

The Christian Messenger.

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.
Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, May 2nd, 1875.—The Death of Samson.—Judges xvi. 25-34.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."—Prov. xiii. 20.

THE CONNECTION.—Between the victory of Gideon and the death of Samson was a period, according to KEIL, of about 126 years. It embraced the judgeships of Gideon, forty years, the rule of Abimelech, three years, the quiet career of Tola, twenty-three years, and of Jair, twenty-two years, and thirty-eight years of the Philistine oppression. During this troubled period was Eli; his career as High Priest and Judge is supposed to have begun twenty years before the death of Jair, the two thus overlapping, Jair being on the east of the Jordan, and Eli in the southern part of Canaan. Eli outlived Jair, it is supposed, twenty years. Samson is supposed to have begun his active career two years before the death of Eli, and to have died twenty years later. Two years after Samson began his career, judging the west of Canaan, Samuel began his career as judge, succeeding Eli; he supposed to have outlived Samson twenty-one years. While these events were taking place in Canaan, on the east of the Jordan, Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, after they had oppressed Israel eighteen years; and he was judge for six years after his victory. Ibzan succeeded him, judging seven years. Elon judged ten years, overlapping Samson three years. There are many features of this chronology which are doubtful; but it is perhaps the best scheme thus far proposed. The life of Samson will furnish sufficient matter to occupy the time of the teacher. Samson probably means *little sun*, or *sun-like*. His birth was miraculous, Judg. ch. 13, having been announced before its occurrence by the angel of Jehovah, the second person of the Trinity; see on Judg. vi. 11-18. 1. He was a Nazarite from birth. Nam. ch. 6.—When he broke his Nazarite vow, he lost his strength, and was taken captive. 2. His weakness with reference to the corrupt women of the Philistines was providentially overruled so as to exhibit to Israel and to us the folly as well as the sin of such indulgences; the lesson was needed by the Israelites, as idolatry had great power over them because it permitted, nay, sanctioned, such immoralities. The spectacle of Samson, the hero and judge, the strongest of his race, brought to death by the sin of his life, must have created awe. 3. Samson performed his great exploits not by his natural strength, though that was great, but by help of God, Judg. xiii. 25; xiv. 6, 16; xv. 14; xvi. 20. Israel was taught thus by a conspicuous example that God was able and willing to endow its armies with all power in answer to prayer and in connection with its obedience, and that God was the source of all power. 4. It has seemed to some that the life of Samson, who performed such feats, and who yet left the Philistines unsubdued, who had such strength of body and such weakness of soul, who conquered thousands of brave men and was conquered by a bad woman, was a splendid failure. Such a life terminated by such a death must have induced profound reflection. 5. He was not strong enough to control himself, ch. xiv. 1-3; xv. 18, 19; xvi. 1, 2, 4. We have no evidence of great mental powers in Samson; yet his intelligence was sufficient to cause him to be resorted to as judge. 6. The authority of Samson as judge seems to have been limited to the extreme south west of Canaan, the district bordering upon the Philistines.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 25.—*Merry*. With eating and drinking and other revelry. The festival was in the temple of Dagon, vs. 23, in Gaza, vs. 21, the capital of the Philistines, and their most powerful city, situated on the frontier towards Egypt, about three miles from the ocean. The religious festivals of the Philistines were orgies in which the appetites were freely indulged. The sacrifice was offered to Dagon, one of the chief deities of the Philistines. It was a fish-deity, the name Dagon being allied to the Hebrew *dag*, a fish; and in shape it resembled the body of a fish with the head and hands of a man, 1 Sam. v. 4. *Call for Samson*. He was now a prisoner,

blind and with fettered feet, employed to grind grain with a hand-mill in the prison, a task most insulting to one of his proud and warlike disposition, as it was usually performed by the lowest slaves, Ex. xi. 5; xii. 29. The four efforts of Delilah, we must suppose, did not take place on the same day, but with sufficient intervals between them to render the stratagem less apparent. His strength did not literally lie in his hair; but it seemed to do so, as it was the symbol of his Nazarite vow; hence, when it was cut, as it were by his own agency, the vow was broken, and God ceased to strengthen him miraculously, that the Israelites might be taught to find the reason of their unhappy condition in their unfaithfulness to their vows. The captivity of Samson had not been very long, as his hair had not attained its full length, vs. 22. *Make his sport, or dance be fore us*. The dance was considered a gymnastic exercise fit for the warrior; and it was sometimes used as an expression of religious emotion, 2 Sam. vi. 5-25. Arab men still preserve the ancient dance. As the dancing of Scripture was of a different kind from that of modern society, the sexes not being in contact, and for a different purpose, the expression of the loftiest emotions, no argument can be deduced from it in favor of the modern dance. *They set him between the pillars*. We have only to take the narrative in its plainest sense in order to avoid all difficulties. He was not made to dance between the two pillars, but to stand there, after the dancing was done, to receive the jests of the lordly feasters.

Verse 26.—*The lad*. Being blind, a boy was employed to lead him about by the hand, and place him where he was required to go. *Suffer me*. Let go of my hand that I may feel the pillars; and do not interfere to prevent my leaning upon them. Having been wearied with the dance, it seemed natural that he should rest by leaning against the pillars; and the Philistines suspecting nothing. Perhaps Samson was willing to amuse them by dancing in order that he might have an excuse for leaning on the pillars. His attitude of rest implied weakness, and thus prevented suspicion. *The house*. It was usual to call the temple of a god his house. *Standeth*. The building was so constructed that the pillars supported it.

Verse 27.—*All the lords*. It was a day of national triumph. *Philistines*. A wealthy and powerful commercial people on the south-western border of Israel, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Their territory was assigned to Judah and Dan; but though conquered on the first invasion of Canaan, Josh. xiii. 2; Judg. i. 18, they regained it and held it till the time of David, who conquered it. They continued to annoy Israel, however, till the time of the Maccabees. The name Philistine means *emigrant*, from the emigration of this people, early Gen. xxi. 32, 34, into Canaan, Gen. x. 14; Jer. xlvii. 4; Amos ix. 7. Our word Palestine is derived from the word Philistine. *On the roof about three thousand*. The common people; the "lords" and others of the more distinguished were below under the roof.

That beheld. The original expresses also the gratification with which they looked. They feasted their eyes. They had seen the dance, and now that Samson went to the pillars under the roof, they remained. The roofs of Eastern houses are almost always flat, constructed with reference to use in this way.

Verse 28.—*Called unto the Lord*. Possibly only in spirit; but more probably with a loud cry. He recognized Jehovah as the source of his strength and had become a prayerful man. *O Lord, God*. He uses the three names of God with which he was most familiar. He says *Lord* at the beginning of his prayer, remembering that God is his master. He says *Jehovah* when he prays to be remembered, because the name Jehovah expressed the faithfulness of God in remembering his people; see on Josh. i. 1. He says *God* when he prays for strength; for the word in the original conveys the idea of power, *the Mighty*. *Remember me*. He seemed to be forgotten of God and forsaken, justly punished, as he would confess. *Strengthen me*. He was about to attempt perhaps the most difficult feat of his whole life. *Only this once*. He is to die; it is to be his last effort. *At once avenged*. He supposed his feeling to be right, or he would not have brought it to God in prayer. So deep was his sense of his condition that the lives of those about to be slain were a fit payment for but one of his eyes.

Verse 29.—*Took hold*. Probably the pillars were slender and graceful, such as

characterize Eastern architecture. Samson probably put an arm about each. *The two middle pillars*. There was, perhaps, a row of pillars; the two in the middle supporting the greatest burden. But the more probable supposition is that these two pillars stood in the middle of the building, so as to support the roof. The front of the temple was open, so that those below could see. The pillars were close together, because the chief weight came upon them.

Verse 30.—*Let me die with the Philistines*. The act of an officer who leads a forlorn hope, knowing that he will die for his country, is heroism. Samson knew the Philistines to be the enemies of God and of his own people. He saw their chief men in a position where he could destroy them. He resolved to give his life in striking a blow which must cripple the power of the oppressors. *Fell upon the lords*. This destruction of the Philistine leaders paved the way for the great victory which Samuel gained over the foe a few years later, and of that decadence of the Philistine power which at once followed, and which culminated in the conquest of Philistia under David. So Samson "began to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines," ch. xiii. 5. *More than they which he slew in his life*. If three thousand were on the roof, there were doubtless as many more below.

Verse 31.—*All his father's house*. The circle of more distant relatives, or possibly the whole tribe, Num. i. 4; ii. 2; iii. 15, 20; xvii. 2; xviii. 1. *Came down and took him*. The brethren and relatives of Samson were able to come to Gaza, and fetch away the body of the fallen hero. In antiquity the belief in supernatural interpositions had the force of a superstition, and any event like the catastrophe of the lesson was admitted at once to be of divine origin, and struck terror into all hearts. *Between Zorah and Eshtaol*. Where he had begun his career, ch. xiii. 25. Zorah and Eshtaol were two towns allotted to the tribe of Dan out of the territory of Judah, Josh. xix. 41. Zorah was the home of Samson, xiii. 2. *The buryingplace*. Was probably a cavern, either natural or excavated, in the limestone hill-side. The body was wrapped in linen, with spices, and laid on a shelf hewed out in the side of the cavern. *His father*. From the fact that his father is not mentioned among those who buried him, it is rendered almost certain that the father died before the tragical death of his son. *Twenty years*. He must have begun his career as judge quite young, as the Philistine oppression lasted but forty years, ch. xiii. 1, and he was born after it began, ch. xiii. 5. It is well known that the intellect matures early in the East. At an early age he taught those who resorted to him to abandon their idols and serve Jehovah, to whose service he was set apart by his Nazarite vow.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.—When God's children are sinfully intimate with the wicked, accompanying the wicked in sin, they are brought to shame by their folly, vs. 4-21.

When the good go into sin with the wicked, they are often betrayed by those whom they have thus trusted.

When we feel ourselves unable to resist the importunities of the wicked, we should at once withdraw from their society.

God is faithful in punishing the backslidings of his children, in order to save their souls.

Samson was a greater slave when he served his affections than now in grinding for the Philistines. The loss of his eyes shows him his sin.

—From *Heroes & Judges*.

SUNDAY, May 9th, 1875.—Ruth and Naomi.—Ruth i. 16-22.

"DE PROFUNDIS," A NEW VERSION.

OR, A VOICE FROM THE DUNGEON OF INFALLIBILITY.

Pity the sorrows of a poor old man,
Close prisoner kept within the Vatican;
What if 'tis a fair palace, if I don't
Go free abroad—that is because I won't?
Dry bread and water, such the prison food;
Unless I choose to order all that's good,
And then so poor—with PETER'S pence in pocket,
And treasury with friends and foes to stock it.

Besides these felon's garments forced to wear,
Of softest silk and costliest mohair;
And forced to brook, by rulers harsh and proud,
Th' obsequious service of a servile crowd;
Crowding my halls, my cruel jailers, see,
Waiting my orders upon bended knee!
And last, not least,—for the severest blow,
My visitors are free to come and go,
To crave my blessing, and to kiss my toe!
—Punch.

Youths' Department.

LABOR: AN ODE.

BY G. W. B.

Toil swings the axe, and forsts bow;
The seeds break out in radiant bloom,
Rich harvests smile behind the plow,
And cities cluster round the loom.
Where towering domes and tapering spires
Adorn the vale and crown the hill,
Stout Labor lights its beacon fires,
And plumes with smoke the forge and mill.

The monarch oak, the woodland's pride,
Whose trunk is-seamed with lightning scars,
Toil launches on the restless tide,
And there unrolls the flag of stars;
The engine with its lungs of flame,
And ribs of brass and joints of steel,
From Labor's plastic fingers came,
With sobbing valve and whirling wheel.

'Tis Labor works the magic press,
And turns the crank in hives of toil,
And beckons angels down to bless
Industrious hands on sea and soil.
Here sun-browned soil, with shining spade,
Links lake to lake with silver ties,
Strung thick with palaces of trade,
And temples towering to the skies.

A SERMON ON PUSH.

When Cousin Will was at home for vacation the boys always expected plenty of fun. The last frolic before he went back to his studies was a long tramp after hazel-nuts. As they were hurrying along in high glee, they came upon a discouraged-looking man—and a discouraged-looking cart. The cart was standing before an orchard. The man was trying to pull it up hill towards his own house. The boys did not wait to be invited, but ran to help with a good will. "Push! push!" was the cry.

The man brightened up; the cart trundled along as fast as rheumatism would do it, and in five minutes they all stood panting at the top of the hill.

"Obliged to ye," said the man; "you just wait a minute;" and he hurried into the house, while two or three pink-aproned children peeped out of the door.

"Now boys," said Cousin Will, "this is a small thing; but I wish we could all take a motto out of it, and keep it for life. 'Push!' it is just the word for a grand, clear morning."

"If any body is in trouble and you see it, don't stand back—push!"

"If there's any thing good doing in any place where you happen to be—push!"

"Whenever there's a kind, a Christian thing, a happy thing, a pleasant thing, whether it is our own or not, whether it is at home or in town, at Church or at school, just help with all your might—push—!"

At that moment the farmer came out with a dish of his wife's best doughnuts, and a dish of his own best apples; and that was the end of the little sermon.

CHRISTIAN CLEAR THROUGH

A certain little boy in Kansas, only seven and one-half years old, is trying hard to be a Christian. The missionary who started the new Western Sunday-school which he attends, says that this boy, whose name is Willie, uses a great deal of what is called good common sense, in his ideas of a religious life.

The other day he was in the house watching Maggie, as she pared the potatoes for dinner. Soon she pared an extra large one, that was very white and nice on the outside, but when cut into pieces it showed itself to be hollow and black inside with dry rot. Instantly Willie exclaimed:

"Why, Maggie, that potato isn't a Christian."

"What do you mean?" asked Maggie.

"Don't you see it has a bad heart?"

It seems this little Kansas boy had learned enough of the religion of Jesus to know that, however fair the outside may be, it will never do to have the heart black. We must be sound and right clear through. —*Child's World*.

DAINTY CHRISTIANS.

There are certain Christians, so called, pronounced to be "in good standing" as church members, who, by their actions seem to have something to sustain, which the Christian in ordinary knows nothing at all about. They were not meant for common uses; indeed, they seem set apart rather, for special work. They are punctual at the means of grace, highly devotional in spirit—and critical in judgment. They have given themselves to the service

of the Lord, but with the understanding that the Lord will not use them as He uses others, and that He will demand of them nothing disagreeable.

When the time comes, they work; and now, pray? They become "presidents" of societies; they serve on choice committees; they address meetings in eloquent speeches; they are interested in the foreign heathen to the extent that they sigh over the subject, and think, and speak, and write about them. They think it a great shame that the heathen are not converted. They even go so far in the exercise of conviction as to wonder what other Christians are about; that the idols of gold and of silver, of wood and of stone, have been so long allowed to take the place of the true God!

These Christians believe in other Christians to a certain extent. That is, they believe there are some good, humble souls, of limited capacity and no sensibilities to speak of, who are not easily shocked at sights and sounds, who have no nerves, and who have good vulgar constitutions. If an epidemic were to break out, the former class think the latter class best suited to become nurses and ministering angels; they believe the Lord designed these humble ones for just such a field of labor, and they withdraw into an aromatic atmosphere, which is supposed to insure their safety. They suddenly find that they have a call to leave town, and they are prompt to reply to that call.

Then again, if there is work to be done among the poor and depraved, they once more yield the palm to others. They are so tender in feeling, that they positively cannot look upon the sufferings of the destitute; and as for the depraved—well, the fact is, vulgar sin shocks them so, that they positively cannot look upon it! About the foreign heathen there is some romance, some poetry; but as to the home heathen—there is absolutely nothing that is not "shocking in the extreme." On the principle that "a prophet hath honor save in his own country," these fastidious ones think that a soul is of value only in the ratio of its distance from their own land.

If a certain member of the Church has his or her feet led away from virtue, these special Christians shrink from such as lepers. What business had these creatures to be off their guard? What right had they to be weak? And how could they ever expect to be taken into the fellowship of the Church again? Nay, the Church must not be contaminated, Christians of the purer, better sort must not have their garments defiled by these fallen ones; or, if any one must needs make an effort on their behalf, let it be made by those who have nothing to lose in the way of public opinion, no standing to maintain. In a word, if there be any rough crosses to take up, any ugly work to be performed, these special Christians are found wanting. They are just one degree above their Master, in that they will not condescend to do the things which He did.

In times of peace, when the voice of the dove is heard in the land, these Christians rejoice and are full of praise and complete in power. But in times of trouble, when men's souls are tried, when doubt, like a viper, creeps in and insinuates that God is not good, then the special Christians seem of no special use; they find themselves unnoticed and unsought in the midst of a great crisis. No one leans upon their profession or lives. From the highest rank they suddenly sink to the lowest.

And alas for such when the great congregations of the earth are assembled and men shall be judged according to the deeds done in the body; when Christ shall put Himself in the place of the lowest who have suffered, and shall say to the special Christians: "Inasmuch as ye did it not unto the least of these, ye did it not unto Me."—*Christian at Work*.

THE POWER OF PRAYER.—Mr. Spurgeon says that twenty-one years ago he went to London, in his nineteenth year, and began to preach the Word to a handful of people in New Park Street Baptist Chapel. And looking at the marvelous success of his ministry he freely admits that hitherto everything has been gained by prayer. "It has been the plow of our husbandry, and the battle-axe of our warfare."

Little three-year-old asked his mother to let him have his building blocks to play with, but she told her darling that it was Sunday, and therefore not proper for him to have them. "But, mamma," said the young hopeful, "I'll build a church." >