

The Christian Messenger.

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, April 18th, 1875.—The Call of Gideon.—Judges vi. 11-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Matt. xxviii. 20.

ANALYSIS.—I. The angel of the Lord. Vs. 11. II. The angel's cheer. Vs. 12. III. Gideon's doubt. Vs. 13. IV. The angel's command. Vs. 14. V. Gideon's humility. Vs. 15. VI. The angel's promise. Vs. 16. VII. Gideon seeks a "sign." Vs. 17, 18.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.—Upwards of one hundred and seventy-five years have passed since the last lesson, within which Israel has repeatedly apostatized, suffered and repented. From successive oppressions under the kings of Mesopotamia and Moab, then under the Philistines and Jabin, king of Hazor, in Northern Palestine, they were successively delivered by Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Barak, and Deborah. Untaught, however, by former experiences, they again forsake the Lord, and are speedily punished. But the time draws on for deliverance. Quite too long has Midian wreaked vengeance upon Israel for his defeat by Moses. Num. xxxi. 1-18. His hosts overrun Canaan as grasshoppers for multitude. They seize cattle; they carry off grain; they force Israel even to the caves of the earth.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 11.—And there came an angel of the Lord [Jehovah], (vs. 7-10). The way for the angel, and his mission, had thus been prepared—God had already spoken, wakened attention. Sat under an oak, to attract attention. The word translated "oak" is from a root meaning strong. It was the strong tree. In Is. vi. 13 the same word is translated "teal tree," and in Hos. iv. 13 "elms." Which was in Ophrah. There were two places of this name, one in Benjamin, Josh. xviii. 23, and this in Manasseh, placed by some "16 miles north of Jericho." That pertaineth unto Joash the Abi-ezrite. An Abi-ezrite was a member of the family of Abi-ezer the oldest son of Gilead, and descendant of Machir and Manasseh, Josh. xvii. 2; Num. xxvi. 30; hence, originally with the rest of the house of Gilead, on the east of Jordan. This Joash seems to have fallen into the prevalent idolatry of the time—the worship of Baal and Astarte, vs. 25-28. His son Gideon threshed wheat by [in] the winepress. Gideon is from a Hebrew root, which means to fell trees, and is thought to signify a mighty warrior as hewing down men, as the woodman does the trees of a forest. There is no other one of this name in the Bible; and he was the fifth judge—Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, and Deborah, preceding him. He was "threshing," not in the usual mode of the time and country, which was by driving oxen about, muzzled, over the grain spread out on a "threshing floor"—a carefully prepared circular space of "hard ground; probably, as now, from 50 to 80 or 100 feet in diameter." A rude machine, consisting of a kind of sledge, translated "threshed," in this verse, means to beat with a stick; as Ruth "beat out" the grain of her gleanings. Ruth ii. 17. Compare Ruth iii. 2, which speaks of the a niple threshing-floor of Boaz. Thus the sanctities of the harvest secured is intimated. The wine press was a "trough, or vat, in which the grapes were trodden with the feet, and from which the juice flowed off into a lower vat placed near." The two vats were usually dug or hewn out of the solid rocks (Matt. xxi. 33). "Ancient wine-presses so constructed are still to be seen in Palestine." Dr. Robinson describes one of these, seen by him, of which the upper vat was 8 feet square and fifteen inches deep. To hide it from the Midianites. He was far less exposed to discovery by the hostile, plundering Midianites than he would have been in an open threshing-floor—especially if the winepress was walled in. Here and in vs. 1, 2, and 6, the Midianites are alone mentioned as though they were the sole oppressors; but in vs. 3 and 33, and vii. 12, "the Amalekites and the children of the east," or Bedouins, are joined with them as their confederates. The Midianites, descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. xxv. 2), dwelt to the east of the Dead Sea (Num.

xxii. 4, 7,) had showed themselves hostile to Israel, and in consequence had been smitten, and well nigh annihilated, by the latter. Num. xxxi. This, however, was 200 years before, and they had now regained their power and pre-eminence.

Verse 12.—And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him. His work must have deepened his sense of the national disgrace and wretchedness, and wakened in him thoughts and longings with reference to deliverance, most admirably preparing him for the revelation that was to come. And said unto him, The Lord [Jehovah] is with thee, thou mighty man of valor. Gideon had in him true faith in God. His father was by no means such a confirmed idolater as most of his neighbors. Gideon is evidently addressed with reference not to his past experience, but to his future. He was now selected, ordained, empowered to become a mighty leader of the people. This appears from vs. 14. The ordination, which is really from the Lord, is always an empowering, and not simply a designation.

Verse 13.—Gideon said unto him, O my Lord. The title of respectful address. If the Lord [Jehovah] be with us, why then is all this befallen us? Notice the use of the plural, "us." He thought and cared first and most for his nation. He shared the nation's degradation, and he saw no evidence that God was with him or the people. It is, indeed, true that this very affliction, or chastisement, was an act of love, by which the people were to be saved, and God's law honored. Luke xiii. 4. And where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of? Implying that as such miracles were not now wrought for the nation, it was proof that God was not now favoring the nation as he did. The miracles then wrought, showed that then he was with Israel. The absence of such now showed that now he was not present. This answer shows that Gideon had pondered on the nation's history, and drawn contrasts and comparisons between the past and present. But now the Lord [Jehovah] hath forsaken us, etc. It was true, though probably not in the way and degree intended by him.

Verse 14.—And the Lord [Jehovah] looked upon him. Not here called an "angel." This look would thus seem to have revealed the true divinity of the being. Or the promise that followed did. The Wonder-worker of the past was even now talking to him, face to face, as he had talked to the patriarchs. Go in this thy might. Words of authority, such as Jehovah might speak. The word "this" refers to the might now divinely imparted, or at least pledged and guaranteed to him. Thou shalt save Israel, etc. Thou, as my instrument. Have not I sent thee? Enough for Gideon could he be quite sure that the speaker was really Jehovah.

Verse 15.—O my Lord. The word Lord here is not Jehovah, yet the Hebrew shows it to have been used of the Supreme Lord, of divinity, and not as in vs. 13, which is a different form in the original. Where-with shall I save? Expressing a consciousness of his inability as by himself. Behold my family are poor, the Abi-ezrites. He supposed that some eminent man was needed, who would, by his family position and personal greatness, rally all the tribes to his standard at his call.

Verse 16.—Surely I will be with thee. It was this, and not family or personal greatness that was needed. Thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man. Breaking their power at a single blow, as when by one blow a man is laid low.

Verse 17.—See Ex. iii. iv. Verse 18.—He would bring a "present," or offering, Vs. 19, 24.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 11. To whom does the angel of the Lord refer? Where was Ophrah? What was the character of their depredations? vs. 2-6. How long had Israel been subject to them? v. 1. What old grudge did the Midianites probably cherish? Num. xxxi. 1-12.

Vs. 13. Are afflictions a sign of God's presence or absence? What is the effect of sin? Isa. lix. 2. What the effect of righteousness? Isa. xxxiii. 17.

Vs. 14. What is the doctrine taught by "have not I sent thee?" Zech. iv. 6.

Vs. 15. Of whom do these words strongly remind us? What is the difference between "my family" and "my father's house"? Num. xxvii. 8.

Vs. 17. Why did Gideon seek a sign? Was a sign given to Gideon? vs. 19-21.

Vs. 18. What is meant by "my present"? What was Gideon's motive in offering it?

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, April 25th, 1875.—Gideon's Army.—Judges vii. 1-8.

Youths' Department.

BY-AND-BY.

The trees are bare, the clouds are gray; Baby must stay in the house to-day. By-and-by, by-and-by, The pretty blue will come to the sky. Wait and see, wait and see, Winking leaves on every tree— Little brooks trying to talk— Then the baby can go and walk.

"TWO MEN WENT UP INTO THE TEMPLE TO PRAY."

BY RICHARD CRASHAW,

who died in England in 1680.

Two went to pray! Oh! rather say, One went to brag, the other to pray. One stands up close, and treads on high, Where the other dares not lend his eye. One nearer to God's altar trod; The other to the altar's God.

THINGS THAT SHOULD NOT BE READ.

Traveling once upon a railway, I saw before me a respectable-looking man, with two sprightly boys, evidently his sons, of twelve and fourteen years. Upon the entrance of the inevitable "newsboy," this man bought three copies of a paper which (as I do not design to help to advertise what I condemn) I shall not name, and reserving one for himself, gave the others to his boys. All three were intently absorbed in reading them. A glance over their shoulders showed me that the paper was one of those which are wholly occupied with the pictorial illustration of the contemporary crimes and intrigues of the country. "How insane," said I to myself, "is the act and the example of this father!" As for my own conscience it would as quickly have consented to steal thirty cents as to waste thirty cents of God's money (of which I was steward) in subsidizing the vile and mercenary press which was providing this moral garbage for unhealthy appetites. And had another man given these papers to my own boys, I should have resented it in some such terms as these: "You must regard my home as a species of vulture's nest, that you bring this carrion to feed my young."

The circulation of these printed and pictorial portraits of the contemporary crimes of a monstrous and shameful nuisance. Under the pretense of circulating current intelligence, newspapers have become little better than moral scavengers; only instead of hiding the loathsome gleanings out of sight, they bring them and deposit them upon our breakfast-tables, and in our parlors, as if for the mental pabulum of our families. Surely, the people do not consider! Let us suppose that there was an acquaintance daily visiting our houses, whose conversation should, in its staple, consist of the recitals of these crimes and misdemeanors, every one would recognize him as a scandal-monger, whose presence would scandalize decent society. Why are the talking types more excusable than the talking tongue?

Let us suppose, again, that one should say to the parent: "That boy of sixteen (or fourteen) is a bright, precocious boy. He is already capable of a man's work. Let us procure him the place of a police judge, where his daily business shall be the exploration and dissection of crime and vice; where the ever present and familiar objects of his attention shall be the monstrosities of moral leprosy which infest the city." Would not any parent, who is not insane, cry out: "May God forbid?" No surer way could be devised to debauch a vivacious and impetuous youthful spirit, to exhale "the dew of its youth," to make the character hackneyed, coarse, and hardened. Only the firmest principles, fortified by experience, good habits, and age, can safely subject themselves to such an ordeal. The upright magistrate, when led by imperious duty to the inspection of crime, finds his protection especially in this fact, that he is in the path of duty.

If a man hate sin for its own sake, as every one does who is not God's enemy, then it will be a grief to him to know or think of sin done by anybody. It will be a painful, instead of an attractive, subject of thought, because of his love for holiness, his love for God, and his love for his fellow. The right-minded man regards it as some misfortune to be obliged to know of any sin done by any creature; and to repeat the story of that sin carelessly is one phase of evil speaking.—Christian at Work.

THE BUCKWHEAT.

From the Danish of Andersen.

In passing through a buckwheat field after a thunder-storm, one will often see upon it a scorched, and even a burnt appearance, as if fire had passed over it, and the farmer will say that the lightning has done this. But how can this be? I will tell you what a gray sparrow told me, and the gray sparrow heard it from an old willow tree that stands where it has long stood, by a buckwheat field. It is a big, honorable tree, but shriveled and old; it has been torn through the centre, and there, in the cleft, grass and whortle-bushes grow. The tree bends forward, and the branches, looking like long green hair, droop toward the ground.

Grain grew upon all the fields around, both rye and oats; yes, the beautiful oats, that look, when ripe, like a great flock of tiny yellow canary birds sitting upon a stem. The grain looked so blessed, and the heavier it was the lower it bowed, in pious humility.

But there was also a field of buckwheat, and it was close by the willow tree. The buckwheat didn't bend like other grain, but strutted so proudly and stiffly. "I am richer than other grain," it said. "Besides, I am much handsomer; my blossoms are as beautiful as those of the apple-tree; it is delightful to look at me and mine. Do you know any more beautiful than we, old willow tree?"

And the old willow tree nodded, as if to say, "Yes, of course I do." But the buckwheat strutted in real vanity, and said:

"The foolish tree; it is so old that grass grows in its stomach!"

There came up a dreadful storm, and all the flowers of the meadow folded their leaves or bent their tender heads while the storm passed over them; but the buckwheat strutted on in its pride.

"Bend your head like the rest of us," said the flowers.

"There is no need at all of my doing so," replied the buckwheat.

"Bend your head as we do!" shouted the grain. "The storm angel is flying; he has wings reaching from the clouds to the earth, and he will cut you down before you have time to ask for mercy."

"Yes, but I will not bend," replied the buckwheat.

"Shut your blossoms and bend your leaves!" said the old willow tree. "Don't look toward the lightning when the clouds burst. Men themselves dare not do so, for by the lightning one may see into God's heaven; and such a sight will make even men blind. What, then, may not happen to us, plants of the earth, and so much inferior, should we venture upon it?"

"Far inferior," said the buckwheat, scornfully. "Now I will just look into God's heaven."

And so it did in its pride. Now, it lightened so that it seemed as if the whole world was in a blaze. Afterward, when the storm had passed, the flowers and grain stood upright in the pure, quiet air, looking so refreshed by the rain; but the lightning had turned the buckwheat as black as a coal, so it was only a dead, useless herb upon the field.

The old willow tree moved its branches in the wind, and large drops of water fell from the green leaves, as if the tree were weeping, and the sparrow asked:

"Why do you weep when all around is full of blessing? See how the sun shines! See how the clouds go, and what a delicious odor the flowers and foliage have! Why do you weep, old willow tree?"

Then the willow tree told about the buckwheat's pride and punishment. This always follows. The writer heard this from the sparrow one night, when he asked it to tell him a story.

THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS.

His outward life was the life of all those of his age and station, and place of birth. He lived as lived the other children of peasant parents in that quiet town, and in a great measure as they live now. He who has seen the children of Nazareth in their red caftans and bright tunics of silk or cloth, girded with a many-colored sash, and sometimes covered with a loose outer jacket of white or blue—he who has watched their games, and heard their ringing laughter as they wander about the hills of their little, native vale, or play in bands on the hillside beside their sweet and abundant fountain,—may perhaps form some conception of how Jesus looked and played when he too was a child. And the traveler who has followed any of those

children—as I have done—to their simple homes, and seen the scanty furniture, the plain but sweet and wholesome food, the uneventful, happy, patriarchal life, may form a vivid conception of the manner in which Jesus lived. Nothing can be plainer than those houses, with the doves sunning themselves on the white roofs, and the vines wreathing about them. The mats, or carpets, are laid loose along the walls; shoes and sandals are taken off at the threshold; from the center hangs a lamp which forms the only ornament of the room; in some recess in the wall is placed the wooden chest, painted with bright colors, which contains the books or other possessions of the family; on a ledge that runs around the wall, within easy reach, are neatly rolled up the gay-colored quilts which serve as beds, and on the same ledge are ranged the earthen vessels for daily use; near the door stand the large, common water-jars of red clay, with a few twigs and green leaves—often of aromatic shrubs—thrust into their orifices to keep the water cool. At meal-time a painted wooden stool is placed in the center of the apartment, a large tray is put upon it, and in the middle of the tray stands the dish of rich or meat, or libban, or stewed fruits, from which all help themselves in common. Both before and after the meal the servant, or the youngest member of the family, pours water over the hands from a brazen ewer into a brazen bowl. So quiet, so simple, so humble, so uneventful, was the outward life of the family of Nazareth.—Farrar's Life of Christ.

MR. ASTOR'S SALARY.

What a man gets out of his money or labor is not his income nor his "salary." He really gets only what he can eat, drink, and wear, i. e., his support; in this respect the millionaire is no richer than the day-laborer.

In a public conveyance, on a certain occasion, Mr. Astor overheard a young man expressing the wish that he could possess "that old man's wealth," whereupon Mr. Astor turned to the speaker, and said to him:

"Young man, I sometimes feel weary, and would gladly throw off my load. For what will you take charge of my business, and take care of my property, watching with ever vigilant eyes that there be no leak—no mistake; and at the end of each quarter rendering up a clear and sure balance sheet?"

The young man opened wide his eyes. He knew not what to say. Said Mr. Astor,—"If you are capable, and will do this, I will pay you your absolutely necessary expenses of living."

As why he supposed, the young man expressed his surprise in his looks, observing which the old merchant simply added,— "That's all I get."

I WILL TELL IT.

Many a physician has gained his practice by one patient telling others of his cure. Tell your neighbors that you have been to the hospital of Jesus, and been restored, though you hated all manner of meat, and drew near the gates of death; and, may be, a poor soul, just in the same condition as yourself, will say, "This is a message from God to me," above all, published abroad the Lord's goodness, for Jesus' sake. He deserves your honor. Will you receive his blessing, and then, like the nine lepers, give him no praise? Will you be like the woman in the crowd, who was healed by touching the hem of his garment, and then would fain have slipped away? If so, I pray that the Master may say, "Somebody hath touched me," and you may be compelled to tell the truth, and say, "I was sore sick in soul, but I touched thee, O my blessed Lord, and I am saved, and to the praise of the glory of thy grace I will tell it; I will tell it, though devils should hear me; I will tell it, and make the world ring with it, according to my ability, to the praise and glory of thy saving grace."—Spurgeon.

A man who had served a twelve years' sentence in the State Prison at Auburn, N. Y., absolutely refused to depart; and the jailer, to get rid of him, sent him to sweep the side-walk, and then locked the doors on him. He made many attempts to break in, but finally gave it up and went away.

No person ever got stung by hornets who kept away from where they were. It is just so with bad habits.

Hearts may be attracted by assumed qualities; but the affections are only to be fixed by those that are real.