

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1881.

FOURTH QUARTER.

Lesson IX.—NOVEMBER 27.

THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS.

Numbers xxi. 1-9.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 7-9.

The Book of Numbers records the marches and organization of the army of Israel. At one point in their journeys, the events of this lesson occurred. They not only had interest in that day, but from the use Jesus made of the chief event, it has long stood as a conspicuous symbol of salvation. Thirty-nine years intervened between the ceremonial appointments, just studied, and the lesson now in hand.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."—John iii. 14.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Serpent in the Wilderness, Num. xxi. 1-9.
T. Spying out the Land, Num. xiii. 16-33.
W. Distrusting the Lord, Num. xiv. 1-25.
T. Wrath upon Israel, Psa. lxxxviii. 12-35.
F. Sorrow worketh Repentance, 2 Cor. vii. 1-10.
S. The Serpent a Type of Christ, John iii. 1-16.
S. Salvation through one Uplifted, Num. xxi. 1-9.

SALVATION THROUGH ONE UPLIFTED.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Sin, Vss. 1-5. II. Suffering, Vs. 6. III. Salvation, Vss. 7-9.

QUESTIONS.—In what wilderness was this serpent lifted up?

I. Vss. 1-5.—What journey followed this victory? Trace it upon the map. Why were the people greatly discouraged? Was there any sin in this? In what did they sin? Why was it sinful to speak against Moses? Why to speak against God?

II. Vs. 6.—How did the Lord punish Israel's sin? How are the effects of sin described in Rom. v. 12?

III. Vs. 7-9.—For what did the people ask Moses to pray? What answer did the Lord make to this prayer? What was the result? Who is the Son of man? How was he lifted up? (John xii. 32, 33.) Who were saved by the serpent? Who may be saved by Christ.

The Israelites lingered about a year in the vicinity of Mount Sinai, where they erected the Tabernacle, received laws and institutions from Jehovah, and were disciplined in organization and worship. At length, "on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year," (x. 11, 12), "they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sinai," and went on their way. They soon reached the wilderness of Paran, and arrived at Kadesh, which was on the southern frontier of the land of Canaan. From thence Moses sent out the twelve spies, who went by a direct route into the promised land as far as Hebron and Eschcol, and, after forty days, returned with evidences of the fruitfulness of the country; but ten of them gave so evil a report of the dangers in the way, that the people were terrified and refused to go up and possess the land. In consequence of this unbelief, God turned them back and kept them wandering in the wilderness of Paran until that generation should die. Of the history of this period of thirty-eight years, we know nothing. But now, in the beginning of the fortieth year since leaving Egypt, the new generation of Israel re-assembled at Kadesh, to make the final advance. Three or four ways into Canaan were before them, all attended with difficulties. The most desirable was through the land of the Edomites, who refused them passage, and compelled them to go southward, around their country. At this point our lesson begins.

NOTES.—I. The Vow, (Vs. 1-3).

Verses 1.—King Arad the Canaanite. Rather, the Canaanite king of Arad. The south. The lower part of the land of Canaan. Here the Amorites, one of the six nations of Palestine (Ex. iii. 8) dwelt, and this king may have belonged to that tribe. The way of the spies (xiii. 21). Some consider the Hebrew word rendered spies, as a proper name, Atharim.

Verses 2.—Vowed a vow. They turned

to the Lord for help, and made a vow devoting the cities of this king to utter destruction, if God would grant his favor. This meant that they would take none of the spoil for themselves, but make the whole a religious and unredeemable offering to the Lord. For the nature of this vow or ban, see Lev. xxvii. 28, 29. Compare Saul's sin in failing to utterly destroy Amalek, in 1 Sam. i. 15.

Verses 3.—Utterly destroyed them. It is not likely that this was done at that time. Doubtless they met the king again in battle and defeated him.

II. Sin, (Vs. 4, 5).

Verses 4.—Journeyed from Mount Hor. Upon receiving the refusal of the king of Edom to the courteous request of Moses to pass through his dominions, they had turned southward from Kadesh to Mount Hor. There Aaron died, and the people mourned him thirty days. Dean Stanley says of Mount Hor: "It is one of the very few spots connected with the wanderings of the Israelites which admits of no reasonable doubt." From this point they journeyed still southward, to compass (go around) the land of Edom. This took them by the way of the Red Sea, not the Gulf of Suez, which was the Red Sea of the Exodus, but the eastern arm of the sea, now known as the Gulf of Akabah, at the head of which was Eziongeber, where they had encamped before on their march from Sinai (33, 35). Thence they passed up through the mountains to the eastern desert, so as to make the circuit of the land of Edom. The Edomites, or descendants of Esau, were relatives of the Israelites. Much discouraged because of the way. For several reasons: 1. At unexpected difficulties, in the hostility of the nations which were between them and their destination. 2. They were traveling in the direction opposite to the promised land. 3. They found themselves no farther in their course than they were thirty-nine years before. 4. The necessity of a long circuitous route through the worst part of a sandy desert, filled with every kind of discomfort. According to Keil, it was "a horrible desert, with a loose sandy soil and drifts of granite and other stones, where terrible landstorms sometimes arise from the neighborhood of the Red Sea; and the want of food might very frequently be accompanied by the absence of drinkable water."

Verses 5.—The people spake against God and against Moses. The human heart is ever the same. The murmurings here are represented in 1 Cor. x. 9, as tempting Christ, probably because he was the angel Jehovah who went before them in the cloud. Disappointment led to ingratitude, and a depreciation of the common blessings of a daily sustenance. Light bread. Thus sneeringly they spake of the miraculous manna, as of something without substance or nutritious qualities, and calculated to bring satiety and disgust. And yet this was "angel's food," (Psa. lxxviii. 25), and on its strength they had made toils and journeys for near forty years.

III. Penalty, (Vs. 6). The Lord sent fiery serpents. Whether the "fiery" refers to the bright, red color of the serpents, or to the violent inflammation which their bite occasioned, is not known. They bit the people. They were God's messengers, teaching the people that sin is an evil thing, and bears a dreadful penalty. Much people died. The bite was incurable; the poison rapid in its effects, the suffering terrible, and the death speedy.

IV. Penitence, (Vs. 7). We have sinned. Words difficult to utter with the heart, but evidently sincere upon this occasion. Moses prayed for them. His meekness and forgiving spirit had often been tested, and shine out brightly here.

V. Salvation, (Vs. 8, 9). Make thee a fiery serpent. The people had asked Moses to pray the Lord to "take away the serpents." The prayer was answered, but the method was one which was to foretell Christ. Moses was commanded to make "a fiery serpent" out of brass, or rather copper, in imitation of the deadly reptile. Most likely it was colossal in size, so as to be seen all over the camp. When he looketh upon it he shall live. Special interest gathers about this scene, because Christ teaches us that this brazen serpent was a type of himself; the bitten Israelites, of the sinners; and the saving look, of saving faith, (John iii. 14, 15). As salvation came to the Israelite by a look, so salvation comes to the sinner by looking on Christ with the eye of faith.

The brazen serpent, preserved as a relic by Israel, afterwards became a snare to them, and was destroyed by King Hezekiah. See 2 Kings xviii. 4.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Our lesson to-day tells us about the time when the children of Israel were very near the Promised Land. Nearly all of the men and women who left Egypt the night of the Passover, had died on the way. The boys and girls had grown to be men and women. God had fed them since they were little children with bread from heaven? They began to find fault, just as their fathers had done forty years before.

God sent a dreadful punishment to the people. Listen while I read about it. Read verse 6.

No medicine could make the people well; the bites poisoned them, so that many died.

All have been bitten by a serpent worse than those fiery serpents. Sin is the serpent. Sin has bitten every man, woman and child in this world. Read a part of our Golden Text. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

Now, although Jesus died to save us all, some do not care for Jesus. They do not believe they need Jesus to save them; they will not look up to Jesus, and ask him to take away their sins. What will become of such sinners? What will become of those sinners who believe in Jesus and look up to him for forgiveness?

Explain the words "perish" and "eternal."

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

Booth's Department.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 145.

The primals once seemed a stern, bold sage, But fled because he feared a woman's rage.

- 1. One born a prince and heir despised his crown, For hunger made him dare to lay it down.
2. This city merchant heard the gospel word, At once her heart was stirred to obey her Lord.
3. This man at eventide did meditate, Before he met his bride and knew his fate.
4. He was a perfect man, and, fearing God, Though tried by Satan's plan, could kiss the rod.
5. Of this Jehovah said, He can speak well.
6. She stood and silent prayed her grief to tell.

CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

262. Who was I?

I was born in a time of great trial to my countrymen. While still young, I was enabled to do a great kindness to my brother. I lived to see my people delivered out of danger, and took a prominent part in the rejoicings. After this, in consequence of my wrong-doing I was punished severely, but owing to my brother's intercession the penalty was removed.

263. Form a diamond of words of the following:

- 1. A feline's head.
2. A bag.
3. A valuable wild animal.
4. A leafy potable vegetable.
5. Music from metal plates.
6. The first home of a chicken.
7. What forms two-thirds of the organ of sight.

264. Form a square of words of:

- 1. The national emblem of England.
2. To leave out.
3. To separate.
4. An abbreviation of Henrietta.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 144.

- 1. Unbelief....Matt. xiii. 58; xvii. 20.
2. Noah.....Gen. vi. 22; Heb. xi. 7.
3. Knowledge.Luke xi. 52; Pro. viii. 10.
4. Nicodemus.John iii. 10 [xv. 22.
5. Obey.....Exod. xxiii. 21; 1 Sam.
6. Wisdom.....2 Chron. i. 11; Prov.
7. Nine.....Luke xvii. 17; [iii. 15. UNKNOWN. Acts xvii. 23.

ANSWERS TO CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

261. Imperfect Poetry. Oh, make thy life all pure and true Fill it with deeds of high endeavor; Be brave to dare, be strong to do That which thy God approveth ever. Let patience, gentleness, and love, Crown e'en thy name with thoughts of sweetness; So shalt thou walk all fear above, A woman in thy rich completeness.

- 262. Jeremiah. Jer. xxvii. 2.
263. Ezekiel. Ex. viii. 7, 8.
264. Jeremiah xxiii. 15.
265. Joel iii. 18.
266. Wind lass.
267. Insect.
268. A stone.

How the Answer came.

It was mother's last prayer. She had prayed over each of us, and her voice was sinking fast, as she clasped her arms around my brother's neck, and pleaded with God for him. We could not catch all the words; but no tongue can describe the tender pathos of the dear voice, as she realized her last opportunity of prayer on earth, and knew that her only son was without Christ.

Every time we approached the bed, she motioned for us to bring him with us to heaven; and to him she often feebly repeated, "My love, come." When the sweet mother lips could no more speak, she raised a trembling finger and pointed up. This was her last act of love, save the parting smile, which left its peaceful halo on the dear face when all was over.

I think my sister and I fully expected our brother's conversion then and there; but, "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." There were to be trials of our faith, perseverance in prayer, and a great trust in the Almighty, ere the answer came.

Four years passed away. We were sometimes led through deep waters, and again walked in pleasant places; but during neither did we see the change in my brother's life we so desired. He, so good and true in every other respect, lacked the "one thing needful." On the subject of all subjects he was reticent, and apparently careless.

For several years the whole community had seemed given over to the gaieties of society. Spirituality was in a direfully lethargic condition, until an awakening during the winter of which I am to speak.

Three churches united for services during the week of prayer; but the meetings were extended from week to week, until seven rolled away. What a precious season. Without any outward excitement, a deep current pressed its way outward, touching hitherto thoughtless hearts, and sweeping away all ceremony. Neighbor pleaded with neighbor in regard to his soul. Christians especially seemed waked out of sleep, and the whole town felt the influence of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

I had a young lady visiting me at the time, and on the first evening of the second week a select company was given by an associate of mine for her sake. I had given my word before I knew the meetings were to be continued, and hence I felt that every duty of courtesy held me to the engagement.

During a morning walk, I met a lady friend, who said, "Are you going to Belle's or to prayer-meeting to night?" "To Belle's, of course," I answered. "I promised, you know." "So have I," she replied, but mamma is very sorry that I am not going with her to church. I think I ought to, but if you go to Belle's, I'll go too." That young lady was not a Christian, and is it any wonder that I bore a heavy conscience through that day? And my brother, what of him? "I must go to church! I must go and pray for him to night, with God's people."

What a mental struggle I had, "There is no harm in the gathering, just a few friends at the house of lovely Christian people. I need not miss another meeting after this one. I may be considered eccentric, and do more harm than good if I stay away. My friend will not wish to go without me, my brother will think me rude."

Such arguments as these floated through my brain but to confront sterner facts, my brother and friend both unconverted; my example to them, besides my influence on the lady I had met in the morning.

My brother was not pleased when I told him I could not go with him, because I felt it my duty to attend meeting. "Our friends will consider it a lame excuse," he said, "so I will simply tell them you could not come." "Tell them the truth," I replied, and then he and my friend went off without me.

Satan, even there, tried to tempt me with misgivings as to whether I had done my duty; but when Mr. A., one of the ministers, arose and said, "A sister desires you to pray for her only brother," and the beautiful prayers followed, I was completely melted, and could have cried with the disciples, "It is good for me to be here." I seemed to know God's time had come. The next day my friend went else-

where to visit, and I called upon T., whom I feared I had influenced to attend the social.

She opened her heart to me that afternoon. She said she had been feeling anxious for some weeks, regretted going to Belle's the night before, and if I would take dinner with her, and talk to her, she would be very glad, and would accompany me to meeting that night.

"One thing stands in my way," she said; "the anxious ones are requested to manifest their interest by rising, and that I'll never do."

"Do not worry over that," I answered; "just think of Jesus, and I doubt not if you are in earnest, He will help you do your duty whatever it is."

On our way to church, I proposed our pausing at my house, hoping we might induce my brother to accompany us. He was about starting for a lecture, but when he found we had no escort, he sacrificed his intention, and went with us.

The meeting was a most effectual one. Numbers stood up for prayer, and finally, when we were singing, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by," in spite of her assertions to the contrary, my brave girl friend stood up between my brother and me. There were many who broke down as the timid graceful figure arose, and I could see the large veins standing on my brother's forehead, telling of a fierce struggle within, and how the act had touched him.

It was then my heart seemed paralyzed with joy, for God gave me a glimpse of how it would be, and when, in a few nights more, my boy asked for prayer, it was no surprise to me. I will bless that sweet girl as long as I live.

Oh, weak one, falter not. Remember we each have an influence on some one. Shall it be for good or evil?

There were days, yes, weeks of darkness for my brother. Days when he was tempted to give it all up; when he voluntarily remained from meeting; when he even tried to induce T. to stay at home and receive him; but she was firm, and worked with me for him. There were many loving, helpful hands, but the light was still withheld.

I went night after night, until physically quite worn out, and then doubts began to crowd upon me. One night I tried to talk with my brother, but my lips were sealed. After he had retired, I longed, yes, started several times to his door with some of mother's words on my lips, but as often stole away tearfully, without having spoken.

At last I dropped on my knees sobbing and crying, "O Jesus!—O Jesus!" I could say no more, so just kept repeating the dear name. Ah! he knew the unuttered request, and finally assured me with a peaceful faith. It was long after midnight when I crept in bed by my sister, and fell asleep.

The next night my brother acknowledged tremblingly his love for Jesus, and so mother's prayer was answered. Does she know? I love to think so, and if she does not know, I know that she will in the "sweet by-and-by."—American Messenger.

At one of the ragged schools in Ireland, a minister asked the poor children before him "What is holiness?" Thereupon a poor little Irish boy, in dirty tattered rags, jumped up and said, "Please your reverence, it is to be clean inside." Could anything be truer?—Rev. W. W. Newton.

To be happy the passions must be cheerful and gay—not gloomy and melancholy. A propensity to hope and joy is real riches; one to fear and sorrow, real poverty.

It is better to yield a little than quarrel a great deal. The habit of "standing up," as people call it, for their little rights, is one of the most disagreeable and undignified in the world.

Mind your stops. A compositor, in setting up the toast: "Woman—without her, man would be a savage," got the punctuation in the wrong place, which made it read: "Woman, without her man, would be a savage."

The difference between a cat and a comma is that one has the claws at the end of the paws, while the other has the pause at the end of the clause.