebel against the Babylonians, hoping for help from Egypt.

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=Jeremiah as a patriot.=—Jeremiah had no sympathy with them. He loved his native land deeply and tenderly. But until the people were *worthy* of liberty he was sure Jehovah would not give it to them.

Again and again they proved their unworthiness. Once when the Babylonian armies were knocking almost at the gates of Jerusalem they remembered that law about Hebrew slaves, which had been made even more strict in the new law, Deuteronomy. According to this law, no Hebrew could be kept in slavery longer than seven years. So in their fear of the Babylonians these rich nobles solemnly set free a great number of slaves whom they had been illegally keeping in slavery. A few days later the hostile army, for some reason or other, withdrew. And within a month all these slaves who had been set free were seized and reenslaved. How Jeremiah denounced this hypocrisy!

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

If Jeremiah's advice had been followed, the people of Judah would have been spared a world of sorrow. But the leaders of the kingdom seemed bent on dragging the whole nation into ruin. In B.C. 597, Jerusalem was captured and some ten thousand of the inhabitants were carried away as exiles to Babylon.

Even that lesson was not enough. Within a few years the new king, Zedekiah, and his nobles again rebelled against Nebuchadrezzar. Jeremiah protested and was called a traitor. Many times his life was threatened; for a long period he was kept in a filthy dungeon, and almost perished from hunger. But friends saved him. Very soon, in B.C. 586, the city came to the horrible end which Jeremiah had so patiently tried to ward off. The city was captured by Babylonian soldiers and burned. Thousands were carried away as exiles. Thousands more fled to Egypt and to other foreign countries. Only the poorest farmers were left to till the soil. David's kingdom and dynasty were ended.

Jeremiah himself was not taken to Babylon, but remained in Palestine. According to tradition, his last days were spent in Egypt, with a Hebrew colony there. His life had been spent in keeping alive the soul of true religion in an age when few would listen. He is one of the great heroes of uncompromising truth.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up the story of Jeremiah in the Bible dictionary.

2. Read Jeremiah 1. 1-9, for a taste of his style of writing.

3. One man sacrifices to a heathen god; another tries to bribe Jehovah with a sacrifice as though he were *like* the heathen gods:

a. Which is worse?
b. Which would the authors of Deuteronomy have considered worse?
c. Which would Jeremiah have considered worse?

CHAPTER XXI

KEEPING THE FAITH IN A STRANGE LAND

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Twice within twelve years, first in B.C. 597, and again in B.C. 586, the Babylonians took great companies of Hebrews as exiles from Jerusalem to Babylon. Each time there must have been in the line of march some twenty-five thousand men, women, and children—an army which, marching eight abreast, would stretch at least five or six miles.

These must have been sorrowful processions, especially the last of the two. For months they had suffered the horrors of a besieged city. Then had come the break in the walls, the screams of frightened women and children, the heaps of corpses in the streets, and the black smoke and red glare of burning buildings; then the hasty setting out on the long road to Babylon. Some of them perhaps were able to buy asses to carry the little children and a few of their belongings. But most of them had to trudge along on foot, fathers and mothers carrying the babies, and leaving behind them all their possessions except what could be gathered into a towel or a blanket. For a month or six weeks they tramped. If anyone fell sick, there was no time to take care of him. He must drag along with the rest or fall by the wayside until he either recovered or died.

THE SETTLEMENT IN BABYLONIA

When they reached the land of their captors they were not made slaves, but were allowed to make their home together in settlements on land set apart for them. In these colonies they probably worked as tenant-farmers on the estates of Nebuchadrezzar's nobles. In the prophetic book of Ezekiel, who was among these exiles, we read about one of these Jewish colonies by the river, or canal, called Chebar (or in Babylonian Kabaru), which means the Grand Canal.

=The attractions of Babylonian life.=—What the Babylonians hoped was that these people would forget that they were Hebrews and become Babylonians, just as immigrants from Europe become Americans. This is exactly what happened in many cases. At first, of course, the Hebrews were bitterly homesick. The land of Babylonia was as flat as a floor. The Hebrews longed for the lovely hills and valleys of their native land.

=By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept, When we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst thereof We hanged up our harps, For there they that led us captive required of us songs, And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song In a strange land?=

But the years went by, and they had time to look about in the new country. They found it full of opportunities for money-making. The soil, watered by hundreds of canals from the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, was wonderfully rich. Everywhere there were prosperous towns and cities with great brick buildings, beautifully decorated with

sculpture, and thronged with merchants. Ships laden with wheat and dates and with Babylonian

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rugs and mantles and other beautiful articles sailed up the rivers, or out to sea toward India. Many Hebrews, or Jews (that is, Hebrews from Judaea), became merchants. In their own land they had been chiefly a nation of farmers. The reputation of the Jews for cleverness in trade began with these experiences in Babylon when hundreds of Jewish boys obtained positions in great Babylonian stores or banks, and by and by set up for themselves as merchants. Among the Babylonian contracts on clay tablets coming down to us from this period are many Jewish names.

THE TEMPTATION TO FORSAKE JEHOVAH

These young Hebrew merchants found themselves in a net-work of foreign religious customs. When a customer signed a contract it was proposed that he offer a sacrifice to the god Marduk, that the enterprise might prosper. There were religious processions and feast days in which everyone joined, just as we hang out flags on the Fourth of July. Foreigners from other lands joined in these rites and thought nothing of it. Furthermore, some of these captive Jews thought that their Hebrew God, Jehovah, had not protected them from these mighty Babylonians. Surely, the Babylonian gods were the stronger, and one should pay them due reverence.

=Memories of the prophets.=—On the other hand, even the dullest of the Jews must have begun to understand that the religion of their prophets was a different kind of religion altogether—not *a* religion, but *true* religion; and that Jehovah was not like the bargaining, jealous gods of the other nations, but was God, with a capital G, the one righteous Creator and Ruler of the world.

Moreover, the prophets who had taught them to think of Jehovah in this way had again and again declared that just this calamity of exile would come upon them if they as a nation continued to disobey Jehovah's just laws; and what they had foretold had come to pass. The prophets must have been right. Their teaching must be true.

=Hebrews in other foreign lands.=—There were probably almost as many Hebrews in Egypt at this time as in Babylonia. Indeed, even before the destruction of Jerusalem the constant wars on Canaan had compelled great numbers of them to seek for peace and comfort for themselves and their wives and children in Egypt, in Damascus, and even in far-away Carthage and Greece. The Jews to-day are scattered all over the world. This began to be true of them from the time of the destruction of Jerusalem.

These Jews who permanently made their homes in foreign countries were called *Jews of the Dispersion*. And they all faced the same temptations as the exiles in Babylonia. Their problem was how to be loyal to their nation and their religion. Great numbers of them, like Daniel and his friends in the stories related in the book of Daniel, did refuse to sacrifice to heathen gods and held fast to the nobler faith

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which they had brought with them from Jerusalem. This was not easy. Not only were they tempted to go with the crowd and worship the gods of the land; they were also uncertain just how to worship Jehovah. They could not offer sacrifices to him. Jerusalem was a thousand miles away, and the temple there was burned. Should they build a new temple for him, in Babylon? It was not certain whether that would be lawful. The Jews in Egypt did build a temple to Jehovah. But no others seem to have been able to do this.

KEEPING THE SABBATH

There were some religious customs, however, which could more easily be transplanted. One was the Sabbath Day. In the earlier centuries the Hebrews had observed the day of the new moon with special sacrifices, and also, to some extent, the other days when the moon passed from full to first quarter, then to the second, then to the third—in other words, every seventh day. There was in the days before Moses no thought of resting from labor on these days, except as might have been necessary in order to offer up the special sacrifices.

=The Sabbath and the new law of Deuteronomy.=—One of the kindly changes which the new law of Deuteronomy introduced was to make the Sabbath a rest day for slaves and all toilers. On the Sabbath “thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, ... that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.”

In Babylonia and other foreign lands faithful Jews were especially careful to keep the Sabbath by resting from all their work. No one else did so, and the custom marked them as Jews. When a Babylonian would propose to buy a wagon load of wheat on the Sabbath the Jew would say, “I cannot sell on that day; it is a Sabbath day to our God.” Boys and girls were not allowed to play with their Babylonian playmates on the Sabbath. Such experiences helped them to remember that they were Jews. They thought of it also as an act of respect to Jehovah. It took the place of animal sacrifices. As the time went on there grew up rules and regulations in regard to Sabbath-keeping which became more and more strict and elaborate.

PRAYER AND PUBLIC WORSHIP

Another religious custom which can be practiced anywhere is prayer. It must have been a great and happy discovery to many a homesick Jew when he found that even though the temple at Jerusalem was far away, yet in his own room “by the river Chebar” he could kneel, or even in the street he could for a moment close his eyes and breathe out a prayer to God and find in it fresh strength and hope and courage.

=The synagogue.=—The weekly Sabbath rest also made it possible for the Jews to meet together on that day for prayer and worship together. The reading circles which Isaiah had organized, and out of which probably came the law-book Deuteronomy, were continued in Babylonia, and the Sabbath morning, afternoon, or evening was a convenient time of meeting. They would gather in some private house and study the law and the writings of the prophets. Then they would pray. Those who were the most learned would read and they and others would pray aloud.

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By and by special buildings were set apart called synagogues. As time went on these synagogue services rather than the services in the temple, became the most important part of the Jewish religion. Our morning and evening worship in the Christian Church grew out of the synagogue service. It was the beginning of that worship of which Jesus spoke when he said: The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father.... But ... the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read 2 Kings 25, or Daniel 1.

2. Mention some other temptations which must have come to the Jews, in Babylon, besides the temptation to worship idols. Consider, for example, their new experiences as traders.

3. What are some good ways in which we may be helped to be true to God to-day when we are away from home.

CHAPTER XXII

UNDYING HOPES OF THE JEWS

As the Jewish exiles were led away to Babylon they asked themselves over and over again, “Is this the end of our nation?” It seemed like the end. Their capital city lay in ruins. Their king was blinded and in chains. All the most intelligent people in the country were being led to a distant land, from which most of them would probably never return. The iron rule of the Babylonians was everywhere supreme.

There are other nations and races whose people might not have cared so much even if this had been the end of their national existence. But the Hebrews from the beginning were proud of their race and ambitious for its glory. They believed that it had been promised to Abraham, their ancestor, that they should become a great nation in their land of Canaan. This hope had grown stronger and stronger. Stories of the greatness of King David were handed down from fathers to their children. To the best men and women among them the great teachings of such prophets as Amos and Isaiah were even more worthy of pride. “We have a knowledge of the true God,” they said, “such as no other nation has. Surely there is a great future before us.” And now all these hopes seemed lost forever.

=The discouragement of the poor people in Canaan.=—Those who had been left behind in Canaan when the Babylonians conquered the land were even more hopeless and wretched. The exiles soon made a place for themselves in the busy, prosperous land of

Babylonia. They earned money and lived in comfort. But the farmers on the stony hills of Judaea suffered untold hardships. Not only were they poor; they were also harassed by bands of robbers. The city of Jerusalem, which had protected them, lay in ashes. The Babylonian governor did not help them. He was there only to collect taxes and tribute. So the old enemies, the robber tribes from the desert, came in and burned and murdered and stole as they pleased. It is not strange that many of these poor people felt that all was over for the Hebrew or Jewish nation. Many of them ceased to worship Jehovah and became heathen, like the other tribes around Canaan.

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VOICES OF COMFORT AND HOPE

It was not easy, however, to crush the courage of the Jews. Out of the darkness of those days we hear a whole chorus of voices, all of them saying: “This is *not* the end of everything for us. Jehovah has not forgotten his promises to our ancestors. He will bring back the exiles from Babylon, and from other distant lands whither they have escaped, and will rebuild Jerusalem in all its beauty, and will restore the glory of our nation in the land of Canaan.”

=The prophecies in Isaiah.=—Many of these voices are found in short passages scattered through the writings of the older prophets. Two of them are in Isaiah 9 and 11.

="The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: ... the rod of his oppressor thou hast broken.... For all the armor of the armed man in the tumult, and the garments rolled in blood, shall even be for burning, for fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."=

“In other words,” he reasoned, “Jehovah will free us from the tyrannical Babylonians, give us an ideal king, who shall be wise and just and faithful, and under whose rule we shall see no more of the horror and cruelty of war.”

=Ezekiel’s prophecies of hope.=—Away off in Babylonia itself Ezekiel helped to keep alive the hopes of the exiles. Even though the nation is dead, he told them, Jehovah can bring it to life. It will be as though the dry and bleaching bones in some valley where a battle was long ago fought should suddenly come together as human skeletons, and warm living flesh should grow upon them once more. Ezekiel worked out a kind of constitution for the new nation and the temple when these should be restored.

All these brave leaders helped the Jews to believe in themselves as a people. They listened to these men as they spoke in their synagogues in Judaea and in Babylonia. They handed from one to another the rolls on which their words were written. And ever the children heard from their mothers these hopes which kept them from being completely discouraged: “We are Jews. The Jewish nation is not going to be destroyed. Some day the exiles in Babylon will return to the old country. We will have a king of our own. And we will build the great nation which Jehovah promised Abraham.”

THE BEGINNINGS OF A RESTORED JUDAH

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In the year B.C. 538, the Babylonian empire was conquered by Cyrus, the Persian. There was scarcely any resistance on the part of the Babylonians. And one of his first acts in the conquered city was to issue a proclamation that captives and exiles from other lands might return if they wished. It was the chance for which the Jews for forty years had been hoping. Now at last they could go back over that thousand-mile journey, up the Euphrates, across to the coast land, and down to Canaan. But alas! too many years had passed. Most of those who had come to Babylon as grown people and who remembered Canaan as home were now dead. Most of the living Jews had grown up in Babylon and were comfortably settled there. Yet some did return, and from time to time others kept returning. These men who thought enough of their nation to go back to the home land and help it in its weakness and poverty almost always became leaders.

=The new temple.=—It may have been a group of these leaders returned from Babylon who started the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in the year B.C. 520, just sixty years after the old temple of Solomon was burned by the soldiers of Nebuchadrezzar. There were two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, who did much to stir up the people to this work. Some of their words are preserved in the Old Testament books which bear their names. These men may have been returned exiles. The new building was erected on the same old foundation and was finished in four years. It was dedicated amidst the shouts of the people, while old men and women, who as children had seen the former temple before it was destroyed, wept for joy that at last a house had been rebuilt for Jehovah. It seemed like the beginning of better times for their nation.

THE GREATEST OF THE PROPHETS OF HOPE

Yet the years that followed the building of the new temple were sad and disappointing. The better days did not seem to come. The walls of Jerusalem still lay in ruins. The robber tribes still made their cruel raids. The poor people suffered most, for they were oppressed and plundered by the richer men even of their own people. “What has become of Jehovah?” men asked. “Where are his promises to Abraham? Why does he allow even his most faithful servants to be oppressed—those who do not oppress others; who obey his just laws, and who are merciful to their brothers?”

=The great unknown.=—About this time there came to the people of Israel a new message from one of the greatest prophets of all those whom God has raised up in any nation. He is sometimes called the “Great Unknown,” because we to-day know nothing about his personal life, not even his name. His great messages to his fellow Jews are found in the latter part of the book of Isaiah, beginning with chapter 40. The first verse of this chapter strikes the keynote of comfort which runs through all the chapters to follow.

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="Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; that she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."=

With words that sing like a beautiful instrument of music he tells the people that God has not forgotten them; that the scattered exiles will be brought back to the home land; that the ruined city, Jerusalem, will be rebuilt and made more lovely than before; that a rule of justice will be established; and that the blessings of peace and happiness will come to all.

=The greatness of service.=—Even better than these promises of happiness, our unknown prophet helped the people to understand more clearly what it means to *be* a great nation. He did not believe that the God of heaven and earth would make a favorite of any one nation. Instead he taught that Jehovah had chosen Israel to be a servant nation for him, to serve all other nations by teaching them about the true God.

> ="I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that
> thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth."=

He explained in this way even the undeserved suffering which many of the best people of Israel were enduring. Israel thus became a type of Him who was "despised and rejected of men." To be chastised and afflicted and oppressed is not so hard to bear if it is all a part of Jehovah's plan for men. The ideal in the Old Testament becomes a reality in the New.

So for the first time the idea came into the world that Abraham's dreams of a greater and nobler nation and God's promises to Abraham, Moses, David and the rest were not for the Hebrew people only, but for all men; that beginning with this little nation God was making a better world; a world of love, instead of selfishness and hate; of happy work and play, instead of misery and hopelessness and war.

Of course very few of the prophet's hearers understood him. But more and more the Jews were filled with the thought that somehow God had a great future for them. Boys and girls, as they grew up, wondered if they might not become leaders, a new Moses, a second David, or Elijah, to play some part in bringing the great future which God had promised.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read Isaiah 40 or 49 for a taste of the writing of the "Great Unknown."

2. Read Ezekiel 2. 1-7, or 14, for a similar taste of this prophet's message and style.

3. Which of these two prophets do you consider the greater?

4. Is there evidence to-day that the Jews still believe in a restored nation?

CHAPTER XXIII

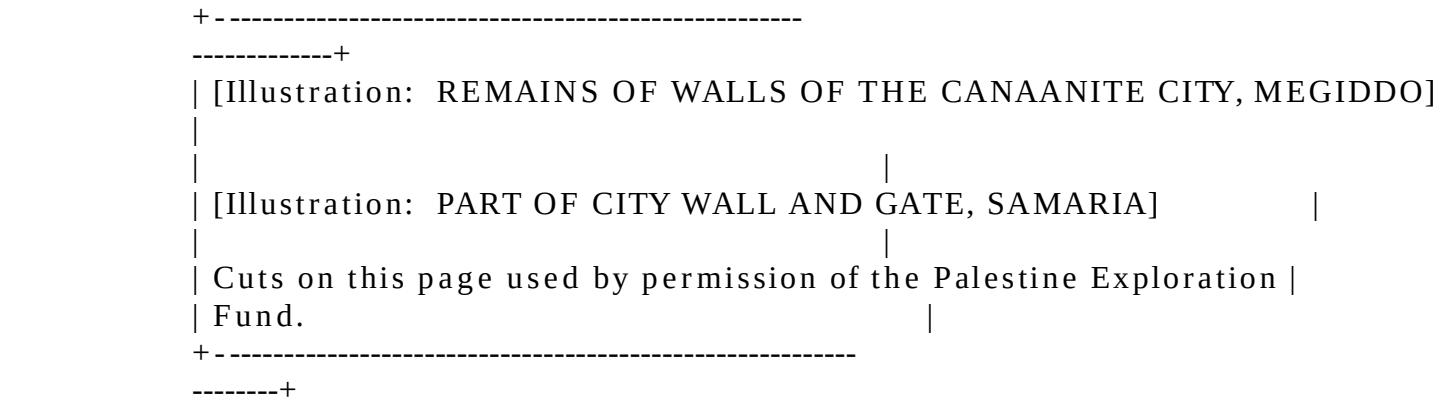
THE GOOD DAYS OF NEHEMIAH

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About seventy years after the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem a committee of Jews went to Persia to seek aid for their distressed country from their more prosperous kinsfolk. In the Persian capital, Susa, they found a man named Nehemiah, who was cup-bearer and personal adviser to the king of Persia. He was a man of good sense, of kindly sympathy, and of great ability—just the man to help them. They told him how the walls of the city of their fathers had never been rebuilt in all these years since the Babylonians had captured it, and how the poor people suffered from robbers and oppressors, who took advantage of their helplessness.

NEHEMIAH'S GREAT ADVENTURE

All this was news to the young man. They did not have newspapers and magazines in those days, and people in one part of the world knew little about what was going on in other parts, even those near by. The stories told by his brother Jews made Nehemiah sad, and his sadness showed in his face even when he came before the king. This was dangerous, for a part of his duty was to keep the king in a cheerful humor. But his Majesty was not angry, but asked him "Why are you so sad?" Nehemiah answered by telling him the story of his native land and its pitiable condition; and then and there with a prayer in his heart he asked the king to give him a leave of absence, and to permit him to go to Jerusalem and help the people there to rebuild the walls.



=Why walls were greatly needed.=—All cities in those days were surrounded by walls. These were necessary, because no government had yet been strong enough to rid the country of the bands of robbers who made their dens in almost every cave or lonely valley. Not only the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, of which Jesus tells, but on almost all roads one was in danger of falling among thieves. In the deserts on the edge of Palestine whole tribes lived by robbery, and were large enough and well enough organized to defeat good-sized armies. Hence no city was safe unless it was well fortified.

Nehemiah's request was granted by the king of Persia. So, with letters to the governors of the provinces through which he was to pass, the young leader set out, perhaps on camel-back, to Jerusalem. After looking about and seeing for himself the condition of the city, and the work which needed to be done, he called the people together and proposed that they rebuild the walls. His energy carried the day. They answered, "Let us rise up and build."

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THE WALLS REBUILT

The task which Nehemiah had undertaken was a difficult one. Jerusalem is situated on a ridge, with deep valleys on all sides except the north. The walls did not need to be high where there were cliffs or steep slopes falling away into the valley. But along the entire north side, and in many other places also, they had to be at least thirty feet high, and fifteen or twenty feet thick at the base. The stones and bricks for this were buried in the rubbish where the old walls had been battered down. They had to be dug up and dragged into their places, stone by stone. Most of the work had to be done by hand, although they perhaps used asses with basket-paniers for carrying lime and sand. They may have constructed small cranes for lifting the heaviest stones, but they had very little machinery.

=Difficulties overcome.=—For a time the work went merrily forward. But soon their rapid progress became known and those who had prospered because of their weakness became jealous. There was a certain Sanballat, governor of Samaria, who wanted to keep Jerusalem helpless so that Samaria might always be the chief city in the land. They were willing that the poor people of Jerusalem should go on suffering from the attacks of cruel bandits if only they themselves could keep on growing richer. He and others did all in their power to stop the work. They organized a force of men and planned to attack and kill the builders. But Nehemiah had his workers carry their swords as they worked, and arranged for signals at which all should rush to the help of any part of the wall which might be attacked. He also kept the people working at top speed from early morning every day “until the stars appeared,” and cheered them on when they were tired and discouraged.

Their enemies tried all kinds of tricks; they threatened to report to the king of Persia that Nehemiah was organizing a rebellion; they plotted to seize Nehemiah himself. But the man was too clever for them. The walls kept steadily going up and up. The gates were set in place and locked; and at last, fifty-two days, or just a little more than seven weeks after the first stone was laid on the old foundations, the work was done.

Once more they could lie down in peace behind protecting walls, and not tremble at the thought that fierce robbers might swoop down upon them before the morning light to plunder, burn, and murder. Once more they could begin to live their lives in peace and plan for the future. Traders could bring their goods into the city without fear of losing everything. Men could buy and sell and prosper.

NEHEMIAH’S REFORMS

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But security from outward foes is not enough to bring happiness to a people. Even before the walls were finished some of the poor people among the Jews came to Nehemiah with a bitter complaint against their rich neighbors. “We are starving,” they said. Others said: “We have mortgaged our fields in order to borrow money that we may buy food for our children. And now because we cannot pay these men take our fields from us, and even sell our sons and daughters into slavery.” It was the old story of greed and oppression. Those who were stronger and more fortunate used their advantage to oppress their brothers and extort from them all that they could pay. So a few men were able to live in luxury, even in those troubled days, while the great majority suffered in poverty and misery and despair.

=The great massmeeting.=—In that little country of Judaea it was possible to gather into an assembly, perhaps in the open space in front of the temple, men from almost every country village and city street. Such an assembly Nehemiah called and laid before it the complaints he had received. He told the rich nobles to their faces: “You exact usury, every one, of his brother. The thing you do is not good.... I pray you leave off this usury.” The nobles had nothing to say. Every one knew that what Nehemiah said was true. Then he went on: “Restore to them their fields, their vineyards, their olive-yards, and their houses, also the grain, the new wine, and the oil that you exact from them.” Then said they, “We will restore them.”

And Nehemiah made them take oath to carry out their promise. “Also I shook out my lap,” Nehemiah writes in his memoirs, “and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performeth not this promise; even thus be he shaken out and emptied. And all the congregation said ‘Amen,’ and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise.”

=The beginnings of a just and happy nation.=—Nehemiah could not stay long in Jerusalem. But he was able to make another visit a few years later. And for a time at least his ideas were carried out. During this time there was happiness among the people. They all had something to eat and clothes to wear. All fathers and mothers had a little time to play with their children after the close of work each day. All who could read had a little time to study the rolls of the prophets and the law of Jehovah. And all were brothers. More than ever before the old dreams, handed down from Abraham, had begun to come true.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up the story of Nehemiah in the Bible dictionary.

2. Read Nehemiah 1-2, or 5. 1-6, 16.

3. On the right side of the line, below, write what in your judgment corresponds to the men and conditions of Nehemiah's time.

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Nehemiah's Time	*Our Own Time*
a. Walls around the city.	*a*. _____
b. Robbers, and enemies such as Sanballat.	*b*. _____
c. The poor and enslaved people.	*c*. _____
d. Nehemiah.	*d*. _____

CHAPTER XXIV

HYMN AND PRAYER BOOKS FOR THE NEW WORSHIP

We have seen that a new kind of public worship of God had been growing up among the Hebrews, beginning with the time when the prophets began to condemn the misuse of the old animal sacrifices. The new worship consisted chiefly of prayer. We have seen how the exiles in Babylon began to come together on the Sabbath days to study the law and other sacred writings, and also for prayer. Those exiles who returned to Judaea brought this custom with them. Special buildings, called synagogues, were erected in Judaea as well as wherever there were faithful Jews in other lands. These synagogues rather than the temple gradually came to be the real home of the Jewish religion even in Jerusalem itself. The chief part of the synagogue service was always the study of the Scriptures. But prayer was also given an important place.

In the temple also, after it was rebuilt, public prayer was regarded as very important—-even if not quite so important as the regular burnt-offerings. There were also prayer-hymns, sung by the people and by special choirs.

=Making hymnals and prayer books.=—In our churches, to-day, we could scarcely conduct our services without the hymn books scattered through the pews. In some denominations there is a prayer book, which is considered just as necessary as the book of hymns. In those ancient synagogues and in the temple service the Jews found such books needful. Had we gone into one of their meetings, we would not indeed have found a book waiting for us in the seat or handed to us by the usher. The art of printing was unknown. Books could not be purchased cheaply by the hundred. Each copy had to be written out by hand with pen and ink on a roll of papyrus. But we would probably have discovered that the leader of the worship had a book of prayers and hymns before him. He would read them, line by line, each Sabbath for the others to memorize. To make this task of memorization easier many of the Jewish hymns were written in acrostic form—that is, each line or stanza began with a different letter in the order of the Hebrew alphabet.

HYMN AND PRAYER BOOKS IN THE BIBLE

Our book of Psalms is a collection of smaller collections of just such hymns and prayers to be used in worship. Each one of these smaller collections came out of some synagogue or group of synagogues, or was prepared by the members of one of the choirs who led the worship in the temple. By studying these we may learn something about how they were used.

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=The Prayers of David.=—This was the title of one of these smaller books. It contained Psalms 2 to 41, and some others of our book of Psalms. All of these are headed in our Bible, “A Psalm of David.” These words, in the original Hebrew, mean “dedicated to David.” The last page in this smaller book is perhaps now found where our Psalm 72 comes to an end with the words, “The Prayers of David the Son of Jesse are Ended.” This sentence corresponded, in the little book, to the words, “The End,” in our modern books. It was copied in what is now our book of Psalms, even though it is no longer “the end.”

These “David” hymns were probably written not only by David, but as well by members of a synagogue of worshipers who were poor and oppressed. There are a great number of references to “enemies.” “Deliver me not over unto the will of mine adversaries.” “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” These people probably lived in the days before the reforms of Nehemiah, when there were indeed many enemies both outside of Jerusalem and within the city, heathen robbers, and rich oppressors of their own race, men who cheated them and who mocked them when they prayed for help to Jehovah.

=The Pilgrim Songs.=—Another very different hymn book embedded in our book of Psalms is one which we may call the “Pilgrim Songs.” It is found in chapters 120 to 134 of our Psalter. All of these psalms have the title, “A Song of Ascents.” This probably means a song to sing on the ascent to Jerusalem. These come from the happy time after Nehemiah when the city was safely protected by walls. Because of this blessed safety it was now possible for the people once more to go on pilgrimages to the great annual religious feasts as prescribed in the law-book of Deuteronomy. Before the walls were rebuilt such gatherings of pilgrims with their gifts would merely have been an invitation to robbers. But now the custom of pilgrimages was renewed, and they came to be among the happiest events of the year in the lives of Jewish men and women and older boys and girls.

The journey to Jerusalem was usually made in large companies or caravans for the sake of protection. For the roads outside of Jerusalem were by no means safe. And naturally in such a crowd of folks from the home village there would be much singing. These “Pilgrim Songs” grew out of the spirit of these journeys. They are filled with gratitude to God for his kindness, and with trust in his care, and with pride in their beautiful city Jerusalem which God had helped them to rebuild.

="I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go into the house of the Lord.”

“As mountains are round about Jerusalem,
So the Lord is round about them that fear him."=

HEBREW MUSIC AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

These hymns were frequently sung to the accompaniment of instrumental music. There are many allusions in the book of Psalms and elsewhere in the Old Testament to the harp (*kinnor*), the psaltery (*nebel*), the cornet (*shophar*) and other instruments.

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We know just how they looked, for pictures of them, or at least of similar instruments, are found on Egyptian and Babylonian monuments. The harp was probably like a large guitar, only it was played like a mandolin, with a plectrum. The psaltery or lute was a larger-sized harp. The cornet or trumpet was simply a curved ram's horn blown with the lips like our cornets; there was also another form made out of brass, long and straight. The Hebrews also used a wind instrument like our flute, a pipe with holes on the side for making the different notes. They seem also to have been very fond of percussion instruments—the timbal, a small drum, and the cymbals, metal plates clashed together.

It is impossible to know how far the Hebrews had developed the art of music. It seems most likely that the best they ever learned to do with these various instruments would have sounded to us more like a loud banging, twanging noise than like our own melodies and harmonies.

=Influence of this worship of prayer and song.=—Nevertheless the prayer-hymns of which we have told could not fail to wield an influence on the lives of those who sung them. Boys and girls heard them week by week until they could not forget them. When they were tempted to wrongdoing these melodies rang in their ears. For in all these collections there were great hymns, written by men who had caught the spirit of God as had Amos and Hosea and their successors—men whose souls were white, whose love was tender, and whose courage was unshakable. Only such men could write such lines as these:

="Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, And speaketh truth in his heart. He that slandereth not with his tongue, Nor doeth evil to his friend, Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor."=

Or these:

="Thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou hast no pleasure in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."=

These words and scores of other passages just as great set to music long since forgotten but in those days sweet to the ear, helped untold multitudes to do justice and to love mercy, to confess their sins, and to find strength and hope in God.

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| [Illustration: CANAANITE PIPE OR FIFE] |
| |
| [Illustration: AN EGYPTIAN HARP] |
| |

[Illustration: AN ASSYRIAN UPRIGHT HARP]
[Illustration: AN ASSYRIAN HORIZONTAL HARP]

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| |
| [Illustration: A BABYLONIAN HARP] |
| |
| [Illustration: JEWISH HARPS ON COINS OF BAR COCHBA, 132-135 A.D.] |
| |
| |
| [Illustration: ASSYRIAN DULCIMER] |
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| Fund. |
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STUDY TOPICS

1. Of the “David” psalms, read any of the following chapters: 11, 13, 15, 23, of the book of Psalms.

2. Of the “Pilgrim” psalms, read chapter 121 or 124 or 126.

3. Which of these do you like best?

4. Look up words scattered through the Psalms which appear to be musical directions.

5. In what ways did the following Psalms help the Jews to realize their hopes?—

   a. 15.
   b. 51.
   c. 124.

6. For a good example of one of the prayers, in the temple, read 1 Kings 8. 27, 28.

CHAPTER XXV

A NARROW KIND OF PATRIOTISM

All nations like to think of themselves as superior to the rest of mankind. The Greeks used to despise all foreigners as “barbarians.” We in America ridicule immigrants from other countries and call them unpleasant names. The Jews also made the same mistake of despising people of other races and nations. We find laws even in so just a law-book as Deuteronomy which are unfair to foreigners. Jews were forbidden to exact interest from fellow Jews, but they were permitted to exact it from foreigners. The flesh

of animals which died of themselves could not be eaten by Jews, but they might sell it to foreigners.

THE INCREASING HATRED TOWARDS FOREIGNERS AFTER THE EXILE

We have seen how the exiles in Babylonia kept the Sabbath and went to the synagogue in order that they might continue to be Jews and might not lose their Jewish religion, the worship of Jehovah. As time went on they found it necessary to be more and more strict. As their girls and boys grew up they fell in love with Babylonian young men and young women. But if these young Jews had married Babylonians, the children would have grown up as Babylonians in customs and religion. So all intermarriages were forbidden.

=The fight against intermarriages in Judaea.=—When these exiles returned from Babylonia to Jerusalem they were shocked to find that the Jews there had not been strict in this matter. They had taken wives and husbands from the Moabites, and Edomites, and other nations around Judaea.

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It is hard for us to see that this was wrong, for these people probably became worshipers of Jehovah, like Ruth the Moabitess in the beautiful story in the Bible, who said to her Jewish mother-in-law, “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.” The exiles from Babylon, however, including so good and wise a man as Nehemiah, fought with all their might against all intermarriages. Without doubt the motive, which was to protect the Hebrews from idolatry, was good, but the matter is certainly open to criticism, especially in the light of our truer knowledge of God. We read that at one time, even under the leadership of Ezra, one of the returned exiles, a large number of the wives from other nations were cruelly divorced and sent away weeping to their own people. All this helped to give the Jews a wrong and unreasonable pride in their own race and a silly and unkind contempt for other races.

=The hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans.=—About the time of Nehemiah there was also started a bitter feud between the Jews and the Samaritans. There had always been a good deal of jealousy between the people of Judah in the South, and the Hebrews of the central and northern parts of Canaan. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, which had split off from the kingdom of David and Solomon. This old jealousy flamed up again after Nehemiah. The Samaritans had intermarried with their heathen neighbors, perhaps more than the Jews in Judaea. So the Jews claimed that the Samaritans had no right to call themselves true Hebrews.

The Samaritans, on the other hand, claimed that they were true children of Abraham, and they built a temple of their own on Mount Gerizim as a rival to the temple of Jerusalem. This jealousy and hate grew more and more bitter until, in the time of Jesus, the Jews looked upon Samaritans with even more contempt than any Gentiles.

=The growing prejudice against the Jews among other peoples.=—Those who call names generally hear themselves taunted and ridiculed in turn. The very fact that the Jews would not work on the Sabbath marked them as peculiar and helped to make them unpopular. Their laws about foods, clean and unclean, were also different from those of other nations. For example, they would not eat pork. Moreover, as time went on many of the Jews in Babylon and in other foreign lands grew prosperous. They were industrious and they had brains and a special gift for trade. Before long they had money to lend, and they often demanded unjust rates of interest. This too made them unpopular. So the more proudly and contemptuously they held aloof from Babylonians, Persians, Egyptians, and all other foreigners the more frequently they heard themselves called “Jewish dogs” and other hard names.

THE COMING OF THE GREEKS

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This racial pride on the part of the Jews was still more increased by the coming of another unusually proud people, the Greeks. In the year B.C. 333, Alexander the Great defeated the army of the king of Persia and soon extended his rule over all western Asia, including Judaea. Very soon Greeks were everywhere to be seen, in all the cities of Palestine. In order to protect the country from the desert robbers who, as we have seen, had been making their raids through all the centuries, a chain of Greek cities was built to the east of the Jordan and thousands of Greek settlers were brought there to live. The ruins of many beautiful Greek temples and theaters may still be seen in that country. Samaria was also rebuilt as a Greek city, the capital of the province. So there were Greeks on all sides of Jerusalem and throngs of Greek merchants and travelers were to be seen on the streets of every Jewish city and village.

The Greeks in some ways had as much to be proud of as a people as the Jews. Their sculptors had carved the most beautiful marbles in the world. Their poets had composed the most beautiful poems. Their philosophers were wiser than those of any other nation. Moreover, many of these Greeks who came into Palestine and other countries of Asia were filled with a truly missionary spirit. It is said that Alexander the Great was inspired by the thought that he was helping to spread the art and wisdom and culture of the Greeks throughout the world.

=The struggle between Judaism and Hellenism.=—This meant that the old religion of Jehovah was in danger of being forgotten not only in Babylonia and other lands but even in Judaea and Jerusalem. Many Jews quite fell in love with the new art and learning of the Greeks. They learned the Greek language, gave their children Greek names, such as “Jason,” for example, instead of “Joshua.” A gymnasium was built in Jerusalem where Jewish lads learned to exercise and play games after the Greek style. Many of them tried to hide the fact that they were Jews, and too often they ceased to worship Jehovah, the God of their fathers, and offered sacrifices to Zeus and other Greek divinities.

=The beginnings of the Pharisees.=—Other Jews fought against all these new ideas and fashions. They became more strict than ever in their observance of the peculiar customs and regulations of the Jewish law. It was at this time that the beginnings of the party of the Pharisees came into existence, of which we read in the New Testament. The word “Pharisee” means “one who is kept apart, or separate”; that is, one who holds aloof from the heathen and from heathen customs. They were the men who “when they come from the market place, eat not, except they bathe themselves.” They might have touched some heathen person in the street which they thought made them ceremonially unclean. In the earlier days the Pharisees were called “Hasideans,” or “the pious.”

It was right, of course, that these men should struggle to keep their religion alive. The great religious truths of the prophets were worth more to the world than all the art and wisdom of the Greeks. But the result of the struggle was an even greater scorn on the part of the Hebrews for all men who were not Jews.

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STUDY TOPICS

1. Read Esther 9. 5, 11-16. What kind of patriotism does this passage express?

2. Compare the following laws in Deuteronomy: 10. 18-19 and 14. 21. Can you explain the inconsistency?

3. What national characteristics do hatred and contempt of other nations lead to?

4. What is the danger from continually hurling bad names at foreigners, such as "Greasers," "Chinks," and so on?

CHAPTER XXVI

A BROAD-MINDED AND NOBLE PATRIOTISM

In spite of all their prejudice, thinking Jews could not help but see that the Greeks, in spite of their heathen religion, had brought with them many of the blessings of civilization. Many articles of everyday comfort were introduced into Canaan for the first time by the Greeks, for example, new varieties of food, such as pumpkins, vinegar, asparagus, and various kinds of cheese. From the Greeks also the Jews learned to preserve fish by salting them. This made possible the splendid fishing business by the Sea of Galilee. In the time of Jesus we find this lake surrounded by flourishing towns. Most of the men in these towns supported themselves and their families by fishing. The fish were salted and the salt fish sold in the inland towns. They were even exported to foreign countries. The Greeks probably also introduced poultry and hens' eggs to the farmers and housewives of Canaan.

=New articles of dress and furniture.=—These same newcomers brought with them a greater variety of fabrics and garments, such as Cilician goat's-hair cloth, out of which coarse cloaks and curtains, as well as tents, were made; also felt for hats and sandals. The Greeks also introduced the custom of carrying handkerchiefs. Many new kinds of household utensils came into Jewish homes as a result of the example of their Greek associates, for example, arm chairs, mirrors, table cloths, plates, and cups. Hemp and hempen cords and ropes came from the Greeks. From this same source came the custom of placing food at meals on dining tables, like ours, while the diners, unlike ourselves, lay on couches with their heads toward the table. It may also have been the Greeks—although possibly it was the Persians—who first brought coined money into Canaan, so that in making each purchase it was not necessary to weigh the silver or the gold.

All these useful and beautiful things helped to win over sensible people among the Jews to look with favor on their new neighbors. And when Jewish travelers found themselves

stopping at new and more comfortable inns managed by Greek innkeepers, and went to bathe in the public baths which were erected in the larger cities by the Greek authorities, they were sure to spread the idea that even Jews might learn something from the Greeks.

BROAD-MINDED PATRIOTS AMONG THE JEWS

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Fortunately there were some among the Jews who could appreciate the good and beautiful things in Greek civilization without being disloyal to their own race and their own religion; and, on the other hand, could be proud of the great teachings of the prophets without hating and despising men of other races. They had learned well the lesson of that great prophet whom we call the Second Isaiah, that Jehovah chose Israel, not as his special "pet" or favorite, but as his servant to teach all nations about the true God and his righteous rule. Such men realized that the Greeks and Egyptians and other foreigners were Jehovah's children like themselves, and that instead of despising them they ought to make friends with them and try to teach them the religion of Jehovah.

=Jewish religious books written for Greeks.=—It was by men of this broad spirit that a number of books were written for the sake of winning Greeks to the Jewish religion. These books were written in the Greek language and explained to Greek readers the law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. Among the most important of these books was the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This translation was made, indeed, chiefly for the benefit of Jews living in Greek countries who had forgotten the old Hebrew tongue. But the translators also had in mind the great non-Jewish Greek world.

And the new translation, sometimes called the Septuagint (that is, the book of the seventy translators who are said to have worked on it), found its way into the hands of many a Greek reader who learned from it for the first time something about the religion of Jehovah.

The author of the story of Jonah, in the Bible, was another Jew of this broad spirit. He had traveled in Egypt. He had seen the vices and sins of the heathen. And he had tried to tell them of the just and merciful laws of the one God of all the world, Jehovah. Many of his fellow Jews criticised him for this. "Why do you have anything to do with these Gentile dogs?" they asked. It was in answer to this question that he wrote about Jonah, the prophet whom Jehovah had sent to preach to the wicked heathen city of Nineveh. He had tried to avoid obeying the command, but at last had gone; and when the Ninevites listened to his preaching and repented and turned to Jehovah he was angry. And Jehovah said unto him, "Should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand?" (That is, six score thousand little children.)

Jonah in this story is a type of the Jewish people. As Jehovah sent Jonah to preach to the Ninevites, so he would send the Jews to teach the nations of his love. What a pity to be so narrow-minded, so blinded by pride of race, as to have no sympathy or good will for any other race of men! This is the lesson the author of the book meant to teach.

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Probably very few of the Jews who heard this man, or read his book, understood or appreciated him. But there were enough of them who cared for him to preserve his book, so that it became a part of their sacred writings; and perhaps more than any other book in the Old Testament it prepared the way for a broadening of the dreams and plans of Abraham and Moses and the prophets to include not only Jews but all mankind—that broadening which we call Christianity.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Read Isaiah 19. 19-24.

2. What do you think this writer would have thought of our American habit of calling names at foreigners?

3. What advice would these writers have given us, in regard to our “Japanese” problem?

4. If you have time, look into the book of Jonah.

CHAPTER XXVII

OUTDOOR TEACHERS AMONG THE JEWS[5]

All children among all races receive as they grow up some kind of an education. Isaac learned from his father Abraham and from the other older people about him how to set up a tent, how to milk a goat, how to recognize the tracks of bears and other wild beasts, and all the other bits of knowledge so necessary to wandering shepherds. Not till many centuries after Abraham in Hebrew history were there any special schools apart from the everyday experiences of life, or any man whose special work was that of teaching. But in the centuries following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and its gradual restoration, the people came more and more to see the importance of education. And in the course of these three or four centuries before the coming of Christ there grew up two kinds of schools and two kinds of teachers, first, an *open air* school where life itself was studied, and then later, in the second place, an *indoor* school, where the chief study was that of books.

SCHOOLS IN THE OPEN AIR

These open-air schools were most often to be seen in the “city gate.” The Jews meant by the “gate” of the city the broad open space in front of the actual opening in the city wall. It was like the public square in our modern towns.

=Scenes in the “Gate."=—Suppose we visit one of the “gates.” It is early morning. Everything is noise and confusion. Here are merchants peddling their wheat, or dates, or honey, their wool or their flax. Customers are haggling over prices. Each one is shouting with a shrill voice and with many gestures that the price asked is an outrage. Besides the merchants there are judges. Here sits one of the city elders with a long white beard. Before him are two farmers disputing over a boundary line—also witnesses and spectators.

Out in the middle of the area children are playing. Every now and then a mangy yellow dog noses his way through the crowd looking for scraps of food. And everywhere are the folks who came out just to see their neighbors and to hear the news.

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In one corner of the open space by the “gate” we notice a dignified figure, an old man with a circle of friends and listeners. He is watching the varied scenes around him and occasionally talking with those about him.

“Who is that old man?” we ask.

“That is one of the wise men,” we are told.

These “wise men” among the Hebrews studied human nature, and gave to young men and to any less-experienced people who cared to listen, the benefit of their practical good sense. They loved to teach through “proverbs,” that is, short and witty sentences. A large number of the “proverbs” of these teachers are preserved in the Book of Proverbs in our Old Testament.

THE TEACHING OF THE WISE MEN

One of the most important keys to success in life is a knowledge of people. This the wise men helped their students to obtain. Let us sit for a while beside one of them and look through his eyes at the people who pass by. Here comes young Mr. Know-it-all. He wears a very fine garment, and walks with a swagger. His father and mother and all his aunts and uncles have always told him that he is the most clever person in the world. And, of course, he agrees with them. He will listen to advice from nobody. The wise man watches him pass, then says to his hearers:

="Seest thou a wise man in his own conceit?
There is more hope of a fool than of him."=
(=Proverbs 26. 12.=)

The wise man has a sense of humor. He loves to smile at the little inconsistencies of life. He has been listening to the talk between a merchant and his customer. And this is his comment on it.

="It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer:
But when he is gone his way, then he boasteth."=
(=Proverbs 20. 14.=)

But though he is so quick to laugh at human follies the wise man has a tender heart. He helps his hearers to sympathize with those who are anxious and discouraged. And he knows the value of friendly encouragement.

="Heaviness in the heart of a man maketh it stoop;
But a good word maketh it glad."=
(=Proverbs 12. 25.=)

=A practical advice of the wise men.=—With this knowledge of human nature these teachers were able to give much good counsel in matters of business. For example, there were tricksters in those days just as now. One of their favorite tricks was to persuade some “greenhorn” to act as surety for a loan. “Just shake hands with me before witnesses,” the smooth tongued one would say, “and the banker will lend me money; there is a caravan of silks coming from Damascus which I can buy for a song. We will both be rich.” So the poor fool would shake hands before witnesses, which was like our modern custom of signing one’s name on a note. The man would then take the money and disappear, leaving his victim to repay the loan or be sold into slavery. “Be on your guard against these sharpers,” the wise men were constantly saying.

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HELPING PEOPLE TO LIVE LOVINGLY TOGETHER

The best part of the teaching of the wise men had to do with even more important matters than how to keep from being cheated. They helped people live together. They had many sensible things to say about good manners. For example, Joshua the son of Sirach, a wise man whose sayings are found in the book of Ecclesiasticus in the Apocrypha, gives much wise counsel about table manners:

="Consider thy neighbor's liking by thine own, And be discreet in every point. Eat as becometh a man, those things which are set before thee; And eat not greedily, lest thou be hated. Be first to leave off, for manner's sake, And be not insatiable, lest thou offend."=

Surely courtesy at the table is one of the things which make life happy and noble. Truly civilized people do not eat like pigs in a trough.

As they looked out upon the lives of men what made the wise men most sorry was the hatred and bitterness which they so often saw between those who should have been friends. One of their most frequent teachings was the need for the control of one's anger and for charity and forgiveness.

="A fool uttereth all his anger,
But a wise man keepeth it back."=
(=Proverbs 29. 11.=)

="He that covereth a transgression seeketh love:
But he that harpeth on a matter separateth chief friends."=
(=Proverbs 17. 9.=)

=Their condemnation of tale-bearing.=—Since the wise men felt so strongly on this point, it is not surprising that they kept their most scathing denunciations for tale-bearers and troublemakers. Too often they saw men who were formerly dear friends passing by each other with dark looks. Some liar had been sowing his evil seed. If you have anything to say against a man, the wise men urged, say it to his face. Don't talk against him behind his back.

="A froward man scattereth abroad strife:
And a whisperer separateth chief friends."=
(=Proverbs 16. 28.=)

THE RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF THE WISE MEN

There came a time, perhaps a century or two after Nehemiah, when the wise men were the chief moral and religious leaders of the Jewish nation. The people had lost faith in the prophets, for there were no more prophets like Amos or Isaiah. And these practical teachers with their warm sympathy and kind hearts had many true words to speak about the God of wisdom and of love. The book of Job in the Bible, one of the greatest books of history, was written by one of these wise men. It is a story of a man who found God although both his own misfortunes and also the false ideas of his friends had made him think that God was his enemy. He found God at last because he was brave enough to think for himself.

So these teachers gave their pupils the best kind of education. They too, like the prophets and all the leaders about whom we have studied, helped to prepare their pupils for the life of loving brotherhood with God as their common Father, which was the goal toward which all this history we have studied was slowly but surely moving.

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STUDY TOPICS

1. Browse through the book of Proverbs, especially chapters 10 and following, looking for teachings on the following subjects; enter the references opposite (*a*), (*b*), *etc*., below.

(*a*) Diligence in work. (*b*) Temperance in use of wine. (*c*) Honesty in business. (*d*) Compassion toward the poor. (*e*) Self-control in anger.

2. Read Ecclesiastes 11, for a taste of another “wisdom” book.

3. Find if you can a Bible with the Apocrypha between the Old and New Testaments, and read a chapter or two in Ecclesiasticus, or the wisdom of the Son of Sira.

FOOTNOTES:

[5] Part of these pages taken from the author’s earlier book, The Story of Our Bible. Copyright, 1914, 1915, by Charles Scribner’s Sons. Used by permission.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BOOK LEARNING AMONG THE JEWS

If we could have visited the home of some sincerely religious Jew about the time when the law of Deuteronomy was adopted by King Josiah and the people we might have seen the beginning of a new kind of education—the regular study of books, and especially of the Bible. They had for their Bible at that time the law of Deuteronomy, which they had accepted as God’s will for all Jews. And if this was God’s will for them, it was plain that it must be taught to everybody, beginning with the children.

TEACHING THE LAW AT HOME

Let us imagine ourselves, then, visiting the house of some good Jewish friend in Jerusalem under Josiah. As we enter the door we notice letters roughly carved or painted on the wooden door. “You ask what are those words,” replies our host to our question. “They are from our law. They are for the children to see, as they go in and out the door. This is the way the inscription reads:

> ="’Hear, O Israel: Jehovah thy God is one and thou shalt love
> Jehovah thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,
> and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.’=

“The priest wrote them for us and both I myself and the children have been learning to read them,” says our friend. “And every Sabbath we study them, and I teach the children to repeat after me as much of the rest of Jehovah’s law as I can remember. Sometimes the children ask me questions. They say, ’What mean these laws and these statutes which you say Jehovah our God commanded?’ Then I answer, ’We were Pharaoh’s slaves in the land of Egypt. And Jehovah brought us up out of Egypt ... to give us this land. And Jehovah commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Jehovah our God for our good.’”

=Religion through education.=—It is easy to understand that with this training in childhood it became more and more easy from this time on to persuade the Jewish people not to worship idols and to see why they gradually changed more and more rapidly into the most devout and earnest people in the world. The children were taught in their homes.

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THE NEW KIND OF TEACHERS, THE SCRIBES

After Josiah's time many additions were made to this law of Jehovah. At first it consisted of only a part of our book of Deuteronomy. But the learned priests and prophets, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem, made a careful study of all the writings of preceding generations, and they found many collections of laws and histories of Jehovah's dealings with his people which seemed to them inspired of Jehovah and worthy to be reverenced and obeyed. They tried the experiment of combining some of these with the law of Deuteronomy. So it came to pass that two or three centuries later the Jews had as their sacred book the whole of what is now the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Bible.

=The need of other teachers besides the father in the home.=—If this larger Bible was to be carefully studied by every Jew from his childhood up, there must be certain men who should give their lives to teaching it. So in time there came to be a class of teachers known as "scribes." These men spent all their working hours reading this law of God, making copies of it and teaching it to others. Some of these men were truly great and good. For example, there was the gentle Hillel, who lived about a century before Christ and who taught the spirit of the Golden Rule, although in a form not so perfect as that of Jesus.

="Do not to your neighbor what is unpleasant to yourself.
This is the whole law. All else is exposition."=

It was a scribe like this who talked with Jesus about the "greatest commandment," and to whom Jesus said, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."

THE SCHOOLS OF THE SCRIBES

These teachers conducted regular daily schools in the synagogues. More and more children were sent to them until in the time of Jesus all boys were supposed to go for at least a year or two. Girls were taught only at home. People had not yet come to realize that the minds of girls are as well worth educating as those of boys.

=The methods of teaching.=—The boys sat on the floor in a circle before the teacher. They repeated after him the Jewish alphabet and learned to recognize each letter. Their only textbooks were papyrus rolls on which were written parts of the law. They began with Leviticus and learned by heart as much of it as possible. We can imagine that the boys were glad when they finished with Leviticus and went back to Genesis to the stories of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph.

They also learned to write. Their copybooks were at first rough scraps of broken pottery on which with sharp nails they learned to scratch letters. Probably mischievous boys

sometimes drew pictures instead of practicing the words assigned to them. After they could write fairly well they were given wax tablets, or even a bit of papyrus, a quill pen, and an ink horn. Papyrus was expensive and had to be used with care.

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GOOD AND BAD RESULTS OF THE TEACHING OF THE SCRIBES

So much study of these books of law and history was bound to wield a mighty influence. Those thousands of boys studying laws which for their time were the most just and humane in the world, could not but learn something about the meaning of justice and mercy. Better still, the wonderful stories in Genesis and Exodus left their sure impress on the hearts of those who studied. The boys for the most part reverenced their teachers, and many of them came to love their Book, the law. It was a boy, so taught, who when he was older, wrote that Psalm:

="Thy word is a lamp unto my feet
And light unto my path.=
* * * * * * * * *
=Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
By taking heed thereto, according to thy word."=

=The danger of formality.=—The danger in this kind of education is that of blindness to the voice of God to be heard in everyday experience or in our own hearts as well as in the written Scripture. The result of this blindness is that goodness and religion are thought of as merely the keeping of the written law. It was such blind scribes whom Jesus denounced for giving tithes, or a tenth part of the mint and anise and cummin, that is, of even the most insignificant of their garden herbs and forgetting mercy and justice and faith; in other words, keeping the letter of the written law but not living out the spirit of it. It is not enough, Jesus taught, just to obey what is written. To do only that is to be an unprofitable servant. This bad kind of religion grew up in those schools where only books were studied, not the real everyday experience of living people.

JESUS WAS A WISE MAN RATHER THAN A SCRIBE

When Jesus came he was a teacher more like those more ancient wise men of the city gates. Like them he taught his listeners out of doors by the shores of the lake or on the hillside as well as in the synagogues. He reverenced the Bible, the Law and the Prophets, as God's word, but he listened for that word also in the sights and sounds of the streets and country lanes. He heard his Father's voice as he listened to house wives chatting with their neighbors, or to vineyard keepers hiring harvest hands.

"When He walked the fields he drew
From the flowers and birds and dew
Parables of God.
For within his heart of love

All the soul of man did move—
God had his abode."

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up in the Bible dictionary under "Scribes" and "Rabbi."

2. What impressions of the scribes do you get from Matthew 7. 28-29, Matthew 15. 1-9, and Mark 12. 28-34?

3. Read Luke 1. 5-6; 2. 25-36. Where and how do you think these good men and women, among whom Jesus was born, got their training?

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CHAPTER XXIX

NEW OPPRESSORS AND NEW WARS FOR FREEDOM

After the death of Alexander the Great his empire was broken into fragments ruled by those of his generals who were able to snatch these smaller kingdoms for themselves. One of them named Ptolemy seized Egypt. His descendants, known as the Ptolemies, reigned there for centuries. Another, named Seleucus, gained control of the greater part of the old Persian empire. He built the city of Antioch, in northern Syria, naming it after his father Antiochus. His descendants, on the throne of the new kingdom, are known in history as the Seleucids.

THE JEWS UNDER GREEK RULERS

Canaan at first became part of the kingdom of the Ptolemies, and this continued for about a century. During this period the Jews seemed to have been treated with a fair degree of kindness and justice. At least they were left most of the time in peace. But about B.C. 200, Canaan was taken from the Ptolemies by the Seleucids, and this turned out to be for the Jewish people an unhappy change. In the year 175 B.C., there came to the throne in Antioch a young prince named Antiochus Epiphanes who, like Alexander the Great, thought of himself as a kind of missionary for Greek art and civilization. He became more and more angry because so many of the Jews refused to worship Greek gods. About B.C. 170, he issued a decree that all persons in his dominion must offer sacrifices to Zeus. When the Jews refused they were put to death.

=New persecutions.=—A terrible persecution was thus begun. A Greek officer would come into a Jewish town or village, set up an altar to Zeus, and summon all the people to join in the sacrifice of worship. As many as possible of those who refused were hunted down and killed. All copies of the Jewish law that could be found were burned. Every month a search was made throughout Judaea to see whether any Jew still had copies of the Scriptures. A heathen altar was set up in the temple at Jerusalem and swine were sacrificed upon it. To the Jews, who were taught to regard swine's flesh as unclean and unholy, nothing could have seemed more horrible.

Of course there were some traitors and renegades. But the great majority of the Jewish people were nobly true to the faith of their fathers. Hundreds and thousands, young and old, allowed themselves to be tortured and slain rather than take part in a heathen sacrifice. Many even of those who had fallen in with some of the evil customs of the Greeks now refused to be known as anything else than faithful Jews, even though it might cost them their lives.

THE MACCABEAN REVOLTS AND VICTORIES

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In the midst of this cruel persecution a rebellion flamed up under the leadership of a certain brave old priest named Mattathias. After his death his sons took up the cause. The greatest of them was Judas, who was surnamed Maccabeus, which some have thought meant the Hammerer. The whole family is known as the Maccabees. Under the skillful command of Judas victory after victory was won by his little band of Jewish warriors fighting against great armies of Greek hired soldiers. The city of Jerusalem was cleared of the detested oppressors, all except a garrison that maintained itself in the citadel. The temple was purified and rededicated to Jehovah.

After some twenty years the soldiers from Antioch were driven out altogether and the little Jewish kingdom under Simon, a brother of Judas, was recognized as independent. For nearly a century the descendants of the Maccabees reigned in Jerusalem. Most of them turned out to be greedy and selfish men unworthy of Judas and Simon. Yet during this period the Jews tasted once again something of the joys of freedom.

THE VICTORIES OF ROME

During the last two centuries before Christ a new empire had been growing up in the west, that of Rome. In the year B.C. 63, two princes of the Maccabean line fell into a quarrel as to which one should be king. There was a civil war, which was ended by the Roman general Pompey, who annexed the country as a province of the Roman Empire. This was the end of the independence of the Jewish nation.

=The Herods.=—Sometimes Roman provinces were ruled by Roman governors, and at other times they were left to native kings who were allowed to do pretty much as they pleased so long as they paid tribute to Rome. There was a certain Edomite, or Idumean, as the name was pronounced by the Greeks and Romans, who partly by flattery and partly by real ability persuaded Romans to make him king over the whole land of Palestine.

This man is known in the history books as Herod the Great, although he was sadly lacking in true greatness, being fearfully cruel and absolutely selfish. He built many beautiful palaces in various Jewish cities and also rebuilt very beautifully the temple at Jerusalem. He himself had no interest in religion, but he hoped in this way to win back with the Jews some of the popularity which he had lost through his many crimes. It was during his reign that Jesus was born. When Herod died the land was divided among his sons. When Jesus began his public career as a teacher one of these sons, Herod Antipas, was the ruler of the northern part of the country, that is Galilee. Judaea, in the south, and Samaria between Galilee and Judaea, were directly under Roman rule with a Roman governor or procurator.

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=The Sanhedrin.=—To a certain extent even after the Roman conquest the Jews were permitted to govern themselves. There was in Jerusalem a council, or court, of leading priests and rabbis, called the Sanhedrin. There were in it seventy-one members. When any member died the others elected some one to fill the vacancy. All Jews everywhere were supposed to be under the authority of the Sanhedrin. But except in purely religious matters it had little power outside of Judaea. In Judaea, however, this court, or council, decided all questions except those which the Roman procurator reserved for himself. They were not allowed to condemn a criminal to death. So when the Sanhedrin voted to put Jesus out of the way it was necessary to take him before Pilate the Roman procurator and persuade Pilate to ratify the sentence of death. How galling it was to a proud nation like the Jews to be obliged to go to a hated enemy for permission to carry out their decrees we can well imagine; and we shall learn more of it in the next chapter.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up in the Bible dictionary, Maccabees and Herod.

2. Read Hebrews 11. 32-40. Verses 33-38 are probably in large part a description of the heroic martyrs before the Maccabees.

3. Was the Maccabean rule a failure because it did not last?

4. How did these rulers contribute to the great ends which Jews had always dreamed of.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DISCONTENT OF THE JEWS UNDER ROMAN RULE

In spite of the fact that the Jews still had some power of self-government through the Sanhedrin, the great mass of the people hated the Romans with an almost inconceivable fury. The world had never before seen such cruel rulers. The Assyrians had been bad, but the Romans were worse. Think of that form of punishment which they inflicted carelessly every day even for minor crimes—crucifixion! The poor victim was nailed by the hands and feet to a pole and left to hang in agony till death mercifully ended it all. Think of the gladiatorial combats in the city of Rome and in other Roman cities, where every day for centuries slaves or condemned criminals fought each other with swords to the death, or fought with wild beasts while the gloating multitudes looked on in rapture.

Moreover, not only were the Romans very cruel, they had no manners. They were haughty in their bearing and took pains to let conquered people know how thoroughly they were despised.

=Roman cruelty in Palestine.=—All these qualities were manifested almost at their worst by the Roman rulers in Judaea and Galilee. Jesus speaks of certain Galilaeans, "whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices." We know nothing of this incident except what Jesus tells. Evidently, these Galilaeans had come as pilgrims to Jerusalem at the time of one of the annual feasts. Possibly they did not salute with sufficient respect the Roman eagles as they passed some squad of Roman soldiers in the street. At any rate, they were taken before Pilate and ruthlessly condemned to the slaughter.

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=Roman taxes and the Publicans.=—Naturally, the thought of paying taxes to such masters was almost unbearable. Yet each adult Jewish man and woman was required to pay a personal or poll tax besides taxes on his property or income. To make matters worse, the Romans were accustomed to hire *Jews* to collect these taxes, giving these men the right to extort whatever they could, provided the required tribute was paid to Rome. Of course all true Jews hated and despised these Jewish tax-gatherers or publicans even more than they hated and despised the Romans themselves.

VARIOUS PARTIES AMONG THE JEWS

There were some respectable Jews, indeed, as well as these tax-collectors, who favored the Romans. There were for example the Sadducees, a group of wealthy and aristocratic men, mostly priests, who formed a sort of political party called by this name. Many of them were members of the Sanhedrin. They were prosperous, and so long as their power was not taken away they sided with the Romans. It was nothing to them that the great mass of their poor fellow countrymen were being brutally and wickedly robbed and ill-treated.

=The Pharisees.=—We have already spoken of the Pharisees as being “Separatists,” that is, the people who were most opposed to any contact with heathen foreigners. Strange to say, most of the Pharisees were opposed to any violent rebellion against the Romans. They believed that God himself would come to the aid of his people. Many books of the class called apocalypses were written during this period of the history in which the writers tried to comfort their readers by prophesying that the Lord would soon descend from heaven with armies of angels or would send his Messiah to drive out the Romans and set up his own kingdom. The word “Messiah” (in Greek, “Christ”) means *anointed one*.

The book of Daniel in the Old Testament is one of the books of this period. Many similar books were written which were not included in the canon of the Scriptures. All of them were written in rather mysterious language—with references to trumpets, vials, seals, beasts with many heads and many horns, and so on. This was to keep their heathen rulers from understanding the real meaning. It would not have been safe openly to predict that in a few years God was going to send all Romans to eternal punishment.

=The Zealots.=—There were still others among the Jews at this time who were not willing to wait for Jehovah to come down from heaven. They wanted to start a revolution right away. One such man, Judas of Gamala, led a revolt when Jesus was about ten years old in which many Galilaeans joined. It was put down by the Romans with their usual cruelty. Very likely the fathers of some of Jesus’ boyhood friends in Nazareth of Galilee were crucified as the punishment for taking part in this revolt. Those who sympathized with Judas continued to plot in secret against the hated Roman

oppressors. They were called Zealots. One of them became a member of Jesus' band of twelve apostles.

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SMOLDERING HATE AMONG THE PEOPLE

Whether they were actual plotters against Rome, like the Zealots, or whether they gave their strength to eager prayer to Jehovah for deliverance, the great mass of the common people among the Jews in the time of Christ were burning with a fierce patriotism and with a hatred against their oppressors such as we can scarcely imagine. The century of freedom under the Maccabees had made them all the more impatient of tyranny—and then to find themselves under such unspeakable tyrants as Herod and Pilate!—this was almost unendurable.

The children drank in this spirit with their mothers' milk. Fathers and mothers had constantly to warn their boys and girls not to show their feelings toward Roman officers and soldiers lest some dreadful punishment should befall them. So it went on from year to year, growing constantly worse instead of better. The whole land was like a heap of smoldering leaves. Sooner or later there would be a sudden flare of open flame.

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up in the Bible dictionary "Publicans," "Zealots," and "Sadducees."

2. How do you explain the success of the Romans in tyrannizing the proud Jews for so many years? Consider the part played by the Sadducees.

3. Read Matthew 3. 1-2. Why did John's message arouse such interest and enthusiasm?

CHAPTER XXXI

JEWISH HOPES MADE GREATER BY JESUS

This history of the common people of Israel began with certain vague hopes of a happier and nobler way of living for the descendants of Abraham. As the centuries passed these hopes were only very partially realized. But what was more important the Jews came more and more clearly to understand the meaning of their own hopes. Their great teachers helped them to know what they really wanted or ought to want if they would be happy. Moses taught them the first lessons of justice as the foundation of happiness. The great prophets helped them to see that neither happiness nor justice was possible except as they knew and worshiped the true God—not a God of greed and anger to be bribed with sacrifices, but the God of justice and love. A few of the prophets also began to see that such hopes as theirs could not be for Jews alone but must include all mankind.

THE FULLNESS OF THE TIMES

The Jews under their Roman masters had come to a time, as we saw in the preceding chapter, when they were wildly expecting an immediate fulfillment of these hopes. The short taste of freedom and happiness which they had enjoyed under Judas and Simon Maccabeus, followed by a tyranny more cruel and distasteful than any which their ancestors had known, made them almost mad with the desire for some kind of a Saviour. And it seemed to them that he must come soon.

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=The chance for a world-Saviour.=—All over the world just at this time there were strange hopes and longings in men's hearts. The Romans had robbed many other nations besides the Jews of their independence. These people had no real nation of their own any longer to live for—and they hated Rome. What was there to make life worth living unless some Redeemer should come from God?

Moreover, it was possible now to think of such a Saviour as a world-Saviour. In the earlier centuries men hardly knew that there was a world outside their own tribe and a few of their neighbors. There were no maps. Only a few could travel, and see for themselves how great a world there really was—and how many nations there were—-made up of men like themselves. The common people of Asia scarcely knew that there was a Europe, and the enormous continent of Africa, except for Egypt, did not exist for them. As for what is now called the New World, North and South America, no one knew of its existence.

=Preparations for Christianity.=—But the Romans built good roads all over the great countries which bordered on the Mediterranean Sea, and many were the travelers who went to and fro upon them. They established one government for all this Mediterranean world. One language came to be understood everywhere—not Latin, the language of the Romans themselves, but Greek. Beyond the boundaries of the empire there were, of course, vast territories. But it was possible now for even the common people to realize that their own village or city or tribe was only a small part of one great world. And for the first time in history there was a chance for some one to take the old Jewish hope of a better and happier Jewish people and change it into a world-hope of a better and happier human race, and to gather a few men and women together and start them working for it.

THE COMING OF JESUS

In the wonderful providence of God there was born in a manger-cradle just at this moment in history the Baby who was destined to accomplish this miracle; to broaden out to their widest and noblest meanings these hopes which had been handed down from one generation of Jews to another. The story of the life of Jesus will be given in detail in other courses in this series. Here, in a nutshell, is what Jesus did: he helped men to believe in a God who loved all men as his children, whether rich or poor, learned or ignorant, Jews or Gentiles or Samaritans, even the bad as well as the good; for if they were bad, they needed his love to help them to be good. Jesus not only taught this idea of God through his spoken words; he helped men, through his deeds, to understand it. He *lived* that way, as the Son of such a God. He healed the sick. He fed the hungry. He ate and drank with outcasts. He was everybody's friend.

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=The inevitable conflict and cross.=—Of course Jesus was not able to live that kind of life very long in our kind of world. Very soon he came into conflict with the various kinds of men who enjoyed special privileges of wealth or learning or honor and were not at all willing to share these things in a brotherly way; with the Pharisees, who were considered especially holy and did not want to be brothers to common men, the “people of the land”; with the rich who did not want to be brothers to the poor; with priests who did not want to be brothers to wounded men lying by the side of the Jericho road; with Romans who were afraid the Jews might think brotherhood meant liberty. So after three short years of preaching and healing Jesus was nailed to the cross, praying even as the nails were driven into his hands, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

=Suppose the Jews had believed in Jesus.=—How different the outcome of their history would then have been! Instead of a bloody and hopeless revolt against the Romans, they might have found a way to live at peace with them, receiving from them a more just and humane government; Isaiah, centuries before, showed his people how to get along under the rule of Assyrians. Or, if the Romans had goaded the people to rebel, they might have fought and died gloriously, not merely for their own freedom but in the cause of all the suffering masses in all lands. Thus the whole course of history might have been changed. The four years’ war which did break out in A.D. 66, about thirty-six years after Jesus’ death, was not that kind of a war. In the course of these four years different factions among the Jews fought each other almost as fiercely as they fought the Romans. The Jews themselves were selfish in their hopes. They were not inspired and strengthened by Jesus’ vision of brotherhood. In A.D. 70 the Romans captured the city of Jerusalem and burned the temple. It was never rebuilt. From that day to this the Jews have been a people without a native land.

CARRYING OUT THE IDEAS OF JESUS

There was, however, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, a splendid company of disciples whose lives had been transformed by their acceptance of Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and who were eager to go on carrying out Jesus’ plans. None of them thoroughly understood these plans. Indeed, we are only beginning to understand them to-day. But very soon, within a few years after Jesus’ death, the wisest of the early apostles, such men as Peter, Barnabas, and Paul, came to see that to carry out Jesus’ wishes there needed to be a universal church in which Jews and Gentiles, men of all races, would be included. Within a half century branches of this new world-church had been started in every important city in the Roman empire. At first their meetings were held in synagogues of the Jews of the Dispersion; and it is a pity that all the Jews could not have perceived that these disciples of Jesus were carrying out the hopes of their own prophets, that this Christianity was simply Judaism fulfilled. But many, of course, wanted to keep their religion and their God to themselves as Jews. So there sprang up other buildings everywhere which came to be known as Christian churches rather than Jewish synagogues.

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=Our task to-day.=—In these modern times we are still trying to understand what Jesus wanted and to bring it to pass in reality. We are beginning to see that if all men are indeed sacred to our heavenly Father, then under the leadership of our everliving Christ, a fight is in store for us on behalf of all the millions of our brothers who are blinded by selfishness, haggard from want, embittered by injustice, stunted in soul and mind by ignorance, or tortured by all the agonies of war. If there is to be a better world for any of us, it must be a better world for all of us. It must be “everybody’s world.”

STUDY TOPICS

1. Look up in the Bible dictionary, for further light on the background of Jesus’ life, Galilee, Nazareth, Capernaum.

2. Read Matthew 4. 17. Explain why the message of Jesus, like that of John, awakened such a quick response among the people.

3. What did Jesus think of the rule of Rome? Read Matthew 20. 25-27, and Luke 13. 31, 32.

4. In contrast with the Zealots, what was Jesus’ plan for winning freedom and happiness, instead of the oppression and misery of Roman rule? Read John 18. 33-38.

CHAPTER XXXII

A THOUSAND YEARS OF A NATION’S QUEST

In this course of study we have been tracing the progress of a great enterprise. A race of people set out in the days of Abraham to seek the best in life. Did they win or lose, succeed or fail? What did they achieve, during a thousand years of striving?

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Looking back over the whole period which we have studied, there are four short epochs which stand out in bright contrast to long stretches of darkness as times when the common people had a chance to enjoy some of the good things of life, or at least had reason to hope that they might some time gain them for themselves or their children. These were the times of David, of Josiah, of Nehemiah, and of Simon the Maccabee. These four men were all able and just leaders. They were all inspired, to a greater or less extent, by the ideals of Abraham, Moses, and the great reformer-prophets.

=The long centuries of failure.=—The lives of all four of these men together, however, do not cover much more than a century. During the rest of the time, the common

people were ground down under oppressors, either of their own race or foreign conquerors. Generation after generation of fathers and mothers patiently toiled and struggled and suffered, in the hope that they might climb just a little higher toward the sunlight of health and comfort and the higher blessings of life. Most of them struggled in vain. It is true that a few of the more fortunate, in each generation, saw some little advance over earlier generations in the good things of civilization. Such men as

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Nicodemus and Zacchaeus, in the time of Jesus, lived in better houses, wore more comfortable clothes, and ate better food than did King David himself in an earlier, ruder age. But the common people of Jesus' day were not so well off as even in the days of Abraham. For as wandering shepherds they were free. Life might be a bitter struggle against wild beasts and drought and famine. But no haughty masters looked down on them with contempt, or robbed them of their last farthing in unjust taxation. Shall we say, then, that as a whole, the great enterprise was a failure?

THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENT—A TRUE RELIGION

No, the great quest was not a failure, even though it was so far from a complete success. Out of the long years of struggle and prayer had come a new religion, not, indeed, understood by many but partly grasped at least by some, and written down in books so that it could never be wholly lost. This was a religion of the brotherhood of man and of a universal Father-God. The four eras of their history when the common people had been happy were eras when the principles of this religion had partly prevailed. And these eras still shine out for us as examples of what that kind of religion means in the life of a people. And the lives and words of the great prophets, and, greatest of all, the life of Jesus Christ, are a priceless legacy to us, who are still continuing the quest which Abraham began.

=The truth which has been revealed to us.=—All men, everywhere, who are longing and toiling for a better chance for life and happiness and for knowledge and beauty and love for themselves and for their children, may now know that they are not without a mighty helper. There is One who revealed himself, in the history of the people of Israel and uniquely in Jesus Christ his Son, who still speaks in the name of all the hungry and thirsty and ragged and sick:

> ="I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: ... Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto me."=

STUDY TOPICS

1. Of the four short eras of righteousness, in the history of the Hebrews, in which does it seem to you that the common people made the greatest gains?

2. What were some of the improvements in civilization which rich or well-to-do people, in the later centuries of this history, enjoyed, as compared with the earlier centuries? Study Chapters I and II, VI, VII, and VIII, and XXII.

3. Compare the earliest religion of the Hebrews with the religion of the prophets and Jesus. Mention four great discoveries in regard to the character of God.

REVIEW AND TEST QUESTIONS

1. Describe the daily life of the earliest ancestors of the Hebrews.

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2. What valuable characteristic of these people is reflected in the story of Joseph?

3. What were some of the evils of Babylonian life?

4. What kind of life did Abraham admire judging from the story of Lot?

5. What was the name of the Pharaoh who oppressed the Hebrews?

6. Describe the slavery which the Hebrews were compelled to endure. What did they have to do?

7. How did Moses succeed in delivering his countrymen?

8. What was the effect of this deliverance on the life and religion of the Hebrews in after years?

9. Why was it comparatively easy for the Hebrews to get a foothold in Canaan about B.C. 1200?

10. To what extent was the settlement in Canaan peaceful and to what extent was it by conquest?

11. What lessons in civilization did the Hebrews learn in Canaan?

12. What moral dangers did they have to fight against there?

13. Why were the Hebrews in the first years after the settlement so often beaten by their enemies?

14. What was Deborah's most important contribution to the history of her people?

15. Why did it seem necessary for the Hebrews to have a king?

16. Why were some of the wisest of the Hebrews opposed to the idea of a king?

17. How did David make the lives of the common people under his rule more prosperous and happy?

18. Why was Solomon unpopular?

19. Was the disruption of the kingdom of Solomon a mistake, or was it a blessing?

20. In what way did most of the kings who followed David make themselves a curse to their subjects?

21. Explain why the Rechabites, Elijah, and others hated Canaanite civilization and wanted the people to go back to the old nomadic desert ways.

22. Describe the burnt-offerings of ancient Hebrew religion. What was the difference between ordinary sacrifices and special “whole burnt-offerings”?

23. Describe the life of the poor people of Israel in the time of Jeroboam II and the prophet Amos.

24. How did Amos criticize the religion of burnt-offerings?

25. What false ideas of God did Hosea combat?

26. How did Hosea come to think of God as loving and merciful?

27. How were superstitious ideas about God used by greedy priests and fortune-tellers in Micah’s day to extort money from the people?

28. What did Micah say were the essential things in religion?

29. Why did the Jews in Isaiah’s time seek for alliances with foreign countries?

30. How were these alliances connected with the worship of foreign gods?

31. What were some of the sayings of Isaiah in which he taught the lesson of faith in the one true God?

32. What plan did Isaiah devise to educate disciples in his religious teachings?

33. What was the historical connection between the study circles of Isaiah and the law-book of Deuteronomy?

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34. To what extent did the law-book of Deuteronomy lead to the practice of the teachings of the prophets?

35. How did this law compromise in the matter of burnt-offerings and other sacrifices?

36. What did the prophet Jeremiah think of the law-book of Deuteronomy? Did he favor it or condemn it? Explain.

37. Describe the life of the exiles in Babylon.

38. How did they keep alive their faith in Jehovah?

39. Where else besides Babylonia were large numbers of Hebrew exiles to be found?

40. With what hopes did the Jews comfort themselves after the destruction of Jerusalem?

41. In what two ways did Nehemiah help the Jews in Jerusalem to a happier life?

42. Tell the story of the growing use of prayer and hymn books in the religious worship of the Jews.

43. Why did many of the Jews become more narrowly prejudiced against foreigners after the destruction of Jerusalem?

44. What influences tended to make some of the Jews in this period more broad-minded and friendly toward foreigners?

45. Mention some writings from this period which helped the cause of the broader patriotism.

46. What two kinds of special schools and teachers grew up among the Jews?

47. Describe the daily scenes in the group of listeners around one of the old wise men.

48. What were some weaknesses and faults in the education of the scribes?

49. What contributions did the Greeks bring to the civilization of the Jews in Canaan?

50. Why were the Jews specially discontented under the rule of the Romans?

51. In what four periods of their history were the Jews happiest?

52. How did Jesus fulfill and broaden out the national hopes of the Jews?

A SHORT LIST OF BOOKS THROWING LIGHT ON HEBREW LIFE AND TIMES

Kent and Bailey: *History of the Hebrew Commonwealth*.

George A. Barton: *Archaeology and the Bible*.

Charles Reynolds Brown: *The Story Books of the Early Hebrews*.

Harold B. Hunting: *The Story of Our Bible*.

Crosby: *Geography of Bible Lands*.

Hastings' One Volume Bible Dictionary.

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| Typographical errors corrected in text: |
| |
| Page 14: wondering replaced with wandering |
| Page 38: record replaced with records |
| Page 155: 'life itself itself was' replaced with |
| 'life itself was' |
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