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[FROM PELGOUET'S NOTES.]

FIRST QUARTER.—Lesson 3.—Jan. 17.

THE FAITHFUL RECHABITES.—

JER. 35: 12-19.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*For unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment.*—JER. 35: 14.

Only a few years pass away after the warnings and prophecies of evil in our last lesson, before they begin to be fulfilled. The armies of Nebuchadnezzar, now the general, but soon to be the king, of the new empire of Babylon, are devastating the territory of Israel and Judah, and approaching Jerusalem. The people have grown worse in spite of the warnings, but Jeremiah does not cease his efforts to stay the oncoming tide of corruption and calamity. This lesson is an example of the earnest, novel, striking methods the prophet uses to enforce his teachings.

I. THE RECHABITES.—(1) THEIR ORIGIN. The Rechabites were a nomad tribe, not of Jewish, but of Kenite, race, who were a branch of the Midianites, i.e., the descendants of Midian, the son of Abraham, and his wife Keturah,—so that they were related to the Jews. In

the days of Moses, the Kenites pastured their flocks on the southern slopes of the Sinai Mountains, in the southern angle of Arabia between the two branches of the Red Sea. Moses, when he fled hither from Pharaoh of Egypt, married a daughter of this race. They were very kind to the Israelites as they passed through this region on their way to Palestine. Moses invited his father-in-law, Jethro, to go with him to the promised land, but he refused; but afterwards some of the tribe went, and settled in Southern Judah (Jud. 1: 16; 1 Chron. 2: 55). One family of them went into Northern Israel and settled in Kedesh Naphtali. (Judg. 4: 11) on the Northern Jordan, four miles north-west of the waters of Meron." One of these was Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who slew the general Sisera (Jud. 4: 17, 21).

(II.) THEIR NAME is derived from Rechab, the father or ancestor of their great reformer, Jehonadab. (III.) THEIR DEVELOPMENT. During the great religious decline in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, and continuing after their death, Jehonadab—shortened to Jonadab,—the son of Rechab, organized the Rechabites, consecrating them anew, by a solemn command, to the simple and religious life of their ancestors, as a protest against the luxury, license, and idolatry of the age. He joined with Jehu, king of Israel (B.C. 884), in his crusade against idolatry (2 Kings 10: 15-27).

(IV.) THEIR CREED. (1) They were believers in the true God, for they were descended from Abraham; all their leading names in this chapter (Jer. 35) are compounded with the name of Jehovah; they opposed idolatry; and later on they joined in the temple worship. (2) They were pledged to total abstinence, refusing to drink wine or strong drink. (3) They were to own no fixed property, as houses, vineyards, and lands, but did possess cattle. (4) They were not to settle in cities and villages, nor build houses or cultivate the land, for this would soon bring them to village life; but to live in tents, moving from place to place as they could find pastureage.

(V.) THE OBJECT OF THEIR MANNER OF LIFE. (1) It was a protest against the luxury and vice of the age. (2) It was to maintain among them the purer morality and higher feeling of the desert, contrasted with the laxity and effeminacy of the city life. (3) It was to preserve to them their freedom. Hence, although living among the Israelites, they never became a part of either kingdom.

II. JEREMIAH'S OBJECT LESSON TO ISRAEL.

(I.) THE RECHABITES COMING TO JERUSALEM. Nebuchadnezzar was advancing with a great army of Chaldeans and Syrians upon Judah (Jer. 35: 11). To Jeremiah he seemed like a lion coming up from the thickets of Jordan, breaking the bones of his prey, or like an eagle swooping down on it. Ezekiel compares him to a great eagle, with vast wings of mighty sweep, full of feathers of many colors—the various nations under his banners, and the splendor of his great captains—tearing the branches from the cedars of Lebanon, and breaking off their twigs. Such terror of his fierce warriors filled all lands, that even a few of their wounded men were said to be more feared than an army of other soldiers. They spread terror on every side. The population of the villages and country towns fled to Jerusalem, the strongest walled city in Palestine. Among them came some companions of the Rechabites.

(II.) JEREMIAH POINTING TO THE RECHABITES AS AN EXAMPLE.

Even in Jerusalem the Rechabites did not live in houses, but pitched their black tents in some open place in the city. They were thus made known, and became objects of mark

and of interest to all the people. They must especially have excited the sympathy of those, like themselves, still true to the old religion; cheering them by a living proof that amidst the wide decay of morals, some remained faithful to the God of their fathers. Fidelity so striking was fitted to read a lesson to the community, and it was used for this purpose by Jeremiah. Acting on a prophetic impulse, he brought their sheik and all the encampment to a chamber within the temple precincts. Here he caused large bowls of wine to be set before them, such as were placed before guests at a feast, and invited them to fill their cups from them and drink. The proposal, made in mock earnest, must have been seen in that light, for otherwise nothing could have been in worse taste. Of course all, at once, and without hesitation, declined. They had vowed, they said, to obey the commands of their forefather, Jonadab, and would be true to their pledge. They could not think of touching wine. Jeremiah, turning to the multitude who had witnessed the scene, announced that he had been sent by Jehovah to utter the words of the lesson for to-day.

III. LESSONS TO ISRAEL FROM THIS SCENE.—Vers. 12-16. 12. *The word of the Lord.* Lord, whenever in small capitals as here, is always the translation of the Hebrew word Jehovah. Unto Jeremiah. Probably by some internal impulse or revelation, which carried its own witness to Jeremiah that the message was from God.

13. *The Lord of hosts.* This great God is the God of Israel, and therefore able to save them from their enemies, if they would trust him. Will ye not receive instruction. Will ye give less heed to me, the Lord of hosts and your God, than these Rechabites do to their reformer Jonadab.

14. *Not to drink wine.* This was the most important of the commands to the Rechabites, and the one in which they had just been tested by Jeremiah. They would not even raise grapes or plant vineyards, lest they be tempted to disobey this command. Are performed.

Are maintained in full force. Unto this day. For more than 275 years, and even before Jehonadab's time the rule has been partially kept.

Notwithstanding. The object is to draw a sharp contrast between the obedience of the Rechabites to their father, and the disobedience of the Jews to the commandments of God. Rising early and speaking. As a man in earnest and full of his mission is up betimes in the morning to begin, so God represents himself as wakeful and active, giving up the live-long day to his work, laboring with unwearied patience to reclaim and to save his people, but all in vain.

15. I have sent also: i.e., even after you have disobeyed, I have continued to speak to you, offering forgiveness of the past. And ye shall dwell in the land. The promise annexed to the fifth commandment, for children who obey their parents, is here given to the children of God who obey their Father in heaven. Both are equally true. The children of Israel were never driven from their land except through their own disobedience. And where in all history is there a nation which has perished unless it first disobeyed God's commandments? Righteousness is the only safety of any nation.

(I.) WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR THE NATION. He made them a nation. He gave them perfect law from heaven. He did marvelous wonders for them to awaken their gratitude. He gave them many prophets to teach and to warn them. He led them by His providence. He sent messages of forgiveness. He encouraged them by great and precious promises of rewards for obedience. He punished disobedience.

Well could he say by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, "What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?"

IV. REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.—Vers. 16-19. (I.) PUNISHMENT OF DISOBEDIENCE. 16. Because.—Rev. Ver. "For as much as ye have not hearkened unto me, although the example of the Rechabites was before you."

17. Therefore. Because of their disobedience. The evil that I have pronounced against them: in Deut. 28, Lev. 26, Jer. 25: 8-10. See Notes on the last lesson, and the destruction and devastation there.

Sinners imagine that, because punishment is delayed, it will not come. But these evils, announced more than 800 years before, came to pass at last. Because...they have not heard. Have not taken any notice of the command.

(II.) REWARDS OF OBEDIENCE. 18. House. That is, family or tribe. Kept all his precepts. Not merely that against wine-drinking, but all the others also.

19. Therefore. On account of their obedience. This obedience led, of course, to temperance. It does not follow that God wants us to do all that the Rechabites did, or

that houses and cultivated lands are wrong. It was the spirit of obedience which God commanded, and which he wishes us to imitate. We do not refrain even from strong drink because of the command to the Rechabites, but in obedience to God. And the reward promised to the tribe was the same which is promised to an individual for filial obedience, namely, long life. Shall not want a man. See chap. 33: 17, 18. The meaning of the language is, that the time shall never come when there shall not be a man of the tribe left; the perpetual existence of the tribe is promised; and not only this, but also its perpetual continuance in the service of Jehovah, this being implied in the next clause, stand before me, which is a figure taken from a servant's standing before his master, waiting for his commands, and ready to serve him.

THIS PROMISE HAS BEEN FILLED IN TWO WAYS. (1) By the existence of Rechabites to the present day. Dr. Wolff says the Jews of Jerusalem and Yemen told him he would find the Rechabites of Jer. 35 living near Mecca. He found them near Sanaa. One of them, Mousa by name, in answer to the question, Whose descendants are you? read from an Arabic Bible Jer. 35: 5-11, and said, "You will find us sixty thousand in number." Even as late as October, 1862, an Eastern traveller, Signor Pierotti, read a paper at the meeting of the British Association, stating that he met a tribe calling themselves by this name near the Dead Sea. They had a Hebrew Bible, and told him the same story that had been told Dr. Wolff thirty years before. (2) By incorporation into the tribe of Levi, and so ministering in the temple service. The tribe of Levi was chosen "to stand before God" (Duet. 10: 8, and 18: 5-7). There is evidence that the Rechabites were adopted into the families of Israel, and recognized as belonging to the tribe of Levi; that they ministered thus before the Lord. (3) This promise is fulfilled spiritually in those who adopt the temperance principles of these people. (4) Of course the promise may have been conditional on their continued obedience. But it is implied that they would continue to obey.

LESSONS FROM THE RECHABITES.

1. OBEDIENCE.

God has done all that is possible to help us to obey,—by his Word; by his Spirit; by the teachings and examples of parents and teachers; by his rewards; by his warnings; by his punishments; by the love and atonement and example of Jesus Christ. Apply the subject in these directions:

1. To obedience to parents. Note the promise in the fifth commandment.

2. To obedience to the Government; making us good citizens. Young and old are often careless as to the laws of their country. See how easily some are broken; as, for instance, those against gambling and lotteries, broken by good people in fairs as well as by bad in gambling houses; or the efforts to escape taxation by lying and deceit. So Sunday laws. But what this nation greatly needs is instruction, example, and the principle of obedience.

3. Obedience of individuals to God. The only way to the best life here, and eternal life, is by obedience,—faith that leads to doing God's will. God's laws are the true principles of living.

4. Obedience of nations to God. Prosperity, enduring existence, permanent government, a happy people, can be obtained only through obedience. Immorality and irreligion ruin a nation.

II. TEMPERANCE. The Rechabites were: (1) an example of temperance.

(2) An example of a temperate life in spite of temptations such as all are exposed to.

(3) They were a protest against the luxury and intemperance of their age. They went too far, but that is far better than not to go far enough. The best of all is to go just far enough.

(4) They are an example of the rewards of temperance,—long life, and a religious divine life.

As their temperance came through obedience, so ours comes through obedience.

(1) Obedience to God's Word.

(2) Obedience to the law of Love.

(3) Obedience to Science.

(4) Obedience to Reason.

(5) Obedience to Experience.

No grace is more necessary to the Christian worker than fidelity; the humble grace that marches on in sunshine and storm, when no banners are waving, and there is no music to cheer the weary feet.

No Christian can attain to a state of religious experience in life in which he will not be subject to temptation. For any one to assert that he has reached such a state, affords sufficient evidence that he is laboring under a delusion.

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