

Education Chapter 6— The Schools of the Prophets

“They sat down at Thy feet; everyone shall receive of Thy words.”

Wherever in Israel God's plan of education was carried into effect, its results testified of its Author. But in very many households the training appointed by Heaven, and the characters thus developed, were alike rare. God's plan was but partially and imperfectly fulfilled. By unbelief and by disregard of the Lord's directions, the Israelites surrounded themselves with temptations that few had power to resist. At their settlement in Canaan “they did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the Lord commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works. And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them.” Their heart was not right with God, “neither were they steadfast in His covenant. But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned He His anger away.... For He remembered that

they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.” Psalm 106:34-36; 78:37-39. Fathers and mothers in Israel became indifferent to their obligation to God, indifferent to their obligation to their children. Through unfaithfulness in the home, and idolatrous influences without, many of the Hebrew youth received an education differing widely from that which God had planned for them. They learned the ways of the heathen.

To meet this growing evil, God provided other agencies as an aid to parents in the work of education. From the earliest times, prophets had been recognized as teachers divinely appointed. In the highest sense the prophet was one who spoke by direct inspiration, communicating to the people the messages he had received from God. But the name was given also to those who, though not so directly inspired, were divinely called to instruct the people in the works and ways of God. For the training of such a class of teachers, Samuel, by the Lord's direction, established the schools of the prophets.

These schools were intended to serve as a barrier against the wide-spreading corruption, to provide for the mental and spiritual welfare of the youth, and to

promote the prosperity of the nation by furnishing it with men qualified to act in the fear of God as leaders and counselors. To this end, Samuel gathered companies of young men who were pious, intelligent, and studious. These were called the sons of the prophets. As they studied the word and the works of God, His life-giving power quickened the energies of mind and soul, and the students received wisdom from above. The instructors were not only versed in divine truth, but had themselves enjoyed communion with God, and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. They had the respect and confidence of the people, both for learning and for piety. In Samuel's day there were two of these schools—one at Ramah, the home of the prophet, and the other at Kirjath-jearim. In later times others were established.

The pupils of these schools sustained themselves by their own labor in tilling the soil or in some mechanical employment. In Israel this was not thought strange or degrading; indeed, it was regarded as a sin to allow children to grow up in ignorance of useful labor. Every youth, whether his parents were rich or poor, was taught some trade. Even though he was to be educated for holy office, a knowledge of practical life was regarded as

essential to the greatest usefulness. Many, also, of the teachers supported themselves by manual labor.

In both the school and the home much of the teaching was oral; but the youth also learned to read the Hebrew writings, and the parchment rolls of the Old Testament Scriptures were open to their study. The chief subjects of study in these schools were the law of God, with the instruction given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry. In the records of sacred history were traced the footsteps of Jehovah. The great truths set forth by the types in the service of the sanctuary were brought to view, and faith grasped the central object of all that system—the Lamb of God, that was to take away the sin of the world. A spirit of devotion was cherished. Not only were the students taught the duty of prayer, but they were taught how to pray, how to approach their Creator, how to exercise faith in Him, and how to understand and obey the teachings of His Spirit. Sanctified intellect brought forth from the treasure house of God things new and old, and the Spirit of God was manifested in prophecy and sacred song.

These schools proved to be one of the means most effective in promoting that righteousness which

“exalteth a nation.” Proverbs 14:34. In no small degree they aided in laying the foundation of that marvelous prosperity which distinguished the reigns of David and Solomon.

The principles taught in the schools of the prophets were the same that molded David's character and shaped his life. The word of God was his instructor. “Through Thy precepts,” he said, “I get understanding.... I have inclined mine heart to perform Thy statutes.” Psalm 119:104-112. It was this that caused the Lord to pronounce David, when in his youth He called him to the throne, “a man after Mine own heart.” Acts 13:22.

In the early life of Solomon also are seen the results of God's method of education. Solomon in his youth made David's choice his own. Above every earthly good he asked of God a wise and understanding heart. And the Lord gave him not only that which he sought, but that also for which he had not sought—both riches and honor. The power of his understanding, the extent of his knowledge, the glory of his reign, became the wonder of the world.

In the reigns of David and Solomon, Israel reached the height of her greatness. The promise given to Abraham and repeated through Moses was fulfilled: “If ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave unto Him; then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you.” Deuteronomy 11:22-25.

But in the midst of prosperity lurked danger. The sin of David's later years, though sincerely repented of and sorely punished, emboldened the people in transgression of God's commandments. And Solomon's life, after a morning of so great promise, was darkened with apostasy. Desire for political power and self-aggrandizement led to alliance with heathen nations. The silver of Tarshish and the gold of Ophir were procured by the sacrifice of integrity, the betrayal of

sacred trusts. Association with idolaters, marriage with heathen wives, corrupted his faith. The barriers that God had erected for the safety of His people were thus broken down, and Solomon gave himself up to the worship of false gods. On the summit of the Mount of Olives, confronting the temple of Jehovah, were erected gigantic images and altars for the service of heathen deities. As he cast off his allegiance to God, Solomon lost the mastery of himself. His fine sensibilities became blunted. The conscientious, considerate spirit of his early reign was changed. Pride, ambition, prodigality, and indulgence bore fruit in cruelty and exaction. He who had been a just, compassionate, and God-fearing ruler, became tyrannical and oppressive. He who at the dedication of the temple had prayed for his people that their hearts might be undividedly given to the Lord, became their seducer. Solomon dishonored himself, dishonored Israel, and dishonored God.

The nation, of which he had been the pride, followed his leading. Though he afterward repented, his repentance did not prevent the fruition of the evil he had sown. The discipline and training that God appointed for Israel would cause them, in all their ways of life, to differ

from the people of other nations. This peculiarity, which should have been regarded as a special privilege and blessing, was to them unwelcome. The simplicity and self-restraint essential to the highest development they sought to exchange for the pomp and self-indulgence of heathen peoples. To be “like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:5) was their ambition. God's plan of education was set aside, His authority disowned.

In the rejection of the ways of God for the ways of men, the downfall of Israel began. Thus also it continued, until the Jewish people became a prey to the very nations whose practices they had chosen to follow.

As a nation the children of Israel failed of receiving the benefits that God desired to give them. They did not appreciate His purpose or co-operate in its execution. But though individuals and peoples may thus separate themselves from Him, His purpose for those who trust Him is unchanged. “Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever.” Ecclesiastes 3:14.

While there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power to meet the wants of men in the different ages, God's work in all time is

the same. The Teacher is the same. God's character and His plan are the same. With Him “is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17.

The experiences of Israel were recorded for our instruction. “All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” 1 Corinthians 10:11. With us, as with Israel of old, success in education depends on fidelity in carrying out the Creator's plan. Adherence to the principles of God's word will bring as great blessings to us as it would have brought to the Hebrew people.