

BIBLE READINGS FOR SCHOOLS

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Bible Readings for Schools by Nathan C. Schaeffer

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NATHAN C. SCHAEFFER

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PREFACE.

THE Bible is the Book of books. As a means of imparting moral and religious instruction, nothing equal to it is found in all the other books which the ages have produced. Without a knowledge of its leading ideas, the pupil cannot even understand and appreciate the best literature of the English tongue. Bible readings cannot be omitted from the exercises of the school without the gravest loss and the most serious consequences.

It is, of course, not the mission of the public school to teach the creed or the doctrines of any religious denomination. That is the province of the home, the church, and the Sabbath School. In making this collection of Bible readings, the aim has been to bring together selections that appeal strongly to the moral nature of the child. In modern education it has become proverbial to say that the perpetuity and prosperity of the state depend upon the intelligence and virtue of the people. Fidelity to duty lies at the basis of good government and is essential to the welfare of society and the happiness of the individual. The still small voice (1 Kings xix. 12) must be obeyed, if, in the end, it is not to become an avenging fury. In fitting pupils for private and public life, it is necessary to quicken the conscience, to develop the sense of duty and obligation, and to impart clear ideas of right and wrong. The faithful teacher, therefore, welcomes everything helpful in training the moral nature of the pupil.

Moreover, in preparing the pupil for citizenship the school should not ignore the fact that the civil oath or affirmation has

been made a part of the civil code. It is considered indispensable in civil causes, and is always administered to jurors and witnesses, and to public servants on assuming the duties of office. It involves a solemn appeal to God as the author of truth and right, as well as a promise to speak the truth and to do what is right. It presupposes belief in God and a knowledge of man's relation to his Maker.

Ethical truth is best imparted by narratives which show the essence of right and wrong in conduct or real life. Another efficient means of imparting ethical truth is found in the parables of the New Testament. Dr. Arnold calls them "the scattered jewels of God's word," and speaks of them as "the highest wisdom clothed in a garb of surpassing beauty."

The collection of narratives and parables is followed by a collection of sayings and discourses, of whose moral beauty the soul never tires.

The Law is summed up in the Ten Commandments of the Mosaic code, and the two great commandments of the new dispensation. These are followed by readings which show how the Law was taught among God's chosen people.

The Psalms, the Proverbs, and the Prophets are more difficult to grasp, and the selections from these have been reserved for the latter part of the volume.

The volume concludes with selections of passages designed to enforce specific virtues. The plan of grouping passages for the purpose of inculcating particular virtues, cannot be pursued very far without reducing the sacred Scriptures to fragments, and destroying the literary beauties of the Bible.

These Bible readings may be used like the lessons of a supplementary reader; or they may be read during opening exercises either by the teacher alone, or by the teacher and the pupils responsively. The teacher should resist the temptation to make doctrinal comments upon the passages thus read.

EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF THE BIBLE.

FAMILIARITY with the Bible is worth more to the student of our best literature than familiarity with any dozen other books that could be named. The pupil needs chiefly :

1. A minute knowledge of the historical facts recited in the Bible.
2. A clear conception of the meaning of the parables and other teachings of Jesus.
3. A memory of much of the sublime language of the poets and prophets of the two Testaments.

No knowledge of the Scripture, even the profoundest, is superfluous to the student of Milton. The poet read the sacred text in the original languages, and often shows his acquaintance with readings not given in our English version. He was no mean theologian ; there are probably nowhere in his great poems three successive sentences without some scriptural allusion ; and the light that he casts on difficult passages is frequently amazing.

PROF. JOHN A. HIMES,

The struggle for existence tends to eliminate those less fitted to adapt themselves to the circumstances of their existence. The strongest, the most self-assertive, tend to tread down the weaker. But the influence of the cosmic process on the evolution of society is the greater, the more rudimentary its civilization. Social progress means a checking of the cosmic process at every step,

and the substitution for it of another, which may be called the ethical process ; the end of which is not the survival of those who may happen to be the fittest, in respect of the whole of the conditions which exist, but of those who are ethically the best.

THOMAS HUXLEY.

Viewed merely as a human or literary production, the Bible is a marvellous book, and without a rival. All the libraries of theology, philosophy, history, antiquities, poetry, law, and policy would not furnish material enough for so rich a treasure of the choicest gems of human genius, wisdom, and experience. It embraces works of about forty authors, representing the extremes of society, from the throne of the king to the boat of the fisherman ; it was written during a long period of sixteen centuries, on the banks of the Nile, in the desert of Arabia, in the Land of Promise, in Asia Minor, in classical Greece, and in imperial Rome ; it commences with the creation and ends with the final glorification, after describing all the intervening stages in the revelation of God and the spiritual development of man ; it uses all forms of literary composition ; it rises to the highest heights and descends to the lowest depths of humanity ; it measures all states and conditions of life ; it is acquainted with every grief and every woe ; it touches every chord of sympathy ; it contains the spiritual biography of every human heart ; it is suited to every class of society, and can be read with the same interest and profit by the king and the beggar, by the philosopher and the child ; it is as universal as the race, and reaches beyond the limits of time into the boundless regions of eternity. . . . It speaks to us as immortal beings on the highest, the noblest, and most important themes which can challenge our attention, and with an authority that is absolutely irresistible and overwhelming. It can instruct, edify, warn, terrify, appease, cheer, and encourage as no other book. It seizes man in the hidden depths of his

intellectual and moral constitution, and goes to the quick of the soul, to that mysterious point where it is connected with the unseen world and with the great Father of spirits. It acts like an all-penetrating and all-transforming leaven upon every faculty of the mind and every emotion of the heart. It enriches the memory; it elevates the reason; it enlivens the imagination; it directs the judgment; it moves the affections; it controls the passions; it quickens the conscience; it strengthens the will; it kindles the sacred flame of faith, hope, and charity; it purifies, ennobles, sanctifies the *whole* man, and brings him into living union with God. It can not only enlighten, reform, and improve, but regenerate and create anew, and produce effects which lie far beyond the power of human genius. It has light for the blind, strength for the weak, food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty; it has a counsel in precept or example for every relation in life, a comfort for every sorrow, a balm for every wound.

Of all the books in the world, the Bible is the only one of which we never tire, but which we admire and love more in proportion as we use it. Like the diamond it casts its luster in every direction; like a torch, the more it is shaken, the more it shines; like a healing herb, the harder it is pressed, the sweeter is its fragrance.

PHILIP SCHAFF.

I doubt not that Providence has kept for us the best of this Hebrew literature. To say that it is the best literature that the world has produced is to say very little. It is separated widely from all other sacred writings. Its constructive ideas are as far above those of other books of religion as the heavens are above the earth. I pity the man who has had the Bible in his hand from his infancy, and who has learned in his maturer years something of the literature of other religions, but who now needs to have this statement verified.

True it is that we find pure maxims, elevated thoughts, genuine faith, lofty morality, in many of the Bibles of the other races. But when we take the sacred books of the other religions in their entirety, and compare them with the sacred writings of the Hebrews, the superiority of these in their fundamental ideas, in the conceptions that dominate them, in the grand uplifting visions and purposes that vitalize them, can be felt by any man who has any discernment of spiritual realities.

It is in these great ideas that the value of these writings consists. . . . They are the record as no other book in the world is a record, of that increasing purpose of God which runs through the ages.

WASHINGTON GLADDEN.

The very excellence of the Psalms is their universality. They spring from the deep fountains of the human heart; and God, in his providence and by his spirit, has so ordered it that they should be for his church an everlasting heritage. Hence they express the sorrows, the joys, the aspirations, the struggles, the victories, not of one man, but of all. And if we ask, How comes this to pass? the answer is not far to seek; one object is ever before the eyes and the heart of the Psalmists. All enemies, all distresses, all persecutions, all sins, are seen in the light of God. It is to him that the cry goes up; it is to him that the heart is laid bare; it is to him that the thanksgiving is uttered. This it is which makes them so true, so precious, so universal. No surer proof of their inspiration can be given than this, that they are "not of any age, but for all time."

CANON PEROWNE.

The day was in Scotland when all her children were initiated into the art of reading through the Book of Proverbs. I have no doubt whatever—neither had the late Principal Lee, as appears by the evidence he gave before a committee of Parliament—that