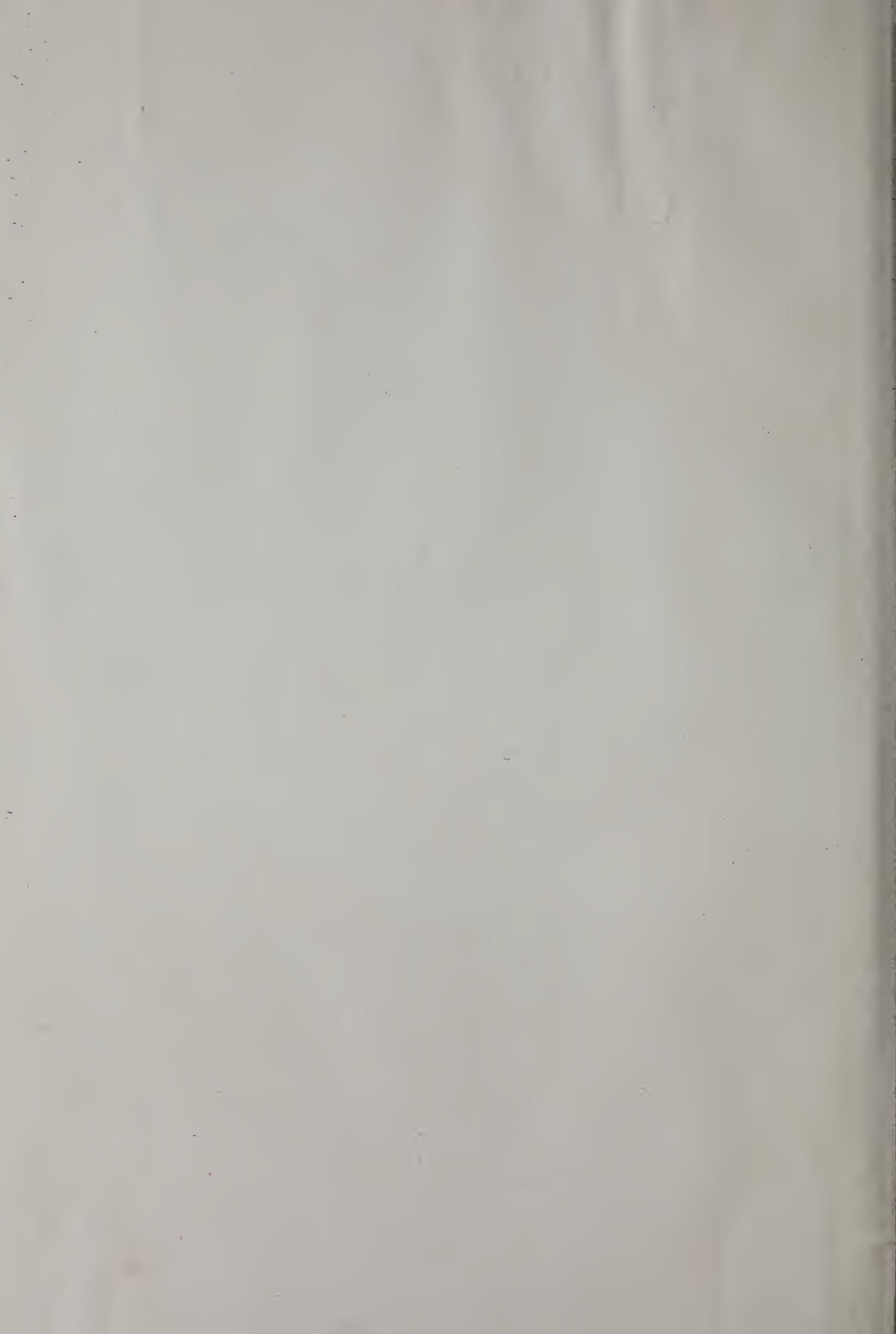


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ADP9181

A PRIMER
of
Old Testament
History

REV. FRANCIS E. GIGOT, D.D.



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of
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BY

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THE PAULIST PRESS
401 WEST 59TH STREET
NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Nihil Obstat:

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, D.D., *Censor Librorum.*

Imprimatur:

✠ PATRICK J. HAYES, D.D., *Archbishop of New York.*

New York, May 28, 1919.

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PREFACE

THE present work deals with the part of Sacred History which extends from the Creation of the world to the Coming of our Lord. It is meant to serve as a "Primer" or small elementary book of instruction in Old Testament history, and is therefore written in a simple and brief manner. The facts which it sets forth are only the leading events which are recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, and the order which it follows in stating them is no other than the one which is found in the Douay Version or Catholic translation of Holy Writ. The spelling of Scriptural names, whether in the body of the work or in the Maps and Illustrations, is invariably that with which Catholics readers are familiar. The dates which appear in the various parts of the book, are not all equally certain; they are those with which the Douay Version is supplied, and they will be found useful in realizing the chronological trend of the events narrated. Finally, the heading to each chapter of the work gives references to the books or parts of books of Holy Writ, of which each particular chapter is but a brief account.

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I. FROM THE CREATION TO ABRAHAM (4004-1996 B. C.)

1. The Creation

(Genesis i. - ii. 3)

THE bright heavens over our heads and the solid earth under our feet have not always existed; they owe their beginning to the goodness and power of Almighty God. When first made, the earth did not look as it does now: there was nothing living on it—neither men nor animals, and there was nothing growing on it—neither trees, nor grass, nor flowers; it was all round covered over with deep waters, and all was darkness. Then God spoke and said: “Let there be light,” and the pleasant light of day was made, and marked the first day of Divine work.

A second time God spoke: “Let there be a firmament,” and it was so; the beautiful blue sky formed the vault of heaven, and a part of the waters were changed into clouds, which went up to take their place in the sky above. Such was the work of the second day.

Then God spoke again and said: “Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear,” and it was so: divided from the sea, the earth now appeared with its mountains and hills and valleys, and also with its springs, brooks, and rivers which refreshed the dry land, and poured themselves into the sea; nay more, at God’s new command, it brought forth grass, and herbs, and trees bearing fruit. Thus ended the third day.

After this, God said: “Let there be light in the firmament of heaven, to divide the days and the years, and to give light upon the earth,” and it was so: in the heavens, the sun rose up to give its light to the day, and the soft silvery moon shone to give light by night as did also the stars without number, glimmering forth their twinkling light. So the fourth day went by.

Next, God spoke and said: “Let the waters bring forth fish, and the air winged birds,” and so it came to pass on the fifth day.

On the sixth day, God said: “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of all kinds,” and it was so; woods and fields were all alive with cattle and wild beasts; the grass, and flowers, and bushes were covered with gay butterflies, winged insects, and

creeping things of all sorts. He also said: "Let us make man to our image and likeness, and let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and over the whole earth." And so man was made bearing in his soul God's image, and having under God authority over all things around him.

"And God saw all the things that He had made, and they were very good."

So Almighty God made heaven and earth in six days, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work, and set apart this day for man, to be given to a holy rest and to joyful thanksgiving for the blessing of His creation.

2. Paradise and the Fall

(Genesis ii. 4 - iii. 24)

The first man to tread the earth and admire the heavens was Adam. The Lord God made his body out of the soft moist earth and breathed into his face the breath of life. He then placed Adam in the lovely garden of Paradise. The garden had many beautiful trees which bore the sweetest fruit. One of them was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And God said to Adam: "Of all the trees in the garden thou mayest eat freely; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou mayest not eat, for in the day that thou eatest of it thou shalt die." The garden had also a great variety of animals. God brought them one by one into the presence of Adam, and to each of them Adam gave its own particular name. But none of them was fitted to be Adam's companion. And God said: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a helper, like to himself." He then made the first woman, Eve, out of the side of Adam whom he cast into deep sleep, and brought her to Adam. When Adam awoke out of his sleep, he saw for the first time his beautiful companion, and joyfully took her to wife.

One day when Eve was near the forbidden tree Satan used a serpent in tempting her to disobey God's command. The serpent slyly asked her: "Why hath God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of Paradise?" He next boldly said to Eve that neither she nor Adam would die were they to eat of the fruit of the tree which was in the midst of Paradise. "God knows very well," he added, "that when you eat of it your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Eve

then began to hesitate: the fruit seemed to her to be particularly beautiful, and very good to eat. At length she ate of it, and gave some to Adam, who in like manner ate of it.

The eyes of Adam and Eve were, indeed, opened, but it was to their shame and confusion. Now afraid to be met by God, they tried to hide themselves in the trees of the garden. God found them out and punished them for their sin of disobedience: both Adam and Eve were now doomed to die, Adam after laboring hard to till the earth, Eve after having had many sorrows with her children and having led a life of dependence on her husband. He also punished the tempting serpent, the cause of their Fall, and declared that in the conflict that would exist between his seed and the seed of the woman, the latter should crush the serpent's head, a victory won by Christ, the Redeemer of the human race. "For this purpose, the Son of God appeared, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

God then sent Adam and Eve out of Paradise, the blessed home they no longer deserved. They and their children must now bear the evil consequences of original sin.

3. Cain, Abel and Seth

(Genesis iv.-v.)

The first children of Adam and Eve were Cain and Abel. The two brothers grew up side by side. Both gave themselves to useful work, Cain tilling the ground, and Abel keeping the sheep. Both also offered gifts to God, Cain presenting to the Lord the first-fruits of the field, and Abel the firstlings of the flock. It so happened, however, that Almighty God showed more favor to the offerings of Abel than to those of his brother. Cain was very angry at this; jealousy grew upon him; and at length he made up his mind that he would murder Abel as soon as possible. Then it was that God reproved Cain gently, telling him that if he did well, like his brother Abel, he would also get a reward. But Cain did not heed this warning. One day he took Abel into the field, rose up against his brother and slew him.

God alone had seen the murderer's deed. "And the Lord said to Cain: Where is your brother Abel? And he answered. I know not; am I my brother's keeper?" Thereupon, God sentenced Cain to a lifelong exile from his early home, and branded him as a criminal whom everyone should let live that he might bear

his guilt. So Cain went out from the face of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, at the east side of Eden. There he busied himself in building a city to which he gave the name of his son. After his example, his children devoted their efforts to the affairs and interests of this life. They soon invented the art of making tents, took good care of cattle, played the harp and the flute, and worked brass and iron. They were a sensual, violent, and godless sort of people.

Meantime God had seen to it that better men than those born from Cain should exist on earth; for after He had doomed Cain to live as an outcast, He had blessed Adam and Eve with a third son. This was Seth who filled the place of the innocent Abel in the eyes of his parents, as he did in the plans of God for the salvation of man. While Cain and his children minded only the things of earth, Seth gave the example of a life in which God's worship had the chief part. Whilst Lamech, who belonged to Cain's family, took two wives and sung the "Son of the Sword," Henoah, as a worthy son of Seth, "walked with God" like a child with his father. In the course of time, it is true, the children of Seth mingled with those of Cain and became wicked like them. But, even then, the children of Seth counted among them the just Noe and his family by means of whom God saved mankind from utter destruction.

4. The Flood and the Tower of Babel

(Genesis vi.-xi.)

When Noe was five hundred years old he had three sons Sem, Cham and Japheth. He was a good and pious man, fearing and loving God. But all men around him did not heed God and His holy will; they led evil lives, and filled the earth with their sins. At the sight of such wickedness, God repented that He had made man on the earth, and He said: "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, from man even to beasts, from the creeping things even to the fowls of the air, for it repenteth Me that I have made them." Noe alone found grace before the Lord. According to God's command, he built a big ark of timber planks, and shut himself in it with his wife, his three sons and their wives, and a pair of each kind of animals.

In the six hundredth year of the life of Noe, the Flood came. The rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights. The waters increased and lifted up the ark on high from the earth.

The whole earth was under water, even the highest mountains, and all men and animals perished; none were saved but those that were in the ark. At length, the rain ceased; the waters went down little by little, and the ark rested upon the mountains of Armenia. When the ground was dry enough, and at God's bidding. Noe, his family, and all living things with him went out of the ark. Noe's first care was to build an altar unto the Lord and to offer Him a sacrifice in thanksgiving. Then God established His covenant with Noe, and gave him the beautiful rainbow as a token that man and every living thing should never again be destroyed by a flood.

Through God's blessing, the children of the three sons of Noe soon became very numerous. At first they dwelt in the large plain of Sennaar, and spoke but one and the same language. But as time went on, they found that the place in which they were, was altogether too small. So they resolved to scatter abroad into all lands. Before parting, however, they undertook to build a great city, and in it to erect a tower the top of which would reach to heaven. They thus wished to make their name famous for ages to come. Their pride greatly displeased Almighty God Who, by a stroke of His power confounded their language while they were at work. As they could no longer understand one another's speech, they gave up the building of the city and its tower. The name of the place was called *Babel*, that is, *Confusion*. "And from thence the Lord scattered them abroad upon the face of all countries."

II. FROM ABRAHAM TO MOSES (1996-1571 B. C.)

1. Abraham. Birth and Youth of Isaac (Genesis xii.-xxv. 18)

AFTER settling in the various parts of the world, the children of Noe forsook more and more the service of God. The peoples who grew out of them, gave themselves up to the worship of idols such as the sun, moon and stars, animals, etc., and became very wicked. Out of the few holy men still found among them, it pleased God to choose Abraham as the great patriarch in whose seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. According to God's command, Abraham left his native home and country, taking with him Sara his wife, and Lot his nephew, and after a long

journey came into the land of Chanaan. And the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him: "To thy seed will I give this land." And he built there an altar to the Lord Who had appeared to him. God was well pleased with Abraham's living faith and ever-ready obedience. He protected him on all occasions, and showered down His blessings upon him. He entered into a solemn covenant with him, that from him should come a numerous people, who would possess the promised land, and that from his seed blessing and grace should flow over the whole earth; and for a mark of this covenant, He enjoined upon him and his children the rite of circumcision. He dealt with him as with a friend when He told him what He was about to do to the very wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, next listened to Abraham's earnest and childlike prayers in behalf of the inhabitants, and then provided for the rescue of Lot and his family from the fire that destroyed those guilty cities; Lot's wife was the only one who perished, for she turned back to look upon the fire, and was changed into a pillar of salt.

Meanwhile, it was a sore trial for Abraham that the child whom God had promised to Sara was not yet born, and apparently would never be born, because both he and Sara had now become very old. But at length, by a miracle of God, Sara gave birth to Isaac. Abraham circumcised the child on the eighth day after his birth, and was again told by God that Isaac would be the father of the true children of Abraham.

After Isaac had grown up, God put Abraham's faith and obedience to a very hard test. He bade him to offer this dear son in sacrifice. Abraham obeyed at once. He took Isaac to the place of sacrifice, bound him and laid him on the altar, and raised his hand to slay him with his sword. But at this moment, the angel of the Lord stayed his arm, praised his obedience, and renewed all the promises made to him.

Isaac was afterwards married to Rebecca, the mother of Esau and Jacob. Abraham died in the good old age of a hundred and seventy-five years, and was gathered to his people.

2. Isaac and Jacob

(Genesis xxv. 19 - xxxvi.)

God bestowed on Isaac the special favor which He had shown to Abraham his father. Twice He appeared to him and each time renewed the great promises He had made to Abraham. He blessed

him with droves of sheep and cattle and with many servants, and He protected him against the ill-will of jealous neighbors. In return, Isaac "walked with God," moving about in the presence of God and doing what he knew to be pleasing in His sight. Of his twin sons, Esau and Jacob, he, indeed, liked Esau better, and meant to give him the blessing due to the first-born, even after Esau had sold heedlessly to Jacob his right to such blessing for a dish of red pottage. But when he recognized God's will in his mistake in having given to Jacob the first-born's blessing, he at once regarded him as the sole heir of the divine promises. Henceforth, the wish of his heart was that Jacob should not become unworthy of those promises by marrying one of the daughters of Chanaan. He therefore called him, and said to him: "Go, and take a journey to Mesopotamia of Syria, to the house of Bathuel, thy mother's father, and take thee a wife thence of the daughters of Laban thy uncle."

Jacob then started on his long journey. In one place, he was favored by a wonderful vision: he saw a ladder standing upon the earth, the top of which reached to heaven; the angels of God ascended and descended by it; the Lord Himself leaning upon the top of it, made the same promises to him as He had made to Abraham. As he came near his journey's end, he met his cousin Rachel at the well where she had gone to water the flocks of her father Laban; he made himself known to her; and soon afterwards was welcomed by Laban himself.

Laban was a crafty Syrian as Jacob soon found out. Instead of giving Rachel at once to him as wife, he required Jacob to labor for her seven years after which he adroitly passed over Lia to him, and then gave him Rachel under the condition of seven years more of service. Having served also these seven years, Jacob said to Laban: "Send me away to my country. Give me my wives, and my children, for whom I have served thee, that I may depart." Even then, Laban detained Jacob for certain wages which he changed time and again to his own favor. At length, and at God's bidding, Jacob took to flight together with his family and all that he possessed. Laban soon overtook him, and only after much abuse let Jacob keep on his homeward journey.

As Jacob went along, God was, indeed, with him. Through God's mercy Esau met him and showed himself friendly to him. On several occasions God favored him with visions, in one of

which He changed the name of Jacob into that of Israel, and renewed the great promises He had made to Abraham. Jacob finally came to Isaac his father in Mambre. "And the days of Isaac were a hundred and eighty years; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."

3. Joseph and His Brothers

(Genesis xxxvii. 1)

Of the twelve sons of Jacob, Joseph was the dearest to the old father. His brothers knew it, hence they hated and envied Joseph. One day, as they were tending their flocks far from home, they seized him, sold him to merchants passing by, and deceived Jacob with the story that a beast had devoured him. The merchants carried Joseph into Egypt, and sold him to Putiphar, one of the king's officers. But the Lord was with him, and he soon became the trusted and successful overseer of his master's house. In the course of time, however, Putiphar's wife brought a false charge against Joseph, and he was cast into prison. Here also, God was with him, and enabled him to give the meaning of the dreams of two officers who were fellow-prisoners of Joseph. After two years, the king himself had dreams which Joseph alone was found able to explain. The dreams meant that seven years of great plenty would be followed by seven years of the worst famine, and so it now behooved the king to appoint over the whole land of Egypt a ruler who would lay up the corn of the seven plentiful years over against the famine of the seven years. By this king's order, Joseph became this ruler. The seven years of plenty came, and he gathered together all the wheat into the barns of Egypt. The seven years of scarcity began, "and the famine prevailed in the whole world, but there was bread in all the land of Egypt."

Driven by famine, the sons of Jacob, with the exception of Benjamin, went down into Egypt to buy corn. Joseph recognized them and pretended to regard them as spies. As they spoke of their youngest brother who was kept at home by their aged father, he told them that in order to test the truth of their words, he would keep one of them in prison, until they would bring to him this youngest brother. He therefore caused Simeon, one of them, to be bound in their presence, and then sent the others away, their sacks filled with wheat.

At their second coming, they had Benjamin with them. Jo-

seph received them well, asked about the health of their father, and was greatly moved at the sight of his youngest brother. At length, he made himself known to them, saying. "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt; be not afraid!" He then told them to hasten to their father, to let him know that his son was still alive, and to bring him down into Egypt. Jacob accordingly removed with all his family into Egypt, and Joseph gave them the fertile land of Gessen.

After his father's death and burial, Joseph continued to rule over Egypt until his own death. "And he died being a hundred and ten years old. And being embalmed he was laid in a coffin in Egypt."

III. FROM MOSES TO SOLOMON **(1571-1015 B. C.)**

1. Moses Delivers Israel

(Exodus i. - xv. 21)

UNTIL the death of Joseph, and for a while afterwards, the children of Jacob or Israelites became very numerous in the land of Egypt. But the time came when there arose a new king over Egypt, who had not known Joseph. Fearing the Israelites would grow too powerful, he oppressed them with hard labor and a most cruel slavery and finally ordered his people to drown in the river Nile all the male children who would be born of Israel. Contrary to this order, a woman of the tribe of Levi hid her lovely babe for three months; then seeing she could conceal him no longer, she took a basket made of bulrushes, put him therein, and laid him in the sedges by the river's brink. The king's daughter, walking by the side of the river, spied the basket; she opened it, and took pity on the crying Hebrew babe. She adopted the child for her son, called him Moses, that is, "drawn out of the water," and had him taught all the learning of the Egyptians. Moses was already forty years of age, when one day he saw an Egyptian striking one of the Hebrews his brethren; he slew him and fled into the desert of Sinai. His exile there lasted forty years.

After the king's death God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and ordered him back to Egypt to deliver his people from slavery. Moses and his brother Aaron returned at once to Egypt. They presented themselves before the new king, and asked for the Hebrews permission to go and sacrifice in the Desert. The

King flatly refused. Then at God's bidding, Moses and Aaron punished the country with nine scourges known as the Plagues of Egypt. More than once, the king touched with regret or fear begged the two brothers to obtain from God the end of these scourges; but no sooner had the plague ceased, than the hardness of his heart returned. He finally yielded to the tenth plague; for at midnight, the Lord slew every first-born of Egypt "from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive woman that was in the prison, and all the first-born of cattle," and so the king and his subjects pressed the Israelites to be gone.

God Himself had taken care that all the children of Israel should be ready for this hasty departure. He had ordered that on the evening before, every Hebrew family should eat the Paschal lamb, with their loins girt, and staves in their hands. When they set out under Moses as their leader, they formed a vast host of six hundred thousand men, without counting women and children. Their march was therefore very slow; and the king now sorry that he had let them go, overtook them with his army, on the shore of the Red Sea. It was then that God made the waters of the sea to part so as to allow Israel safely to cross on dry ground, and that He caused the water to return just in time to drown the whole Egyptian army. Whereupon Moses and his freed people sang a hymn of praise and thanks to the Lord.

2. Moses Gives the Law to Israel

(Exodus xv. 22 - Leviticus xxvii.)

After crossing the Red Sea, the Hebrews led by Moses made for Mount Sinai. Time and again, they were sorely tried on the way. The first water they met after a march of three days was so bitter that they could not drink it. Next, they suffered from want of food. A while later, they had no water to drink. And when they were near their journey's end, a strong tribe of the desert known as Amalecites came and fought against them. On such occasions, they loudly complained against God and against Moses, regretting they had ever left Egypt. But God was very patient and merciful to them: He made the bitter waters sweet; He sent His people a flight of quails, and gave them every day a supply of manna; He drew for them water out of a rock and He defeated the Amalecites by the hand of Josue. At length, on the

third month after they had left Egypt, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai.

This was the place God had chosen to give His law to Israel. Calling Moses up to the mount, He bade him tell the children of Israel: "If you hear My voice, and keep My covenant, you shall be My peculiar possession above all people: for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a priestly Kingdom and a holy Nation." When this was told by Moses "all the people answered together: All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do." Three days later, peals of thunder were heard on the mountain top, and lightning flashed on every side; presently all Mount Sinai was afire, and from the midst of the fire God delivered with a loud voice the Ten Commandments. Struck with fear and terror, the people stood afar off and said to Moses: "Speak thou to us, and we will hear: let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die." Moses then went alone into the dark cloud wherein God was. There, he was told what God required from Israel in making the covenant with them. He next came down, wrote all the words of the Lord in the book of the covenant, read them aloud to the people, and after the people promised to obey them all, he sealed the covenant between God and Israel, with the blood of victims.

Having thus bound Israel to God's worship, Moses went up again into the mount. During the forty days and forty nights he was there, the Lord gave him many directions for the building of the Tabernacle, the making of the altars, the priestly vestments and the anointing of Aaron and his sons, the sacrifices to be offered; etc. Meanwhile, the people seeing that Moses stayed a long time in the mountain gave way to a form of idolatry which they had witnessed when in Egypt: they made to themselves a golden calf, and worshiped it. At this moment, Moses came down carrying in his hands the two stone tables of the Law, written with the finger of God, and being very angry at the sight of Israel's idolatry, he threw the tables out of his hand and broke them at the foot of the mount. Then he destroyed the golden calf, and caused many of the idolaters to be slain.

The covenant was now broken. But God, at Moses' earnest prayer, renewed it with Israel. The Tabernacle, the Ark of the covenant, the altars, and the holy vestments were next made. The Tabernacle itself was finally set up, and the Lord filled it with His majesty. And it was from this His dwelling-place among the

chosen people, that God gave to Moses the other laws needed by Israel.

3. Moses Leads Israel to the Border of Chanaan

(Numbers-Deuteronomy)

When the time came near for the Israelites to leave Sinai, Moses, warned by God, made sure that they would depart in good order. He numbered the whole people, gave to the Levites the special charge of the Tabernacle, assigned to each tribe its place in camp and on the march, and let all know the signals they were to obey. Above the Tabernacle hung a cloud of smoke by day, and a cloud of fire by night. When the Israelites were to move onward, the cloud would rise and go before them; and when they were to pitch their tents the cloud would rest.

In the second month of the second year after the going out of Egypt, the cloud rose above the Tabernacle, and so the children of Israel started toward Chanaan. The road lay northward across the Desert, and the journey soon became trying to all, especially to Moses, their great leader. Their very first march of three days was not yet over, when many, repining at their fatigue, murmured against God. At their second halt, they turned into a mob regretting Egypt; they lusted for flesh, and loathed manna. The next stop was marked by a denial of Moses' right to leadership, on the part of his own sister and brother, Mary and Aaron. When Israel came almost in sight of Chanaan, Moses, at God's bidding, sent twelve men to view the whole country, and bring back an account of it. At their return, they brought a huge cluster of grapes, and other fruits of the land, as a token of its fertility. But then, with the exception of Josue and Caleb, they told the people to give up all hope of conquering Chanaan: its cities were walled and very great, and its inhabitants were giants in comparison with whom they themselves were as grasshoppers. Hearing this, all the children of Israel rebelled against Moses and Aaron; they regretted they had ever left Egypt, spoke of appointing a leader to bring them back thither, and as Josue and Caleb tried to calm them, they were about to stone them when the glory of the Lord appeared over the Tabernacle. God then doomed the whole multitude to wander in the Desert forty years, and the men of twenty years of age and upward to die in it, with the exception of Josue and Caleb.

New trials soon befell Moses. His authority as a leader was

objected to by a large and strong party the head of which was Core, a man of Moses' own tribe. The earth opened, indeed, its mouth and swallowed all these rebels; but the very next day the people's ill-feeling burst forth anew against Moses. A while later, Mary, Moses' sister, died and was buried in the Desert. This was soon followed by a general murmur of Israel for want of water; and as on this occasion, Moses struck twice the rock to obtain water instead of simply bidding it to yield forth water, he was told by God that he would not be permitted to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land. Next, there occurred Aaron's death and burial at Mount Hor. As the wearied people complained once more against God and Moses, they were punished by fiery serpents whose biting could be healed only by looking upon the Brazen Serpent lifted up by Moses at God's order.

The last days of Moses were crowded with great events. Under his guidance, the vast territory east of the Jordan River was quickly taken from powerful kings, and given to the tribes of Ruben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasses. The prophet Balaam foretold the glories that awaited Israel. Moses himself, having completed his laws for the Chosen People and appointed Josue as his successor in command, exhorted at length all the tribes to be faithful to God, and imparted to them his last blessing. Finally he ascended Mount Nebo from the top of which he beheld Chanaan on the other side of Jordan; and died there at the age of one hundred and twenty years. "And no man hath known of his sepulchre until this present day."

4. Josue Conquers Chanaan

(Josue i. - xxiv.)

As God had been with Moses, so was He also with Josue, Moses' successor. He said to him: "Take courage and be strong. Fear not and be not dismayed: because the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest." Thus encouraged, Josue bade the people to make ready to cross the Jordan River. Meantime, he sent over two scouts to the strong city of Jericho where a woman, named Rahab, welcomed and concealed them. After their return, the people broke camp, and followed at a distance the priests who carried the Ark of the Lord up to the river. The Jordan was then swollen into a deep muddy stream. But as soon as the feet of the priests who bore the Ark, touched the swirling

waters, the supply from above was by miracle cut off, and stayed so until the advancing hosts of Israel had passed over on dry ground. Thence Josue moved against Jericho the lofty walls of which fell down likewise by miracle at the sound of Israel's trumpets. The city was razed to the ground, and none of its inhabitants were spared, except the household of Rahab who had hid Josue's spies. The town next taken was Hai in the hillcountry of Chanaan.

At the news of this speedy and victorious march of Josue, the kings of the Chanaanites purposed to form a league and to fight Israel. But instead of joining the league, the inhabitants of Gabaon and its dependent towns sent envoys to Josue to make a separate peace with him. The envoys falsely claimed that they had come from a very far country, they pointed to their tattered garments and showed their dry provisions as a token of the truth of their words; and so they deceived Josue who at once entered into a league with them. Hearing of this, five kings of Southern Chanaan, whose territories were nearest Gabaon, took instant action against that city. The Gabaonites appealed for help to Josue. After a forced march by night, the Hebrew leader swooped upon the kings in the early morning, routed them and lest he should not have time to complete his victory, he bade the sun and moon to stand still, as, indeed, it came to pass. The five kings were captured and put to death; and soon afterwards Josue took by storm the chief cities of Southern Chanaan.

Northern Chanaan had yet to be conquered. Its allied kings gathered their large armies together, and pitched their camp at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. Josue fell suddenly upon them; and the Lord delivered them into his hands. In truth, whithersoever he went, God was with him; so that some time before his death he was able to allot the country west of Jordan to nine and a half tribes of Israel. The southernmost part of it became the lot of the tribes of Simeon and Juda. North of them, were Benjamin, Dan, Ephraim, and half of the tribe of Manasses, in Central Chanaan. The northernmost tribes were those of Issachar, Zabulon, Nephtali and Aser. As God had ordered that the tribe of Levi should not have a lot of its own, its families were distributed in forty-eight different cities, and their upkeep was provided for by the tithe-offerings of all Israel.

Aware that his end was near, Josue warned the people against

mingling with the surviving inhabitants of Chanaan, and renewed the covenant between God and Israel. This great "servant of the Lord died, being a hundred and ten years old." He was buried in his own inheritance. His tomb, a vast excavation in the rock, has been recently discovered.

5. The Greater Judges of Israel

(Judges i.-xvi.; Ruth)

The children served the Lord for a while after Josue's death. There were yet among them men who had seen God's wonderful works in conquering Chanaan for His people. But, after all these men were dead and gone, the Israelites worshiped more and more the idols of the Chanaanites who were still in the land. To punish His sinful children, God gave them up time and again to the power of enemies, by whom they were enslaved and oppressed in many ways. Each time, however, that they repented and cried to Him for mercy, He rescued them out of the hands of their enemies, by means of great deliverers who are known as the Judges of Israel.

Among these Judges were Debbora, a prophetess, and Barac, a valiant man of Nephtali. During twenty years, the children had been oppressed for their sins by a powerful king named Jabin and Sisara his general. But now they were sorry for their evil deeds, and begged God's mercy. Moved by the Spirit of the Lord, Debbora told Barac that he should arise and fight against Israel's enemies, fully sure that God would give him victory. At Barac's request, Debbora went with him and with the men he hastily gathered. When the two armies met, God struck Sisara with such terror that he leaped down off his chariot and fled away on foot. Sisara's men likewise panic-stricken took to flight. Barac's victory was complete, and Debbora sang it in an inspired hymn of thanks to God.

The next time the Israelites forsook the Lord, they were for seven years under the power of the Madianites and of other cruel oppressors. When at length they cried to the Lord, Gedeon was called to deliver them. At Gedeon's rousing appeal, over two hundred thousand warriors gathered around him. Out of this vast host, however, God allowed only three hundred men to fight for Israel, and, indeed, with no other weapons than trumpets, and lamps burning in pitchers. At midnight, these three hundred

men rushed into Madian's camp sounding their trumpets and breaking their earthen pitchers. Terror from the Lord struck the Madianites; they began to flee, and in their great haste and confusion they even killed one another. Thus God alone had rescued Israel, and hence when the people would have made Gedeon their king, the hero rightly said that the Lord alone should rule over them.

It was also to God's power that at a later date, Jephte, one of Israel's Judges, referred his victory over the Ammonites who had oppressed his people eighteen years. Before fighting against these enemies, he had made a vow to the Lord that if He gave him victory over the children of Ammon, he would offer as "a holocaust to the Lord" the first one that would greet him at his return home. He defeated the Ammonites, and even though the first one of his household to greet him at his return was his only daughter, he regarded himself as bound to fulfill his vow.

The last extraordinary Judge of Israel was Samson, a man consecrated to God from his birth so that no razor should ever touch his hair. The Spirit of the Lord wrought by him many wonders, and enabled him to hold in check, as long as he lived, the power of the Philistines who had oppressed Israel forty years. Samson died a hero's death: shorn of his locks through treason, and deprived of his sight by his enemies, he asked from the Lord a sudden return of his former strength, and then while thousands of the Philistines, gathered in one of their temples, rejoiced at his misfortune he shook the pillars inside that temple and perished "killing many more at his death, than he had killed before in his life."

The story of Ruth's strong attachment to Noemi, her forlorn mother-in-law, and of her later marriage to Booz, a rich kinsman of Noemi's former husband, affords a glimpse of the domestic life during the time of the Judges.

6. Samuel and Saul

(1 Kings i. - xxxi.)

After Samson's death, the difficult task of leading Israel's fight against the Philistines, passed to Heli, the high priest of the time. A feeble old man, Heli was not equal to the task, his two unworthy sons, Ophni and Phinees, were slain in a great battle wherein the Ark of the Lord fell into the hands of the Philistines, and Heli himself died at the news of this disaster.

Meantime, God had prepared in Samuel a younger and better leader for His people. He had granted his birth to the earnest prayers of Anna his mother, watched over his earliest years in the service of the sanctuary at Silo, and gradually made him known to Israel as "a faithful prophet of the Lord." When therefore "Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying: Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only, and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines," the whole people obeyed his words. Soon afterwards, the Philistines went up against Israel; but with God's powerful help, the Israelites routed their enemies and made a great slaughter of them. From that moment forth, and for many years, Samuel ruled with great success over the Chosen People. As he grew old, however, he appointed his two sons as judges in Israel. These men did not walk in the footsteps of their father; they took bribes, and perverted judgment. Hence, the people complained to Samuel and asked him for a king to judge them, as all other nations had their kings. "And the Lord said to Samuel: Hearken to their voice, and make them a king." Israel's first king was Saul a tall and handsome man of the tribe of Benjamin. Raised to the throne by God's will, his plain duty was to do God's bidding which was made known to him through Samuel, the aged prophet of the Lord. It was not long, however, before Saul went against the strict orders of God, the supreme King of Israel. The first time he fought against the Philistines, he offered sacrifice on behalf of his men without waiting, as he should have done until Samuel came. Swift was Samuel's reproof of Saul's willful disobedience. In the name of the Lord, the prophet told him that none of his family would reign after him. Saul said nothing to this, but his heart was not changed. In course of time, after God had given Saul many victories over his enemies, Samuel said to him: "Hearken to the voice of the Lord. Go and smite Amalec, and utterly destroy all that he hath: spare him not, nor covet anything that is his." Upon this command, Saul fought against the Amalecites, and defeated them. But instead of doing as he was bidden, he spared Agag the king of Amalec and the best of the flocks of sheep and of the herds, and the garments, and all that was beautiful; and then on meeting Samuel, claimed that he had fulfilled the word of the Lord. The man who thus acted and spoke, was no fit king of Israel. God therefore rejected the king,

and bade Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse's sons, as a successor to Saul. Samuel anointed David, Jesse's youngest son, and from that day "the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him."

The last part of Saul's life was most wretched. For a while he loved the young David who played the harp before him when the evil spirit troubled him. But soon he became jealous of David, and through hatred of him, long tried to kill him, but in vain, for the Lord was with David. At length, when sorely pressed by the Philistines, he fell into despair, and got the witch of Endor to call up for him Samuel who had died some time before. On the day of battle, Saul's men fled before the Philistines, his three sons were slain, and Saul himself, grievously wounded, "took his sword, and fell upon it."

7. King David **(1055-1015 B. C.)**

(2 Kings - 3 Kings ii. 11; 1 Paralipomenon xi. - xxix.)

By the time of Saul's death, David was well fitted to rule over Israel. From a simple keeper of his father's sheep, he had grown into a skilled warrior, trusted and loved by his followers. Hunted up and down the land by the wrathful Saul, he had many a time nobly spared the life of that unhappy king. Driven from the country sacred to the true God, he had not swerved from his fealty to the Lord, and his long stay among the Philistines, was but a means to know better the very enemies against whom he would one day fight. Ever true to Saul, he lamented his death when he heard of it. Ever true to God, he went back to the land of Juda only after getting a favorable answer from the Lord. No wonder then that as soon as he was seen in their midst again, the men of Juda, that is, of his own tribe, hailed him as king, and that after a few years of resistance, the men of the other tribes yielded to his authority.

The early part of David's rule as king of all Israel, was most blessed by God. Jerusalem which he took from the Jebusites became his own capital; it became also the religious center of all the tribes when he removed to its oldest quarter, Mount Sion, the Ark of the Lord. His wars against the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, Syrians, etc., were all successful and he extended far and wide the boun-

daries of his kingdom. His court was that of a wise and powerful monarch. Besides a bodyguard, he had a regular army under one commander-in-chief, Joab, his own nephew. He himself presided over judicial cases, and had around him a staff of prudent counselors and officers. The desire of his heart was to build a beautiful temple to the Lord, and although he was not allowed to carry it out, his good will was rewarded with the promise of great blessings in his seed: his son, Solomon, would build the Temple in Jerusalem, and his far greater Son, Christ, would build the true Temple of God, to wit, the Church which shall never fail, nor be cast off for any iniquity of her children. Meantime, his zeal for God's glory shone forth in the good order he established among the priests and the levites who ministered in the Tabernacle, and also in the beautiful psalms he wrote under divine inspiration.

The latter part of David's reign opened with his dreadful fall into the sins of adultery and murder, and was much darkened by the woes which befell both king and people, such as the rebellion of Absalom, David's son; the uprising of a man of Ephraim, named Seba; a drought and famine lasting three years; and a pestilence in punishment for counting the people. Even in the king's last days, when he was stricken with the infirmities of age, his son, Adonias, attempted to seize the royal succession to which David had appointed Solomon. The seven psalms of David, known as the Penitential Psalms, bear special witness to the king's deep sorrow for the sins of his life. "So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. And the days that David reigned in Israel were forty years."

IV. FROM SOLOMON TO THE CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON (1015-588 B. C.)

1. The Reign of Solomon (1015-975 B. C.)

(3 Kings ii. 12 - xi.; 2 Paralipomenon i. - ix.)

SOLOMON'S reign was the golden age of the Hebrew nation. It seemed to combine the riches and the glory of earlier and later times. Its glitter and magnificence gladdened the hearts of all Israel, and dazzled the strangers of distant lands. The people enslaved of old in Egypt, had now a king wedded to the daughter

of an Egyptian monarch. The once wandering tribes of the Desert now formed a mighty nation whose rule went from the Great Sea and the River of Egypt on the West, to the Euphrates on the East. Solomon's early and pious desire for wisdom from above that he might govern well this vast realm, was most pleasing in the eyes of God: that wisdom was to be his, bringing in its train numerous other blessings which the youthful king had not asked. His unequaled learning and sagacity soon became famous throughout the East. He carried out David's purpose by erecting in Jerusalem a most magnificent temple for the Lord. Near by, he built for himself and his queen beautiful palaces. He also constructed great waterworks for his capital, and added to the strength of its walls. His court was that of a rich and powerful monarch: princes stood about his throne, and twelve officers supplied all that was needed for the upkeep of his table, his wives, his retinue, his horses, etc. Refinement and literature flourished in his day: Solomon himself "spoke three thousand parables, and his poems were a thousand and five." New fortresses arose to secure the safety of Israel's borders and the remnant of the Chanaanites still within the realm, was thoroughly subdued. Commerce by land and by sea brought in the wealth and the produce of nations near and far. Peace and plenty prevailed throughout the land, "and Juda and Israel dwelt without any fear, every one under his vine and under his fig tree." Sovereigns came out of all nations to hear Solomon's wisdom and to behold him "in all his glory."

Alas! the time came when this highly favored king of Israel trod not in the ways of the Lord. He had married a large number of heathen wives, and to please them "when he was now old" he built temples for their idols, and even joined in their worship. As a punishment, his kingdom was to be divided after his death, and only two of the tribes were to remain faithful to his son and successor. Meantime, clouds on all sides gathered about Solomon's declining day. Edom and Syria rebelled against his authority. Jeroboam excited the northern tribes of Israel's to revolt, and prepared the way for the division of the Hebrew kingdom. Above all, the people showed more and more their discontent at the heavy burden of taxes laid on them by the king's vast and foolish expenditure. Solomon died after a reign of forty years, and was buried in the city of David, his father.

2. The Northern Kingdom or Kingdom of Israel (975-721 B. C.)

(3 Kings xii. - 4 Kings xvii.; Jonas; Tobias)

After Solomon's death his kingdom was soon rent in twain. In a national meeting at Sichern, in the center of the land, Roboam, the successor of Solomon, was asked to lighten his father's heavy yoke. Roboam refused this with haughty and threatening words. In their anger, ten of the twelve tribes denied him obedience, and set up the Northern Kingdom or Kingdom of Israel, with Jeroboam as its head; the other two tribes alone remained under Roboam's rule, and made up the Southern Kingdom or Kingdom of Juda.

As long as it lasted, the Northern Kingdom was unfaithful to the Lord. Its unfaithfulness began with its very first ruler, Jeroboam. Hardly on the throne, this king felt that his crown and his life were unsafe if his subjects went as heretofore to worship God in the Temple at Jerusalem which was in the dominions of Roboam. In order therefore to keep them from the Temple of the Lord, he brought in the worship of two golden calves which he set up, the one in Bethel and the other in Dan. The prophets of the Lord rose up against this calf-worship, but the ten tribes joined in it, and each and all of the kings who reigned after Jeroboam kept it up, and thus, like him, "made Israel to sin." Achab, one of these kings, did worse yet. He added to the sinful worship of the golden calves the infamous worship of Baal, the idol of the Phenicians. He built a temple to Baal, in the city of Samaria, which his father Amri had made the capital of the Northern Kingdom. He hunted down and killed the prophets of the Lord, and if he did not succeed in his efforts to uproot altogether God's worship in Israel, it was because of the wonderful zeal and great miracles of the prophet Elias who lived at the time. All the line of this wicked tyrant was wiped out and nearly all trace of Baal worship disappeared shortly after the prophet Eliseus anointed Jehu king of Israel.

The reign of Jehu was the turning point in the history of the Northern Kingdom, for then it was that "the Lord began to be weary of Israel." Jehu's own relations with Syria and Assyria were unfortunate for his kingdom, and the only king of his family who had a glorious rule was Jeroboam II. under whom the prophet

Jonas was sent to preach in Ninive. Not long after the end of Jehu's line, the Assyrian armies invaded Israel. In one of these invasions, the northern part of the Kingdom of Israel, west of the Jordan, was laid waste by the conqueror, and a large number of Israelites were carried into captivity. Finally, the Northern Kingdom came to an end in 721 B. C. Osee, its last king, had been cast into prison by the invading Assyrians, and Samaria had been captured after a siege which lasted upwards of two years. The Israelites carried into exile in large numbers were chiefly placed in one of the farthest districts of Assyria, and strangers from various parts of Babylonia were brought in to occupy the deserted land of Israel. These new settlers soon joined to the worship of their own idols that of the Lord, and gradually formed a mixed race which was ever hated by the Jews.

The history of Tobias' faithfulness to God and of its final reward by the ministry of the angel Raphael, gives an idea of the religious and civil state of the Israelites carried captives into Assyria.

3. The Southern Kingdom or Kingdom of Juda (975-588 B. C.)

(3 Kings xii. - 4 Kings xxv.; 2 Paralipomenon x. - xxxvi. 20; Judith)

Of the two Kingdoms formed shortly after Solomon's death, the Southern Kingdom or Kingdom of Juda, had for its special mission to keep alive the worship of the true God. The Temple of the Lord stood in Jerusalem, its capital, and was the only lawful place of public worship. In God's intention, too, the kings of Juda were to belong to the family of David, and were to show themselves worthy of that great monarch who, all his life, had worshiped the Lord alone.

Of course, the first ruler of the separate Kingdom of Juda, the haughty Roboam, was not the man to understand, still less to carry out, this lofty mission. Born of a heathen wife of Solomon, he soon adored idols as his father has done during the last years of his reign. Abiam, his son and successor, trod in his wicked ways: Juda's next two kings were the God-fearing Asa and Josaphat. But although they both worshiped the Lord, the former was not able to uproot altogether idolatry from Juda, and the latter unwittingly paved the way for its full growth in the Southern Kingdom by marrying his son Joram to Athalia, the

daughter of Achab, the most wicked king of Israel. Through Athalia's evil influence, both Joram and his son and successor, Ochozias, were rank idolaters. Upon the latter's death, Athalia slew all the sons of Joram with the exception of the infant Joas, who was saved by the wife of the high priest Joiada and was kept hidden in the Temple of the Lord six years during which Athalia reigned over the land. In the seventh year Joiada the high priest caused Joas to be made king, Athalia to be slain, and idolatry to be destroyed. As long as Joiada lived, his counsels prevailed at the court of Joas, and God's worship flourished in Juda. But after his death, the wicked courtiers of the king got the upper hand, and Joas not only restored the worship of idols, but even ordered Zacharias, Joiada's son, to be stoned to death, because of his bold rebuke of the people's unfaithfulness to God. Like his father Joas, king Amazias began well, but worshiped idols toward the end of his life.

The remaining history of the Kingdom of Juda is bound together with the mission of the great prophets Isaias and Jeremias whom God raised, the one shortly after the other, to guide both kings and people in the true service of the Lord. Even under such good kings as Ozias and Joatham, Isaias had much to say against the idolatrous practices which survived in Juda, and much more still against the soulless worship of God by the people at large. Under the wicked Achaz, the prophet's threats and warnings were not heeded: this wretched king burned his own children in honor of idols, shut the Temple of the Lord and left it to fall into ruins, and in punishment, Juda became the vassal of Assyria. When Ezechias reached the throne, things changed. God's worship was fully restored by the pious prince, and according to Isaias' prophecy, the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, was forced to a shameful retreat without being able to enter the Holy City. A new change for the worse occurred under Manasses. Early in his reign, this unworthy son of Ezechias caused Isaias to be sawn asunder, and during many years gave himself up to the worship of idols even more than Achaz had done. For his great sins, Manasses was carried captive into Babylon, where he repented and was restored to his kingdom. It was during Manasses' captivity that the courageous Judith delivered Bethulia from a besieging army of the Assyrians.

The mission of Jeremias to Juda was even less successful than

that of Isaias. Born in the last years of Manasses, Jeremias witnessed, indeed, and greatly rejoiced at the religious reforms of king Josias, the pious grandson of that wicked prince, but not long afterwards he had to lament Josias' death in battle against the king of Egypt. His message of woe against Juda and Jerusalem drew upon him the wrath of all, high and low. People and kings ever "did what was evil in the sight of the Lord," and so his worst threats to them came to pass. In 606 B. C., Nabuchodonosor marched against the Jewish king Joakim, took Jerusalem, and carried into Babylon a certain number of captives among whom were Daniel and his companions. The next blow in 598 B. C., was heavier still: Joachin, the son and successor of Joakim, all his family, the strength of the army and the nobility, all the more useful artisans were taken into exile and together with them the priest and prophet Ezechiel. The last blow in 588 B. C. was certainly the worst: the Babylonian king invaded Juda, captured the Holy City, burned its Temple, broke down its walls, and carried captive into Babylon most of its inhabitants. He also appointed Godolias, a friend of Jeremias, governor of the wretched remnant which was allowed to stay in the land. But Godolias was soon murdered by one of his Jewish opponents, whereupon the little remnant of the Jews, fearing the vengeance of Nabuchodonosor, fled into Egypt whither Jeremias went with them.

V. FROM THE CAPTIVITY IN BABYLON TO OUR LORD (588-6 B. C.)

1. The Babylonian Captivity

(Psalms cxxviii., cxxxvi.; Baruch; Ezechiel; Daniel)

The fate of the exiles from Juda was most wretched in the opening years of their captivity in Babylon. Day after day they were forced to labor on the huge and numerous works of Nabuchodonosor, while overseers devoid of all mercy furrowed their backs with the lash to keep them or quicken them at work. Time and again, the dungeon, hunger and nakedness fell to their lot. In vain did they complain that they were "devoured" and "broken in pieces." Joining insult to misery, their taskmasters bade them sing the canticles of Sion. And so, the bitter anguish and revengeful hatred of the Jewish slaves found vent in such words as these: "O daughter of Babylon, miserable; happy be

he who shall repay thee thy payment thou hast paid us! Blessed he that shall take and dash thy little ones against the rock!"

In course of time, however, God had pity on them. He caused Daniel to find favor with Nabuchodonosor, and Daniel's three companions, Sidrach, Misach and Abdenago, to be appointed by the "King over the works of the province of Babylon." Little by little, the pressure of the Babylonian yoke was much relieved. Availing themselves of this, the Jewish captives complied with the wise counsel of Jeremias that they should build houses, plant orchards, marry their sons and daughters, work and pray for the peace and prosperity of Babylon. Nay more, they settled in groups or colonies here and there in Babylonia, and organized themselves pretty much in the same way as formerly in the land of Juda. The history of Susanna and the two elders, in particular, shows to what extent both self-government and personal comfort came to be enjoyed by the captives in Babylon. In fact, when the royal decree of Cyrus finally gave the Jewish exiles liberty to return to the country of their fathers, the vast majority of them chose to stay in their now happy homes rather than to go back to the desolate towns and fields of Palestine.

As God watched, in His mercy, over the material welfare of the two tribes in Babylonia, so did He watch over their spiritual interests. At first, idolatry flourished among them. Instead of seeing in the captivity which had befallen them, the just punishment of their unfaithfulness to God, they regarded the ruin of Jerusalem and of its Temple as a proof that the God of Israel was less powerful than the gods of the conqueror, so that to their minds, the safest way not to incur the wrath of such gods was to share in their worship. Over against these false views, God enabled Jeremias, and more especially Baruch, Jeremias' secretary, to argue with great power. He also caused Ezechiel to prophesy and to use his priestly influence in order to excite sorrow in the breast of his fellow-captives and to suggest to them motives of hope by means of the glorious visions which he beheld in the land of exile. Above all, Daniel's unswerving fidelity to God, patronage at court, renown as a prophet, public exposure of the impotence of Bel and of the deceit of its priests, were a providential means to keep up and promote throughout the captivity in Babylon the honor and worship of the true God. And there is no doubt that before the end of the seventy years of exile, the Jewish faith

had become purer and stronger, and remained so in the hearts and lives even of the Jews who did not return to the Holy Land.

2. The Return from the Exile

(1 and 2 Books of Esdras)

When the seventy years of the Babylonian Exile, foretold by the prophet Jeremias, were over, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon, to release His people from their captivity and to allow them to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. The royal decree to that effect was given in 536 B. C. The Jewish exiles who at once availed themselves of it under the guidance of Zorobabel and the high priest Josue were forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty in number. Soon after their return, they set up an altar to God in Jerusalem, offered thereon the morning and evening sacrifices, and started again the keeping of the sacred feasts and festivals. "In the second year of their coming," they gladly laid the foundations of the Temple of the Lord. But owing to the opposition of the Samaritans or mixed race living in the land of the former Kingdom of Israel, they were hindered from carrying on the work until the reign of Darius I. On finding the decree of Cyrus, this Persian king ordered the Temple to be completed, and freely made gifts to meet the expenses. The rousing words of the prophets Aggeus and Zacharias also urged the people on their work, and the House of the Lord was happily finished and joyfully dedicated in 515 B. C.

Under Assuerus, Darius' successor, the Jews who still dwelt in the land of exile, were threatened with utter destruction. At Susan, the Persian capital, the highest court official, named Aman, stung by an affront from the Jew Mardochai, got a royal decree against the life and property of all Jews in the Persian empire. Esther, however, niece of Mardochai and queen of Assuerus, succeeded not only in reversing the decree, and thus delivering her people, but also in obtaining vengeance by the slaughter of thousands of their enemies. In grateful memory of this deliverance, the feast of Phurim was instituted and is even now kept, year after year, by the Jews throughout the world.

In the seventh year of the Persian King Artaxerxes, Esdras the priest, a learned scribe in the law of Moses, went up from Babylon to Jerusalem at the head of a second body of returning exiles. He was sent by the king to teach and assist the people

of God, and was supplied with both a gracious decree in their favor, and rich presents for the Temple. By this time, the Jews of Jerusalem and the surrounding towns had so far neglected the Law as to take wives from among the daughters of strangers and unbelievers. After his arrival in Judea, Esdras brought forth the royal decree and gifts, and caused all, high and low, to put away their foreign wives.

The walls of the Holy City were yet in their broken condition. Hearing of this, Nehemias, cupbearer to Artaxerxes, came with the king's authority as governor to Jerusalem. Through his efforts and in spite of opposition from powerful enemies of his people, he finished the walls and hung up the gates of the city in fifty-two days. Before going back to the Persian court, he took measures to provide for the defense of Jerusalem by increasing the number of its residents, abolished usury between Jew and Jew, had the Law read aloud to the people by Esdras, the ancient covenant with God renewed and signed, and the city wall dedicated. Twelve years after his return to Persia, he was sent again by Artaxerxes as governor to Judea. In his absence, the old abuses had quickly revived: intermarriage with the heathen had sprung up again; levitical dues had been neglected, and the Sabbath was freely broken. With the greatest vigor Nehemias set himself against such evils and did away with them.

3. The Machabees

(1 and 2 Books of the Machabees)

The power of the Persian empire, as Daniel had foretold, was overthrown by the Greeks under the conduct of Alexander the Great. But this new empire did not last long after Alexander's death in 323 B. C. Syria and Egypt, two of its chief provinces, were soon made independent kingdoms, and Judea was a part of each in turn, until the time of the Machabees. During these various changes, the Greek rulers of either kingdom allowed the Jews of Palestine to enjoy their religious and civil rights. The attempt of Seleucus Philopator, king of Syria, to have his envoy Heliodorus plunder the Temple was but an exception to this, and by God's power it signally failed.

The first king who reversed this policy was Antiochus Epiphanes in whose days Judea passed finally under the sway of Syria. Long before this prince came to the throne, Greek customs and

manners had little by little crept into Jerusalem from the surrounding Greek cities, and in the early part of his reign they had made much headway in the Holy City by the efforts of such unworthy high priests as Jason and Menelaus. Antiochus therefore thought that the time had now come to enforce on all his subjects the Greek culture and idolatry of which he was a staunch advocate. But most Palestinian Jews refused to comply with the decree which he issued for that purpose. Angered at this, the king ordered that all the Jews of his realm should renounce the worship and law of God, and offer sacrifice to the idols which he set up in every city and even in the Temple of Jerusalem which he profaned with the image of Jupiter: "Whosoever would not do according to the word of king Antiochus should be put to death." Among the great numbers who died martyrs by his persecution, were the learned and aged Eleazar, and the seven brothers, who, with their mother, perished amidst the worst torments. Under God, the deliverers of the Jews from such tyranny, were the Machabees.

Hidden in the little town of Modin, there lived Mathathias, an aged priest, and his five sons. Summoned to sacrifice to idols by Antiochus' envoy, Mathathias bravely refused and boldly raised the standard of revolt. At his death in 167 B. C., Judas Machabeus, one of his sons, became the leader of the forces which had little by little gathered around him. Judas soon won victory after victory, and two years later (165 B. C.) entered Jerusalem, cleansed the Temple, and renewed the Divine worship. In course of time, Jonathan, Judas' brother and successor in command was recognized as high priest of the Jews by the Syrian power and as an ally by Rome and Sparta. After him, Simon, another brother of Judas, was hailed by a national assembly "prince and high priest for ever, till there should arise a faithful prophet." Judea was at length an independent country with the children of Simon Machabeus as its hereditary rulers. Its territory was greatly enlarged by Simon's successors, one of whom, named Aristobulus, was the first to take the title of "King of the Jews" and the last of whom, Antigonus by name, was shorn of his power by the Roman Senate in behalf of the Idumean Herod. And it was in the last days of King Herod that the great Son of David, the long-expected Saviour of the world, Our Lord Jesus Christ was born.

Table Showing the Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Juda

<i>Kings of Juda</i>	<i>Kings of Israel</i>	<i>First Year of Reign</i>	<i>Length of Reign</i>
Roboam		975 B. C.	17 years
	Jeroboam	975 B. C.	22 years
Abiam		958 B. C.	3 years
Asa		955 B. C.	41 years
	Nadab	954 B. C.	2 years
	Baasa	953 B. C.	24 years
	Ela	930 B. C.	2 years
	Zambri	929 B. C.	7 days
	Amri	929 B. C.	12 years
	Achab	918 B. C.	22 years
Josaphat		914 B. C.	25 years
	Ochozias	897 B. C.	2 years
	Joram	896 B. C.	12 years
Joram		889 B. C.	8 years
Ochozias		885 B. C.	1 year
	Jehu	884 B. C.	28 years
Athalia (usurper)		884 B. C.	6 years
Joas		879 B. C.	40 years
	Joachaz	856 B. C.	17 years
	Joas	840 B. C.	16 years
Amasias		839 B. C.	29 years
	Jeroboam II.	825 B. C.	41 years
Ozias		810 B. C.	52 years
	(Interregnum)	784 B. C.	12 years
	Zacharias	772 B. C.	6 months
	Sellum	772 B. C.	1 month
	Manahem	771 B. C.	10 years
	Phaceia	761 B. C.	2 years
	Phacee	759 B. C.	20 years
Joatham		758 B. C.	16 years
Achaz		742 B. C.	16 years
	(Interregnum)	738 B. C.	10 years
	Osee	730 B. C.	9 years
Ezechias		726 B. C.	29 years
	(Samaria taken 721)		
Manasses		698 B. C.	55 years
Amon		643 B. C.	2 years
Josias		641 B. C.	31 years
Joachaz		610 B. C.	3 months
Joakim		610 B. C.	11 years
Joachin		599 B. C.	3 months
Sedecias		599 B. C.	11 years
(Jerusalem taken)		588 B. C.	

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