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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, March 7th, 1875.—The Cities of Refuge.—Joshua xx. 1-9.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."—Psalm xli. 1.

THE CONNECTION.—The designation of the cities of refuge followed immediately upon the division of the land. It was of the highest importance that the tribes, so soon as they had taken possession of their allotments, should organize at once the administration of law, and provide for the execution of public justice. In highly civilized lands, there is such a respect for law that the manslayer is screened from summary punishment, and is intrusted to the courts for trial. But where the veneration for law is not strong, where might, and not right is the law, the slayer of a brother man would not be safe in the hands of his outraged and excited neighbors. Hence cities of refuge, at convenient distances, were appointed.

The provisions of the Mosaic code concerning manslaughter were simple, just, ingenious, and admirably adapted to repress violence.

In all malicious attempts to injure another, the criminal was made to suffer the identical injury which he inflicted, Ex. xxi. 23-25; Lev. xxiv. 19-22. This was the rule of the Israelite magistrate only; but in our Lord's time it had been made the rule of private revenge; hence his words in Mat. v. 38-42. Witnesses were restrained from untruth in capital cases by the requirement that if the prisoner were condemned to die, they should throw the first stones, thus bringing to them the horror of committing actual murder by false testimony, Deut. xiii. 10; xvii. 7; Josh. vii. 25; John viii. 7.

THE EXPOSITION.—Verse 2.—Appoint out. With the advice of the national authorities. See vs. 7, where the plural, they consecrated, shows the participation of the rulers in the action. For you. Meaning, for the whole people. Cities. Not cities in general, but the cities which Moses had long ago spoken of, Num. xxxv. 9. Refuge. Literally reception, because the authorities of the city received the fugitive and protected him. It was required that the roads to these cities be kept plain and open with scrupulous care, Deut. xix. 3. The road was to be at least thirty-two cubits broad (three rods), and every kind of obstruction was to be removed. At every branching of roads posts were erected bearing REFUGE! REFUGE! to guide the fugitive. Whereof I spoke. Num. xxxv. 9. The hand. The hand being the organ by which men most usually execute their purposes.

Verse 3.—A slayer that killeth. The "killeth" of the common version sets too narrow bounds to the merciful privilege of refuge. Smiting was the usual way of killing; poisoning, etc., belonged to an age more experienced in crime. The law, however, of course, would apply to one who had killed otherwise than by smiting. Unawares. Through mistake. A possible case is given Deut. xix. 4, 5; others are in Num. xxxv. 22, 23. The city of refuge was not to screen criminals, but to afford an opportunity to all accused of so grave a crime to show the absence of a guilty intent. The avenger of blood. The Hebrew word is goel, a name still applied in the east to the avenger. It has been from time immemorial, and still is the custom among nations governed by patriarchal institutions, for the nearest male relative of a murdered person to execute vengeance with his own hand. The man, who, through cowardice or preoccupation, declines the office is considered infamous. Moses found the custom of blood revenge in existence among his people. It was so deeply fixed in their traditions and their feelings that he could not hope to eradicate it. His legislation, therefore, attempted to make it the means of securing the execution of justice. In order to secure the punishment of the willful murderer he made it the legal duty of him who was next of kin to the victim to slay the guilty man, if found outside the territory of the city of refuge, Num. xxxv. 10-27. If the authorities found the fugitive guilty of murder, the authorities of his own city were bound to bring him home and deliver him to the avenger of blood, who at once slew him, Deut. xix. 11-13.

Verse 4.—Stand at the entering of the gate. The gate was surmounted by an arch or by beams which upheld the massive wall above. The gate-way was thus sheltered from sun and storm. It was a convenient place for the sessions of the judges, and was habitually used by them. Declare his cause. Claiming protection on the ground that he had killed a man unintentionally. Elders. Civil officers generally, Ex. xxiv. 1; Num. xi. 16, 17. A place. A room or house. Dwell among them. Until his formal trial, and longer if he was not delivered to the executioner as a willful murderer, vs. 6. Verse 5.—If the avenger. Here it is supposed that in some cases the avenger would not pursue. Perhaps, in many instances, he did not. They shall not deliver. That is, if the fugitive was innocent. The elders of the city of refuge never delivered even a criminal directly to the avenger; they delivered him to the elders of his own city, who in turn delivered him to the avenger, Deut. xix. 11, 12. Unwittingly. Unknowingly. Verse 6.—He shall dwell. Secure from the avenger. Until he stand before the congregation. The rulers and representatives of the city, who are frequently spoken of as if they were the body of the people, compare Josh. xxiv. 1 and xxiv. 2, 19, 21; 1 Sam. viii. 4 and 1 Sam. viii. 7, 10, 19. Until the death. Here is another limit of his abode in the city of refuge. The first is the formal trial. If found guilty, then his residence in the city of refuge ceased, and he was taken home for execution. But if innocent, he remained in the city until the death of the High Priest. The law is stated thus briefly, because it is a repetition of enactments previously recorded, Num. xxv. 11-24; Deut. xix. 2-10. Then shall the slayer return. Should the avenger attack him thereafter, this would be judged and punished as crime. Verse 7.—The cities mentioned in verses 7 and 8 begin with those on the west of the Jordan. Three were on one side the Jordan, and three on the other, in that two were in the north, two in the middle, and two in the south. Consecrated. Set apart to sacred uses. The preservation of innocent life was considered a sacred duty; and the asylum of the fugitive a sacred place. The three of these cities on the east of the Jordan, outside of Canaan proper, had been named by Moses, Deut. iv. 41-43. The three in Canaan had not been named by him, because he died before its conquest. He had ordered, however, that upon the conquest they should be selected, Num. xxxv. 6, 14; Deut. xix. 7-10. Kedesh. Means Sanctuary. Kades, now ten English miles north of Safed, and four to the northwest of the upper part of the Sea of Merom. There are numerous sarcophagi and other ancient remains. Gath. Applied in the Old Testament to a small district among the northern mountains of Naphtali; it was not applied to the great province until much later. Shechem. Thirty-four miles north of Jerusalem, and seven south of Samaria. Bezer in the wilderness. A town of Reuben, allotted to the Marathite division of the Levites, Deut. iv. 43; Josh. xxi. 36; 1 Chron. vi. 78. The plain, or table-land. Opposite Jericho the mountains of Moab rise like a precipitous wall; and from their brow the Belka, the upland plain, sweeps back, high, rolling, and fertile, till lost in the desert. Ramoth. It may have been identical with Ramoth-nizpeh, Josh. xiii. 26. Golan. A city of Baschan. The site is unknown; but it was in the north and probably gave its name to the district called in the time of Josephus Gaulanitis of which Golan was the chief city. Verse 9.—The stranger that sojourneth. A foreigner who did not intend to remain in the country, who visited it for purposes of commerce, study, etc. The Mosaic legislation was very careful to protect foreigners who visited the Israelites, Ex. xxii. 21; xxiii. 9, 12; Lev. xix. 10, 33, 34. Unawares. The Hebrew law afforded no shelter to crime. The guilty were torn even from the altar of God, and led to punishment, Ex. xxi. 14. Though the city of refuge was designed thus for the protection of the innocent, it may have served also in many instances to entrap the guilty. In most instances it is probable that the murderer avoided the city of refuge, fearing the strict inquiry to which his entrance must lead.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.—Murder the greatest of crimes, vs. 1-9.

The murderer should be put to death, vs. 1-9; Gen. ix. 5, 6. But the sentence should be executed with as little cruelty as possible.

A wholesome regard for the lives of others would lead to the prompt punishment of those who commit murder.

In executing the law against murderers we should take scrupulous care that we do not destroy innocent persons.

Murder in the Scriptures is regarded as the taking of human life unjustifiably.

We should carefully avoid all fighting and striking, if for no other reason, because a blow given in anger, without any intention of killing, has often produced death.

The city of refuge was a place of perfect security from the avenger for such as had a right to its protection, so Christ is a perfect security to all who seek safety in him.

The city of refuge was not merely a place of safety for those who had accidentally killed others, but a place of restraint and confinement, from which they were released by the death of the High Priest. So our souls are set free by the death of Christ, our great High Priest.

—From Heroes & Judges.

SUNDAY, March 14th, 1875.—The Altar of Witness.—Joshua xxii. 21-27.

Youths' Department.

FANNY'S TWO QUESTIONS.

Fanny, leaning on my knee, With her questions bothers me:

"Uncle, you know everything;— All about the birds and bees, Flowers and grass, and leaves and trees— Uncle, you know everything!

"Why do buttercups grow yellow While the violets grow blue? Tell me, please, and tell me true, There's a dear old fellow!"

"Fanny dear, some things, it may be, I may know more than a baby; But why buttercups grow yellow While the violet grows blue, I can tell no more than you."

Fanny raised her shining eyes Up to mine in swift surprise:

"I thought you knew everything, Uncle, and I'm sure you do, If you'll only tell me true; Why do rusty brown birds sing Sweetly, while bright birds are mute? Why are all the dull ones honest, While the gay ones steal the fruit? Don't you think it quite a pity They can't be both good and pretty?"

"Older heads than yours, my dearie, Have been puzzled by this query, And may answer as they would; As for me, why fair and good On the same bough seldom grow, Really, Fanny, I do not know!"

—Painesville (O) Telegraph.

BABY BELLE'S MISSION.

"Poor little baby Belle!" That was what everybody said when they looked into her great brown eyes so full of suffering patience, and the slender misshapen figure that sat so still in the tiny wheelchair. Poor little baby Belle! She had lived through five summers of roses, and though the Lilliputian feet had never learned to walk, and the fragile hands were translucent like Seves china, she sang as the sunshine played over her on the latticed porch, or in the bay window, and was happy all the day long. No cloud seemed ever to darken the bright light of her lustreous eyes, and the notes of her bird-like voice were as sweet as those of the meadow lark.

One day a tall sad lady, clad in garments of deepest mourning, visited baby Belle's mamma, and as she looked at the cheerful little soul, so happy with the toys on the miniature table before her, yet destined never to walk the beautiful earth, always to sit helpless in the quiet corner, she silently shook her head, and said to baby Belle's mamma: "Why are such spared, and my husband, so full of life, and labor, and usefulness, taken away?"

"Baby Belle has her mission," replied the mother, "and perhaps, in her quiet way, does as much good as many a strong man. What patience she teaches us, what gentleness! The boys are sometimes rude to each other, but they are always kind and tender to baby Belle. In their long rambles in the fields and woods, they never forget her; some sweet wild flower, the stray feathers of some bright-tinted birds, or a gayly hued butterfly, or a bit of green moss, they bring back to Belle. When she was a little thing, and before we knew she would be an invalid all her life, she always cried when the boys took her, they handled her so roughly. But they have learned to lift her so carefully, that she loves now to sit in their laps, and have them tell her stories, or to be carried about in their arms, to see their pet rabbits and squirrels, and to feed them from her own tiny hands.

"Baby Belle cannot bear a word of anger, or impatience, or roughness; she can only grieve over unkindness. Knowing this, and careful never to wound her tender little heart, we are all more gentle and considerate towards each other than we should be were Belle strong and rugged as the other children are. So she has become our perpetual peacemaker, and the maker of sunshine as well, for we cannot look into her face, pale with suffering, yet bright with patient cheerfulness, and wear clouds upon our own.

"You cannot wish her to live," said a friend to me the other day. Not for her sake would I have her live, though the world is so beautiful, but how could we spare her? Who would teach us, as she does, lessons of smiling resignation, of trustful submission, of cheerful hope? Loving and patient towards her, we learn unconsciously to prefer each other to self, to bring forward only the sunny side of life, and bear its shadows with serenity.

"Poor little baby Belle! But she has a mission, and is unconsciously making us all fitter for the heavenly mansions, from which, for our sakes, she is permitted to remain a little while away. Angel work is baby Belle doing, till the angels take her home."—Laura E. Lyman in Little Corporal Magazine.

UNCLE BEN JOHNSON.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH.

Uncle Ben requested one of the brethren to give out a hymn, and I will transcribe it from memory as he lined it, nearly as possible, but the reader must imagine the inimitable tones:

"There is a fountain filled with blood Drawn from Immanuel's veins, And sinners plunged beneath that flood— Lose all their guilty stains.

"See low before thy throne of grace A sinful wanderer mourn; O shine on this benighted heart, In beams of mercy shine.

"I plead thy sorrows, gracious Lord, And upward lift my eyes; To pay the dreadful debt I owe, No tears will e'er suffice.

"How long, dear Saviour, shall I feel This warfare in my breast? Here, Lord, I give myself away: 'Tis all that I can do."

One familiar with the "Psalmist" would recognize nearly every line, but it might trouble him to find all the hymns in which they belong. The brother who followed in prayer uttered some singular phrases, but there was a pathos and earnestness in all the exercises that showed the deepest reverence and sincerity, even when he asked that we might "bow our souls under our knees, and our knees in the dust of humanity."

The Church Covenant usually published with what is called the New Hampshire Articles was then read and explained by sentences and paragraphs, and all who were willing to adopt it were requested to stand up, while it was read to them the second time.

Before adopting the Confession of Faith, it was thought best that they should elect a Moderator and Clerk. This was to them new business.

"We jes-talks things up an' grees to them, an' dun no nothin' 'bout doin' business as white people do."

"Then, brethren," said I, "it is time to learn. The Bible says, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.'"

Uncle Ben was chosen to preside, and the articles were taken up separately and discussed. But he could not remember how to put a motion.

"All you that is 'posed to this article signify by saying yes," said he, as an article was presented for adoption.

"You mean, Brother Johnson, all that approve of this article," I replied.

"Yes. All that 'prove say yes." But the next time he attempted to put the question he said,—

"All you that 'prove this article, say no."

Sometimes he would call for the vote before the motion had been made and seconded, and once or twice he made the motion himself. However, two and a half hours' drilling made an improvement, both with Uncle Ben and his people, and at the close they were all happy to know that they were now an independent Baptist church, with full powers to transact their own business. They have quite an intelligent clerk and mean to call a council of recognition, when they dedicate their meeting-house. These are new things with the colored people in this region. They were requested to leave the white churches, and some of them have had a kind of organization and recognition service, presided over by a white minister, but as far as I know have not adopted a confession of faith or church covenant, and some of their deacons tell me they never heard of any such thing till I informed them. No one has taken pains to teach them how to organize and conduct business meetings, or to keep their records. But they are anxious to learn, and as soon as they can be supplied with educated ministers of their own color there will doubtless be a change for the better in the rural districts, such as has already taken place in the large towns. The old men like Uncle Ben may not advance very far, but a new class is coming forward, and even if there were no facilities furnished except in the free public schools, the next generation of colored people will be intelligent.

UNCLE BEN'S VISIT.

The dogs in Virginia seem to have a natural antipathy toward the colored peo-

ple, and one morning our Patsy was more boisterous than usual, so I went to the door, and who should be there but Uncle Ben and one of the brethren from White Oak Church, the name that had been adopted by the new organization.

"Good morning, Brother Johnson," I said. "I am glad to see you."

"Well," he replied, "I've come to ask some 'vice."

Uncle Ben's meaning was quite different from his expression, and comprehending it, I told him I would be happy to render him any assistance in my power.

"Well, we have some good brethren who were baptized in de night by colored people, 'fore Lee's surrender, when their masters would not let them jine de church."

"Were such things common, Uncle Ben?"

"O yes. Some masters would not let their servants be baptized at all, if they know it. An' de colored people taptied one another, heaps of them. An' now I wants to know if you think they mus' be baptized over again?"

I got a copy of the Blue Stone Association Minutes (colored), and read to them the resolution passed at their last session, answering his question in the affirmative.

"It 'pears to me that as they did it to 'bey Jesus, an' 'twas all they could do, He would 'cept it."

"I cannot say that He would not, but the leaders among your people think that the order of God's house demands their re-baptism, and I suppose they will comply with their wishes," I replied.

"Yes, I reckon."

"Well, Uncle Ben, I want to ask you a few questions. And first, how do you get your texts? Do you get some one who can read to find them—for you and repeat them till you have committed them to memory?"

"No ear. I jes takes them as de Lord gives them."

"But I do not understand you. What do you mean by taking them as the Lord gives them?"

"I'll 'splain. I was walkin' w' a white man—a 'fessor of 'ligion, an' I seed a tree, that was when I was 'bout nineteen years old, an' it came to me, 'I is de vine, an' you is de branches. Every branch that bears fruit in me I purges that it may bear much fruit to eternal life.' An' he took his Bible an' foun' it read jes' so. Another tex' I uses, is, 'Blessed are they that hunger an' thirst for righteousness, for they shall have enough to satisfy their souls.'"

"But had you never heard these texts read or repeated?"

"Not that I 'members."

"I think you had, Uncle Ben; and if God inspired you to preach from His word without reading or hearing it, He would give you the passages as they read. My advice would be that you get your employer to find and read for you the texts that you intend to preach from, and that you be careful to repeat them just as they read. When Jesus prayed for His disciples, 'Sanctify them through thy truth,' He added, 'Thy word is truth.' And if your people are to become free indeed, it must be through the agency of the truth."

Uncle Ben is a fair specimen of the uneducated colored preachers. He is a man of more than average natural ability, and white men who have heard him preach, say that he is sometimes really eloquent, though he uses words not found in Webster, and quotes Scriptures not in King James' version. Such men show the importance of the work now being done for the colored preachers by our beloved Home Mission Society, and their appeal should call forth a generous response from the benevolence of their more favored brethren. And especially at this time, when the church of Rome is training and sending so many of her sons to fasten upon them the chains of Papal superstition. The great mass of the colored people are Baptists in sentiment. They have heard the New Testament read, and have not yet learned how to evade its plain teaching, in respect to the ordinances of the Gospel. They think that going down into the water, and coming up out of the water, and being buried in baptism, means just as they read. But they have a high opinion of the superiority of white people, and can be made to think that it is their own ignorance that makes them understand so differently from learned pedobaptists. And unless cared for by Baptists, they may fall an easy prey into the snares of Romanism.

—W. & R.

D. F. L.

Of your friends speak well; of your enemies say nothing.