

The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter-Lesson X.—Dec. 9. GIDEON'S ARMY.—Judg. 7: 1-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.—Zech. 4: 6.

Two hundred years have passed since the death of Joshua. The larger part of this time was spent in peace and prosperity, but the Israelites were prone to fall into idolatry, and three times they had gone so far that the punishment spoken of in our last lesson had to be inflicted upon them, and for 45 years out of the 200 they had suffered from the oppressions of the neighboring nations.

ISRAEL OPPRESSED BY THE MIDIANITES AND AMALEKITES.—See Judg. 6: 1-6. The wild hordes of the desert, Midianites, Amalekites, and other nomadic tribes to the number of at least 135,000 "streamed over the fords of the Jordan year by year, migrating thither, with their households and herds. The plains and valleys of Palestine had in all ages been the very "gates of Paradise" to these dwellers in the waste, as indeed they still are to their descendants.

Applications. 1. So God's church during the ages has been exposed to many assaults from the world; sometimes the worldly spirit has overrun it; sometimes the hordes of false doctrines, of dead forms, of ungodly ease, have sought to plunder its treasures. 2. So "the holy land" of each soul, where God should be king, has often been overrun by wrong thoughts, ambitions, lusts of the flesh, hatred, indolence, selfishness.

GIDEON SUMMONED TO DELIVER HIS COUNTRY.—Prophets had been sent to Israel urging its sons to return to Jehovah but the land had been wasted for seven years before they listened to them. An angel from the Lord came to Gideon while he was threshing wheat secretly in a wine-press near his home, to avoid the notice of the Midianitish hordes and appointed him to be the deliverer of the people. Gideon was probably a middle-aged man at this time. God chooses fitting instruments for his work.

Applications. 1. Gideon had the wise caution to make himself sure that he was called of God before he went on with his work.

2. This work to which Gideon was called was practically a revival of religion. All through this history we see that the object was to bring the people back to the love and service of God, and to holier lives.

3. When God has a work to do, he does it through his children.

4. Like Gideon, "prophets and lawgivers and God's heroes ever shrink from great tasks, and are humbled, not exalted, when large fields of service open before them.

GIDEON'S PREPARATION FOR HIS WORK.—All his previous faithfulness in daily life, had been preparing him unconsciously for the great work of his life. He was prepared for his larger work by a lesser duty which required the same qualities, and which tested his fitness. Gideon had a work to do in his own village, and in his father's house. The very day of his call he built an altar on the spot hallowed by the visit of the angel. Joash, his father, had built an altar to Baal, on the top of the cliff, but the new altar to Jehovah could not tolerate such abominations near it. Waiting till darkness fell, Gideon bravely threw down the one, with the help of ten of his slaves, and not only cut down the other, but split it up for fuel; and having laid it on the altar of Jehovah, used it to consume, in sacrifice to Him, a bullock which his father had apparently consecrated to Baal. The citizens were angry when they discovered what Gideon had done, and would have stoned him to death had not Gideon's father defended him by the clever irony that if Baal were really the god they imagined, he could easily defend himself. It was from this event that Gideon was named Jerubbaal, "contender against Baal." Gideon was prepared for his work by divine works proving to him that it was God who had sent him on his great mission; and also enabling him to prove to those he summoned to his

aid, that he was a leader commissioned of God. In answer to a prayer a fleece left out all night was filled with dew, while the ground was dry. Then the next night the fleece was dry, while the ground was wet.

Applications. 1. By daily duties done from worthy motives we are prepared for our life's work.

2. By lesser works faithfully done we are prepared for the larger works God may give us to do.

3. God is ever ready to strengthen our faith, by special acts of his providence, by wonderful answers to prayer.

GIDEON'S ARMY.—Vers. 1-7. Gideon sent messengers to four neighboring tribes, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, and summoned them to come and drive out the invaders. And pitched beside the well of Harod... the hill of Moreh. The well of Harod was a fountain, at the foot of Mt. Gilboa, near the site of Jezreel. It is 150 feet in circumference, and the stream from it is large enough to turn a mill. Northward of this rises little Hermon. The valley opposite little Hermon is about two and a half miles wide; it extends to the Jordan; and the enemy probably had ascended to the heart of the country by it. The plain of Esdraelon has in all ages been the battle-field of Palestine. Here have fought in turn the armies of Assyria, of the Crusaders, and of Bonaparte; and it was on the mountains of Gilboa, at its east end, that Saul and Jonathan perished. The host of the Midianites. The Midianites were a powerful nation of Arabia, which sprang from Midian the fourth son of Abraham, by Keturah. They inhabited chiefly the country east of the Jordan and southward, and for a long time were the virtual rulers of Arabia. The people that are with thee are too many. Though the whole army of the Israelites consisted of only 32,000, that of the Midianites amounted to at least 135,000, or four to one to the Israelites. Lest Israel vaunt themselves against me. As if by their own strength they had gained the victory. The victory would amount to very little unless it taught the people that all their hope was in God, and in obeying him, and thus led them to trust His power and goodness. Whosoever is fearful... let him return. The appeal which Gideon is here directed to make was prescribed in the law (Deut. 20: 8) for every war in which the Israelites should be engaged. It was for the discovery of proper bravery. Depart early from mount Gilead. The only known Mount Gilead was on the other side of Jordan where half the tribe of Manasseh belonged. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; or more than two-thirds of Gideon's army. They were afraid of the Midianites on the opposite heights. They had lost courage. They had not served God faithfully, and knew that they did not deserve his favor. The people are yet to many. It is hardly possible to conceive a severer trial of faith than that to which Gideon's was now subjected. While he doubtless thought his men too few, God saw that they were too many, and ordered a still further reduction.

Bring them down unto the water. The fountain of Harod below them, on the way to meet the Midianites. Every one that lapped of the water with his tongue, as a dog lapped. You have seen a dog running along the bank of a river or in the shallow of a stream, and, without stopping, snatching mouthfuls or tonguefuls of water, never even while slaking his thirst turning aside or pausing from the chase. The men who did not break rank, or stop their march, but dipped their hollowed palm into the stream, and tossed a little into their mouth as they ran, "drank for strength." They employed their hand as the dog employs his tongue,—that is, dipping water with it from the stream. This mode of drinking is often practised in the East. The number of those who did this was 300, and they were placed by themselves. Likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. They bowed down to the brook with their mouths to the water, and drank leisurely, stopping in their march. All the rest of the 10,000 drank in this way.

1. The 300 showed more eagerness and earnestness for the battle, and were therefore more strong and courageous.

2. The 300 showed more care for others, and for the cause, in so drinking as not to hinder the march.

3. It can scarcely be doubted that those who threw themselves on the ground and drank freely were the more self-indulgent. Gideon needed men of endurance, and caring more about the grim task they had to do than about ease.

4. The most apparent natural reason seems to be that, as the season was hot, and most of the soldiers would be thirsty, all but a few of the freshest or least fatigued of them would be apt to drink a great deal.

5. Probably the more prevalent Jewish interpretation is also correct. The worship of Baal was accompanied by prolonged prostrations, so that his worshippers became accustomed to this attitude, and it was more natural for them to assume it in drinking. By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you. It must have required great faith on the part of Gideon and the few who remained. Gideon should not be blamed for anxiety. He seems never to have doubted God's ability and willingness to save Israel, but only his own call to work out the deliverance.

Why so Small a Number chosen. In order that the Israelites might plainly see that the victory was from God. To shame and humble his people for their past cowardice in submitting to Midian.

We should never be discouraged because our numbers are small, and our instrumentalities feeble. "One with God is a majority." Gideon's victory was a prophecy of almost all the victories of God over evil.

THE BATTLE AND THE VICTORY.—Ver. 8. So the people took victuals, etc., their trumpets. Trumpets were not usually in the hands of common soldiers, nor were lamps, or rather, torches. These belonged only to leaders, so that each of the hundred would appear to the Midianites as a leader of a large band. The pitchers were to cover the torches from being seen, making, as it were, a dark lantern.

Gideon's attack was made at midnight. The 300 men were divided into three companies; and they seem to have stretched in a line nearly or quite around the enemy's camp, the men placed at considerable distance one from another, as the object was not to fight, but to terrify. The stratagem of Gideon was simple. The torches were concealed in the large pitchers, or bread-jars, until the men had taken their stations, so that their movement might not be detected. It was the duty of the leader of a band to blow the trumpet and give the war-cry. By him, in a night attack, stood a torch-bearer to light the way, and guide the soldiers so that they might always know where to find the leader. The breaking of the jars, the flashing of lights, the deafening blare of trumpets, aroused the enemy from sleep. The Israelites seemed to be present in overwhelming numbers. Each heathen in the darkness mistook his neighbor for a foe. They slew one another. The panic was universal. They fled in confusion, and scattered over the country, throughout which Gideon immediately sent runners to arouse the people. The fords of the Jordan were seized by the Israelites, and the destruction of the invaders was complete. The Midianites were so utterly annihilated that they do not reappear on the page of history.

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