

SAUL, A GIANT AT HIS GREATEST HEIGHT

Occasions Reveal Heroes; Saul Rose Nobly and Took Definite Relief Measures

ISSUED BLOODY SUMMONS International S. S. Lesson For March 14 Is "Saul Gains His Kingdom," I Sam., Ch. 1

(By William T. Ellis) Every day the cables are bringing us news from the Holy Land of the military activities there. The best of the war is the most interesting field of conflict to-day are found in the backs of our Bibles. The day-by-day tidings turn our thoughts back to the earlier stories of the battles over this same war-torn soil, and we are freshly reminded, in the light of the daily news, that cruelty and slaughter still are concomitants of wars, as ever in the remotest past.

The present Sunday School Lesson is a war story that gains new interest when read alongside of the latest cablegrams. It is a story of a great outrage, a great strategem, a great battle and a great hero. Like the recent dispatches from Suez and Sinai, it depends upon an understanding of the local geography for an intelligent interest. Most of the Children of Israel, it will be remembered, lived between the Mediterranean on the west and the Jordan River on the east. What we now technically call Palestine. Three tribes, however, had been given territory east of the Jordan toward the Arabian Desert at the time of the conquest which are to this day the best soil in the Holy Land. The region has always been turbulent, however, and it then passed through the hands of the Turkish army was encamped there, subduing an uprising of the Druses. Here in the territory of Gad was the city of Jabesh-Gilead.

Atrocities Are Old Fashioned Ever hovering over the Jewish communities east of the Jordan were the Ammonites, a great and war-like people, of whom we learn from both the Old Testament and from the Babylonian monuments. At this time they had a powerful ruler named Nahash, who had besieged Jabesh-Gilead, and had forced it to seek terms of surrender. The hunger, wounds and disease of the besieged were not greatly different from what usually accompany a successful siege.

The answer that was returned by Nahash, when the Israelites sued for peace, was truly oriental, displaying that cruelty which usually camps with miles. A head of a man to thrive in war. The Jewish proposal of Nahash was that he would spare the city, provided every man would come forward and have his right eye put out. This scheme, which meant a perpetual jibe at the Israelites. In addition to being a cruel and inhuman punishment, it was a constant humiliation to the pride of the people.

The tyranny of it becomes greater when we consider the helplessness of the people. They were at the end of their fighting. They could do no more. The mere of their conquerors was their only hope. When the ultimatum was received they asked for ten days respite, and this the conquerors granted. It was merely prolonged the sufferings of their victim. They were sure of their prey, and they could watch the agonizing waiting as a cruel boy enjoys the squirming of an impaled worm. Can you not hear the hysterical lamentations of the weaklings over their impending fate, and see the grim faces of the strong who were determined to undergo the worst like men? The wailing of the women and the nervous agony of the waiting, and the gasps of the Belgians who wait for the succor of the world; and of the besieged at Lucknow.

A Chance For a Hero The tale is almost contemporary. When messengers came from Jabesh-Gilead to Israel, the greater part of the people received the news with weeping and with wringing of hands. They substituted instant reaction. Most of us probably are to be classified with the fiddle folk who stand on a river bank and wave our hands foolishly while the boats are being pulled out. The record says: "All the people lifted up their voice, and wept."

There was one man who spent no time in idle weeping. Occasions reveal heroes. When the great hour strikes, the man comes to his own. Commonplace and beyond notice on the day before, great deeds were done by the man who rode on horseback before the Johnstown flood, warning the people to flee to the hills; and the girl who staid by her telephone when the building was on fire; and the fisherman who rescued the shipwrecked in the storm. These opportunities did not make heroes, they merely released the heroism that had all along been latent in the soul. It is to a present need is the one sign of a hero. Such was Saul, who quickly took definite measures for the help of the imperiled Israelites in Jabesh-Gilead. Here we find Saul at his greatest height.

Hot and Holy Anger Amid the helpless weeping of the mass, up rose this one man quick to do. "And the spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard these words and his anger was kindled greatly." Does that sound strange? Is not the Spirit of God a consoer, the One who helps us to endure life's ills? No; "The Comforter," which is His title in the New Testament, means Strengthener. The Spirit of God is power for striving, as well as solace in suffering. For some churches the surest sign of a baptism of the Holy Spirit would be for them to get into action and clean up their own membership rolls and their neighborhood conditions and their local politics.

It is high praise for Saul that he had a capacity for hot and holy indignation. Surely the righteous God had no pleasure in the timid and colorless spirits who never resent injustice and oppression, and do not flame with righteous anger against wrong-doing. Neither God nor man can get much help from the torpid souls who simply endure injustice. Would that we could write of every church member, "The spirit of God came mightily upon John Doe and his anger was kindled greatly." Then we should see flaming victories for the Church of Christ.

The Bloody Summons Instant action followed Saul's intense purpose. "He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the borders of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, whosoever cometh north after Saul and after Samuel, so shall he be done unto his oxen, and the dread of Jehovah fell on the people, and they came out as one man." Some of us would have hesitated over the sacrifice of those valuable oxen. Petty persons do not know when minor prudences are to be disregarded in the achievement of great purposes. Saul was a great doer. In this hour his real statesmanship appeared. He had the qualities of a heroic leader, which appealed to the imagination of the people. The trouble with a great deal of our reform work to-day is that it is superabundantly equipped with office-chair theorists, while sorely lacking men who actually can bring things to pass. There are one hundred men who can tell us how the nation should be run to every one who can take off his coat

and show us how to make a model neighborhood. Saul's summons to Israel by means of pieces of bloody beef, which swift runners bore, suggests the fiery cross of the Scottish highlands, which called the clans to war. A wooden cross was scorched with flame and drenched in blood "as an emblem of the fire and sword awaiting all who should neglect his summons." No lacrymose message was it that went from the new king to his people. It was a strong man's summons. Of course it put the fear of the Lord into the hearts of men, even as the fearless words of strong men do in our own day. Perhaps there is a hint of "Billy" Sunday's power in this episode of the stinging message which brought recruits to Saul's standard.

When Justice Fell A host of three hundred thousand Israelites swiftly assembled to follow Saul into action. The sight was one to fuse patriots into unity. Such occasions as this make for national sentiment. In helping beleaguered Jabesh-Gilead Saul was incidentally and unwittingly doing most to strengthen his own power over Israel. Across the Jordan in the beleaguered city of Jabesh-Gilead, the distraught and anxious Jews had received the message of succor soon to come. They adopted a strategem, sending word to Nahash, "To-morrow we will come out unto you and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you." But before that to-morrow broke, the hosts of Israel, divided into three great companies, fell swiftly upon the sleeping Ammonites and until the heat of the day they were busy in smiting the enemy. "And it came to pass that they that remained were scattered so that no two of them were left together." Royal Magnanimity Saul played the king greatly that

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