

The Reading of the Law.

JULY 29.

JOSHUA VIII: 30-35

Golden Text, Deut. 30: 19.

FOLLOWING up the victory at Ai, Joshua now brought the Israelites in a body to Schechem in the very centre of the country, not for the purpose of making it his headquarters, but in compliance with the express instructions of Moses on two different occasions, Deut. 11: 29; 27: 1-10. The place was well chosen for a ceremony of this kind. *Schechem*—the ancient "Sychar" lies in a beautiful fertile valley between the twin mountains Ebal and Gerizim which rise on either side to a height of 1000 feet above the level of the plain. This was consecrated ground. It was Abraham's first resting place in Canaan. Here he built an altar and worshipped God. Here Jacob also reared an altar and under "Abraham's Oak" buried the strange gods that were found in his household, Gen. 35: 4. Here was Jacob's well, John 4: 6, and here Joseph's bones were soon to be laid, ch. 24: 32. It was, and is still the garden of Palestine. What an imposing spectacle it must have been, as the people in orderly arrangement of their tribes ascended the opposite hillsides—six tribes on each side: the priests and Levites, surrounding the ark of the covenant standing in the valley below. Vs. 30, 31. The altar was built *as Moses commanded* Exo. 20: 25, a simple, inexpensive structure made of the boulder stones that lay around, so that the attention of worshippers might be directed to the sacrifice rather than to the altar, Matt. 23: 18, 19. V. 32. So much of the Law as could be conveniently transcribed was written, graven or painted in distinct characters, not on the altar stones, but on large slabs covered with a coating of cement, Deut. 27: 2. When all was ready, it would seem from v. 35, that Joshua himself read the words that had been written on the stones, as well as other passages from the sacred writings, in tones so distinct and clear that every syllable could be heard by the whole vast multitude. The purpose of the solemnity was to impress upon the people a proper sense of their dependence upon God: To assure them of his blessing so long as they continued faithful to Him; and, on the other hand, to warn them of the curses in store for them should they adopt the idolatrous and wicked practices of the surrounding heathen. Upwards of 600,000 stalwart men, Num. 1: 46—all told, probably not less than two millions of people. Fancy how the loud refrain must have re-echoed from the hills on every side, while men, women and children shouted "Amen"! as each successive period was reached in the reading of the Law. To the people it was in the nature of a sacrament—a solemn engagement to worship and serve Jehovah and none else. Too much dependence is often placed on our own efforts, and far too little on the assistance of the Almighty. The eye and the ear of the people being both addressed, the occasion was calculated to leave an indelible impression; and, with spirits elevated by their brilliant victories in the Land of promise, memory would often revert to the striking scene on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, and in the vale of Sychar.

The Cities of Refuge.

AUGUST 5.

JOSHUA XX: 1-9.

Golden Text, Hebrews, 6: 18.

HERE is an interval of six or seven years between this lesson and last one. Meanwhile, after many arduous struggles the country had been in a great measure subdued. The camp had been removed from Gilgal to Shiloh, 17 miles north of Jerusalem on the road between Bethel and Schechem. Joshua lived there. There the tabernacle was erected and remained for upwards of 300 years. The promised land had been parcelled out to the several tribes by lot, chs. 13-19. Joshua by this time was getting old, ch. 13-1, and he now proceeds to carry out the instructions of Moses in regard to the Cities of Refuge, Deut. 19: 1-13. The need of such places arose out of the state of society then existing. If any one was killed by another it was held to be the duty of the nearest kinsman to avenge the blood of his relative by taking the life of the manslayer. These cities were not to screen criminals, but only to afford the homicide protection from the avenger until he had time to prove whether the death had been accidental, or the result of momentary passion, or of premeditated malice. They thus served the ends at once of justice and mercy. It behoved the local authorities to investigate each case. If the manslayer was found guilty, he was given up to the blood-avenger, if extenuating circumstances appeared, he was to remain in the city, but should he leave it, it would be at the risk of his life. Vs. 7-8. Consult a map for the situation of the cities and see how accessible they were from all quarters. Whether properly called "types of Christ" or not, these cities remind us in many ways of Him who has ever been the refuge and strength of his people in times of trouble. Ps. 46: 1, 2; Prov. 18: 10. They were always available, their gates being open day and night, and they were open to all, rich and poor alike, Isa. 55: 1; Matt. 11: 28. Yet they must be sought after with much effort. He who would reach the city of refuge must be no loiterer; he must make haste, lest he be overtaken. So must the Christian flee from the wrath to come, Matt. 3: 7; Heb. 6: 18. he must *run*, 1 Cor. 9: 24; he must *strive*, Luke 13: 24; he must *fight*, 1 Tim. 6: 12. Only so long as he remained inside the city, was the manslayer safe, Prov. 29: 25; Rom. 8: 1. Only so long as believers abide in Christ is their salvation assured John 15: 4. Christ is our one refuge, we need none other, Acts 4: 12. His atonement is sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world, 1 John 1: 7. The conditions of salvation are so easy that all may avail themselves of the offer, if they only will, Rev. 22: 17. By his word he hath shewn us the way, Ps. 119: 105. God has not only provided a refuge for every sinner, but He has done everything that is possible to aid the sinner to escape to that refuge. The plan of salvation is so simple, plain, and easy that a child can understand it. It is not the Church that saves us, yet the Church is a means of bringing us to the knowledge of Salvation.