

The Christian Messenger.

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BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, April 11th, 1875.—The Promise broken.—Judges ii. 11-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel." Psalm cvi. 13.

ANALYSIS.—I. Forsaking the Lord. Vs. 11-13. II. Israel's punishment. Vs. 14, 15. III. Judges raised up. Vs. 16.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.—We now enter upon the time of the Judges, those non-regal rulers who governed Israel from the period of Joshua to that of Eli. It was a distinct dispensation under the Theocracy, forming the background to the Monarchy. There were fifteen judges in all, Othniel being the first, and Samuel the last, covering a period of three hundred years. Stanley calls it the Middle-Age of Jewish History. The judges were avenging deliverers and judicial officers of Israel, as the case demanded. It was their chief care to bring their countrymen to acknowledge, worship, and obey God. Many of their lives are full of the romance of heroism—not as fiction, however, but as truth.

EXPOSITION.—Introductory.—This book is called Judges, because it treats of the officers of this name figured, and is largely occupied with a recital of their deeds. As to these "Judges," see below, on verse 16. The book took its final form after the reign of the kings had begun. xviii. 1; xix. 1; xxi. 25. It consists of two quite distinct divisions. The first (chaps. i-xvi) has an introduction (i-iii 6), and a consecutive history of the Judges to the death of Samson. The second (chaps. xvii-xxi) is more of the nature of an appendix, and contains an account of two remarkable events that occurred early in the period of the Judges, and that give an insight into the morals and customs of the people. Ruth was formerly taken as a part of the book, and belongs there by the same right as does this second part.

Verse 11.—And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord [Jehovah]. The phrase is used seven times, descriptive of seven apostasies. If Joshua was eighty-five, as Josephus states, at Moses's death, as he died when 110 years old, it would have been now fifteen years since his death, and something more than that since the solemn renewal of the covenant at Shechem, which was our last week's lesson. The men who there honestly pledged themselves and the nation passed away, and after that corruption came in as a flood, though of course not suddenly and at once. And served Baalim. "Baalim" is the plural of Baal. They served Baals. "Baal was the supreme male divinity of the Phœnician and Canaanitish nations."

Verse 12.—They forsook the Lord [Jehovah]. Heathen nations were wont to tolerate different gods, and their varying forms of worship. There is evidence that many of the Israelites, perhaps the nation generally, in this period thought to do the same, and mingle with the worship of Jehovah idol-worship. See viii. 23-35; ix. 27. Jehovah would not share his honor, as we last week saw. It was necessary to choose between him and any and every other object of worship. No man might choose him and them. The attempt is often made, in practice, to serve both God and Mammon, by those who have no theory to justify it. We have the clear word of Christ that "no man can serve two masters." "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." It will be observed that the "evil" which Israel did, and which provoked God's judicial wrath, is summed up in this act of idol worship. There is no mention of murder, licentiousness, thefts, etc., etc. But here, idol-worship is spoken of as though it were the whole of the condemning evil. The very root and fountain of all kinds and forms of vice and crime is the forsaking of God. Hence the first commandment is first in both order and nature. Reformatory which do not reach to the relation of man and his God, are superficial and transient. The only effective Reformer is Jesus Christ! since he reconciles to God, and so opens in man the springs of a holy life. God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt. This clause is added to bring out into full view the shocking enormity of these generations—of these children of those thus signally favored by Jehovah.

Other gods, the gods of the people round about them. Friendly, intimate fellowship with the vicious, breeds vice. Against such fellowship and its infallible results Israel had been faithfully and repeatedly warned. See Deut. vi, vii, etc. Bowed themselves to them. Spoken in abhorrence of the degradation and impiety. Provoked the Lord [Jehovah] to anger. If God were not "provoked" when we sin, why should he be pleased when we obey him? If we are not worth regarding in the one state, we are not in the other. The Bible, in such a representation of God, reveals the essential worth of man, as well as the real love of God. This passage also warns us that God is impartial in dealing with men.

Verse 13.—Served Baal and Ashtaroth. Ashtaroth, the plural of Ashtareth, or Astarte, or Asherah. Ashtareth was the supreme female divinity of the surrounding nations; and the plural indicates, not the many idols, but the different modifications of the divinity. The former was also regarded as the sun-god, and the latter as the moon-goddess. The worship of Baal appears to have been appointed with much pomp and ceremonial. Temples were erected to him (1 Kings xvi. 32); his images were set up (2 Kings x. 26); his altars were very numerous (Jer. xi. 13); were erected particularly on lofty eminences (1 Kings xviii. 20); and on the roofs of houses (Jer. xxiii. 29); there were priests in great number (1 Kings xviii. 19); and of various classes (2 Kings xix. Kings xviii. 26-28)

Verse 14.—The anger of the Lord was hot. Corresponding to the enormity of the sin. Delivered them, etc. Just as he had predicted that he would. See Deut. xxxi. The alliance with God's enemies lost them God's favor, and did not secure the favor of those enemies themselves. Could not any longer stand. The cause may have been in appearance and in reality natural, but none the less was it God who delivered them and sold them, and made them powerless to stand.

Verse 15.—Whithersoever they went out. Namely, to battle—to encounter the enemy. The hand of the Lord. The Lord in action, as the hand is the instrument of our chief execution.

Verse 16.—Nevertheless. Though such was the sin, and the wrath, and the judgment, yet there was another side, namely, mercy—free grace. The Lord [Jehovah] raised up judges. In all fifteen—Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, Jephthah, Iban, Elon, Abdon, Samson, Eli, Samuel. It is not quite certain what was the whole length of the time. There are varying estimates; Dr. Smith, makes it 329 years which seems highly probable. The sin of Israel was the occasion, not the cause of the deliverance. Just as the world's sin gave occasion to Christ's redemption.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 11. How many times is the phrase "did evil in the sight of the Lord" used in the Book of Judges? How many apostasies does it record? Of what is Baalim plural?

Vs. 12. What promise does this forsaking the Lord break? Joshua xxiv. 16. What commandment is broken by following "other gods"?

Vs. 13. Of what is Ashtaroth the plural? What were Baal and Astarte?

Vs. 14. What is meant by God's anger as "hot"? What does Paul say of idolaters? 1 Cor. vi. 9. What does John? Rev. xxi. 8. What very foolish thing are idolaters guilty of? Rom. i. 21-25. Is there any idolatry now-a-days?

Vs. 16. What were the judges? How many were they in number? Who was the first? Who the last? For how long a period did the order of judges exist? What was the general character of the period? Judges xvii. 6.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

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

Youths' Department.

KIND WORDS.

Nelly Gordon was one of the most lovable children I have ever known. Every one loved her, old and young, rich and poor. All rejoiced when she came to them, and sorrowed when she was gone. Do you ask whether she was very pretty, or very clever and amusing, or very accomplished? No, Nelly was none of these things. Nor was she rich, for her father was a poor clergyman, with eight children—so you may fancy that very little pocket-money fell to Nelly's share, and accordingly she had very little to give away. Then would you like to know the secret of her being so beloved? I will tell it to you in her own words; for once, when she was nearly

grown up, I said to her, "How is it, Nelly, that you manage to win people's hearts in this way? I want to know"—and she answered so humbly and sweetly:

"It is since God has helped me to keep my tongue, Mr.—. A long time ago, when I was quite a little girl, I used to be dreadfully unhappy, because nobody loved me—you look surprised, but it is very true—and mamma said it was because I said such nasty, unkind things to everybody. If one of the boys did anything naughty, I used to love to tell of it, instead of speaking to the boy about it; and I used to like to see people laugh at what I said, as they did sometimes. I did not care a bit how much it vexed anybody else. Oh, it was very sad! But when I learnt to watch over my tongue, it became so different. It was hard at first, because you see I had got into such a dreadful habit of it; but God helped me, and that made it easy."

Now, if any of my readers are grieving that they are not loved, that nobody cares for them, let them look into their hearts, and I think they will often find that an evil tongue has a great deal to do with it. Words have a wonderful power for good or ill. Many a little unkind word sticks in the mind like a little thorn, and makes, oh, such a sore place; and gentle, kind words are like rays of sunshine, so bright and comforting, and often more precious than gold. Do try to say kind words, and not to say unkind ones. Pray to God David's prayer: "Lord, keep the door of my lips. Set a seal before my mouth." Say it when you feel inclined to be angry or discontented—when you feel an ungentle answer rising in your heart. Don't be satisfied when you go to bed at night unless you have gained some victory over your tongue during the day, and said something kind and cheering whenever you could. Do but try this earnestly, prayerfully, humbly, and I don't think you will long have to complain that nobody loves you; and, what is more precious still, you will be following in the steps of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."—Young Reaper.

A STORM AT SEA—THE RESCUE.

"Mother, you will let me go?" A terrible storm was sweeping along the wild coast of North Devonshire. The Dymouth life-boat is prepared to make its way to a foreign vessel which, at some short distance from the land, is showing signs of dire distress. The life-boat crew is complete, with the exception of one man. Young Will Carew, a Dymouth fisher-lad and an expert sailor, is offering to fill the vacant place. At first he bends down gently to a woman, who stands beside him on the dreary shore, and it is his clear, brave voice that we hear above the raging of the storm.

"Mother, you will let me go?" The mother has been a widow only six months. Her husband was a fisherman; he put out one bright day last spring, for the last time, in a fishing-boat, upon a delusively calm sea. A sudden squall came on; broken fragments of the boat were seen next morning on the beach, but the fisherman returned no more to home and love. And now the son asks permission to brave the horrors of the sea, which his father found so pitiless.

A fierce, passionate refusal rises to the woman's lips. But her sad eyes move slowly toward the distressed vessel; she thinks of the many loved lives in jeopardy within it; thinks, with a sudden pang of agonized pity, of many distant, dear homes in peril of bereavement. She turns to the boy, and her voice is calm and courageous as his own:

"Go, my son. And may God Almighty go with you, and bring you safe back to your mother's heart."

Hurriedly she leaves the beach; hurriedly seeks her desolate home, and alone she wrestles with the pain of her old sorrow and her new fear.

Morning dawns again. The storm has spent itself. Sullenly the waves are tossing their haughty heads, but the sea's worst fury is over at last. A gallant vessel has gone down upon the waters, full filled its noble task, and all hands on board the vessel have been saved.

Why does young Will Carew linger in hesitation outside his mother's door? Bravest of the brave he has shown himself throughout the night. Why does he shrink from the proud welcome that awaits him from the heart nearest to his own? Beside him stands a tall, worn man—a man whom he has rescued from a watery

grave; a man whose eyes, full of tenderness, never leave his own. Around the two throng Dymouth villagers; many hands are thrust toward the man in happy recognition.

"Who will dare to tell her?" So speaks a voice well nigh choked with emotion.

"I will." And Will Carew makes his way through the awe-struck crowd. Another moment, and he is in his mother's arms. He feels and knows for the first time the whole depth of that wondrous maternal love which Love Omnipotent has chosen as its best earthly token.

"Mother, listen. I have a tale for your ears. May God teach me how to tell it right. One of the men saved last night was a Dymouth fisherman." The boy's voice is soft and grave, but it is evident that he studies it only with a strong effort.

"A fearful storm had overtaken him upon the sea, one day not many months ago. He was observed and saved by a foreign vessel. The vessel was outward bound. Away from home, from wife, from kindred, the man was forced to sail; and by wife and kindred he was mourned as dead. He arrived at the vessel's destined port, only to set sail again with the first ship bound for England. Last night he found himself within sight of home; but a wild storm was raging on land and sea, and once more the man stood face to face with a terrible death. Help came in his need; help God-sent, God-directed. And—"

The boy breaks down now. On his knees, by his mother's feet, he clasps her hands convulsively in his, and his voice comes only through his thick sobs: "Mother, darling, try to bear the happy truth. When your brave heart—a heart which, in the midst of its own sorrow, could feel for the sorrow of others, sent me forth last night to the succor of the distressed, you knew not—how should you know?—that you sent me to the rescue of my dear father's life. God gave him to me. God has given him, mother, back to our grateful love."

Not another word is spoken. Locked in each other's arms, mother and son pour out their hearts in a flood of unspeakably happy tears.

A step is heard; the rescued man stands by his own fireside, remembering, with deep emotion, that his place there has been won for him by the skill and courage of his son.

With a cry of wild joy, the mother rushes forward, and her head finds its long-lost place upon her husband's breast. Ah! Love, supreme, unutterable! Strange, indeed, are the paths through which thy Divine wisdom leads thy children to happiness! In mute reverence we bow before the mighty Tenderness which crowns and blesses earthly love.—Olive Leaf.

MR. SPURGEON'S COW.

My grandfather was a very poor minister, and kept a cow, which was a very great help in the support of his children—he had ten of them;—and the cow took the "stagners" and died.

"What will you do now?" said my grandmother.

"I cannot tell what we shall do now," said he, "but I know what God will do; God will provide for us. We must have milk for the children."

The next morning there came £20 to him. He had never made application to the fund for the relief of ministers; but on that day there were £5 left when they had divided the money, and one said, "There is poor Mr. Spurgeon down in Essex, suppose you send it to him." The chairman—a Mr. Morley of his day—said "We had better make it £10, and I'll give £5." Another £5 was offered by another member, if a like amount could be raised, to make it up to £20; which was done. They knew nothing about my grandfather's cow; but God did, you see; and there was the new cow for him. And those gentlemen in London were not aware of the importance of the service which they had rendered.—Spurgeon.

WHAT AN ARMLESS WOMAN CAN DO.

"Where there's a will, there's a way;" and an armless woman in England has shown what can be accomplished by energy and perseverance:

An armless woman at Jevinton, England, whose marriage has just occurred, is a remarkable instance of what may be accomplished by perseverance, under the most adverse circumstances. Her name is

Charlotte Wickerson, and she was born without arms. Yet she has acquired the power of using her feet, especially her left foot, for all domestic purposes; and amongst other things she manages to do fine needlework and fancy embroidery for sale. She is a skillful cook, dresses herself completely with very little aid, and besides sweeping the kitchen and dusting the rooms can make the beds. From an account of this remarkable woman, it appears that she is a very good reader, writes very nicely and rapidly, is a member of the choir at the parish church, and has learned to play upon a concertina. Most of her work is performed sitting on the ground. Considering the perseverance she must have put forth to overcome such peculiar difficulties, there is every reason to believe that she will prove as useful a wife as many who are blessed with the full complement of members.

LIVINGSTONE'S TOMB.

A large black marble tombstone has been laid over the grave of the late Dr. Livingstone, in Westminster Abbey. The stone bears a long inscription in gold letters as follows:

Brought by Faithful Hands, Over Land and Sea, Here Rests David Livingstone, Missionary, Traveller, Philanthropist, Born March 19, 1813, At Blantyre, Lanarkshire, Died May 1, 1873. At Chittambo's Valley, Utiaka. For thirty years his life was spent in an unwearying effort to evangelize the native races, to explore the undiscovered secrets, and abolish the desolating Slave Trade of Central Africa.

Where with his last words he wrote, "All I can do in my solitude is, may Heaven's rich blessing come down on every one—American, English, Turk—who will help to heal this open sore of the world."

On the right hand edge of the stone are the two following lines: Tantus amor veri—Nihil est quod noseere malim, Quam Fluvii causas per secula tanta latentes.

And on the left hand edge the following text: Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice.

FANCIFUL INTERPRETATIONS.

In his essay on Church Exemption, Rev. H. L. Morehouse cites the minister who, in expounding Prov. xxvii. 27, "And thou shalt have goat's milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance of thy maidens," said: "Milk denotes nourishment, goats signify sinners; hence the passage teaches that it is the will of God that the church should milk the goats—in other words, get all the money it needs from sinners."

We recall an ingenious and startling interpretation which we once heard from a Baptist minister at the West, of the passage in Mark xi, where our Lord bids the disciples provide an ass for him to ride upon; and the disciples "went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without, in a place where two ways met; and they loose him," etc. "Now," said the interpreter, "we have here a parable. The ass is the minister of the Gospel. He is at the dividing of two ways. On the one hand, he feels that the Lord calls him to preach the Gospel. On the other hand, he must labor to support his family. He cannot move in either direction. He is tied. The disciples represent the church of Christ; it is the business of the church to "loose him," by providing for the support of his family, so that he [the ass, that is, the minister] can go and preach the Gospel."

The old ministers used to spiritualize the parables; as, for example, that of the Good Samaritan. The wounded traveller, of course, is the sinner. The priest is the Moral Law. The Levite is the Ceremonial Law, which is equally vain. The Samaritan is the New Dispensation. The beast is—we really forget what. The inn is the Church of Christ. The two pence are perhaps the two sacraments, and so on.

On this principle, we can make the Bible teach anything. But this is not exposition; it is not interpretation; it is not exhibiting the mind of the Spirit.

The finest composition of human nature, as well as the finest china, may have flaws in it, though the pattern may be of the highest value.