

For the Sabbath School.

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON VII.—MAY 13.—EXODUS I., 1-14.

(Israel in Egypt.)

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Our help is in the name of the Lord."—Ps. cxxiv., 8.

TIME.—The time of this lesson extends from the death of Joseph, B.C. 1635, to the birth of Moses, B.C. 1571, — sixty-four years according to the common chronology; or to B.C. 1375, the date of Moses' birth according to many others.

PLACE.—Egypt, particularly the land of Goshen.

CHRONOLOGY.—There is a general agreement of the Bible with the chronology derived from the monuments. But it must be understood that all the dates applied to the Egyptian dynasties are very uncertain and indefinite. The general order is clear, but the exact dates are unknown. The dates given in all the best books on Egypt are tentative only, and vary greatly among themselves. There is no certain chronology, in the Bible or in history, till about B.C. 1000.

DURATION OF THE BONDAGE IN EGYPT.—We have two measures by which to ascertain the duration of the bondage. The First is 480 years of I. Kings vi., 1. The Second is the 430 years of Ex. xii., 40, and Gal. iii., 17.

(1) In I. Kings vi., 1, it is stated that the building of the temple, in the fourth year of Solomon, was in the 480th year after the exodus. The fourth year of Solomon was about B.C. 1012. Add the 480 years (leaving off one year, because neither the fourth nor the 480th were full years), and we have B.C. 1491 as the date of the exodus. The bondage is the preceding 430 years, extending from B.C. 1491 to 1921, the date of Abraham's call from Chaldaea, to enter upon the long, homeless period of himself and descendants, of which 215 years were spent in Egypt.

(2) In Ex. 12 : 40, 41, and Gal. 3 : 17, the duration of the bondage is given as 430 years. The common chronology, as we have seen, makes it extend from the call of Abraham to the exodus, one half of it, or 215 years, being spent in Egypt, and the other half in the wanderings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as pilgrims and strangers. In favour of this view, St. Paul says in Gal. 3 : 17, that from the covenant (or call of) with Abraham to the giving of the law (less than a year after the exodus) was 430 years. But in Gen. 15 : 13, 14, it is said that they should be strangers in a strange land, and be afflicted 400 years, and nearly the same is said in Ex. 12 : 40. But, in very truth, the children of Israel were strangers in a strange land from the time that Abraham left his home for the promised land, and during that whole period of 430 years to the exodus they were nowhere rulers in the land. So in Ex. 12 : 40, it is said that the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years. But it does not say that the sojourning was all in Egypt, but this people who lived in Egypt had been sojourners for 430 years.

On the other hand many think that the 430 years were all spent in Egypt and must date from Jacob's immigration into Egypt. This method necessitates one of two changes. Either we must put the date of Jacob's coming to Egypt some 200 years earlier than the common chronology (1706) to B.C. 1900, which makes room for the 480 years, but confuses the previous dates; or starting with B.C. 1706, the common date of Jacob's immigration, brings the exodus to a little beyond, B.C. 1300. In this case there must be some error in the 480 years of I. Kings 6 : 1, and great difficulty in the numbers given in Judges. The principal reason for this view is that it gives abundant time for the increase of the Israelites from 68 men to the 600,000 of the exodus (see below in v. 7).

1. THE IMMIGRANTS INTO EGYPT.—Vs. 1-6. By a series of strange providences, and for the purpose of developing and training them into a people who could embody the kingdom of God on earth, Jacob and his sons had come into Egypt. The names are given here of the heads of the tribes or families. It is to be noticed that they came over with man and his household, which fact is of some importance in

computing the time needful for their increase to 600,000 men who went out from Egypt in the exodus (Num. 1 : 46). A hint as to the numbers of the households may be gained from the fact that in Abraham's household there were at least 318 men who could bear arms (Gen. 14 : 14). "The servants were reckoned as part of the household, and were admitted to the covenant and recognized as Israelites (Gen. 17 : 27).

When the Israelites left Egypt they numbered about 600,000 men (Num. 1 : 46), which implies a population of about 2,000,000. From Jacob to Joshua was eleven generations, according to I. Chron. 7 : 23-27. The third generation, Ephraim, was born before Jacob came to Egypt in 1706. For the remaining eight generations, a very simple calculation shows that if each of the 55 males (leaving out Jacob and his sons from the 68 male descendants at this time) should have less than an average of four male children, the total would amount to 600,000 males in the 215 years to the exodus. But if we take into account that in addition there were considerable numbers in their households (v. 1), from whom there would also be descendants, it is not at all improbable that the numbers should reach that sum in these two centuries.

THE PERIOD OF OPPRESSION.—Vs. 9-14. The children of Israel are more and mightier than we, not than the whole of Egypt but than of the province connected with Israel. In Goshen, Israel might be greatly more numerous than the Egyptians, as in Hungary, the Slavs are, than the Magyars. But the expression may mean only, too many for us, unmanageably strong."—MacGregor. The Egyptians were weakened by the great wars and internal conflicts. The new dynasty would of course have many powerful enemies and many discordant elements, so that at first the king would feel the need of guarding against every danger. The monuments show that Rameses II. had long and disastrous wars with the Hittites and others.

AND THEY MADE THEIR LIVES BITTER WITH HARD BONDAGE.—The Israelites were employed in forced labours (probably in detachments), but were not owned by individual taskmasters. (See v. 11.) In mortar and in brick. It was the practice of the Egyptian monarchs to employ their criminals and captives in war, in building. Bricks were a favourite building material, especially in the alluvial valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile, where stone is scarce. Egyptian brick were of different sizes, but all of them considerably larger than ours.—Todd. The works built by the Israelites were probably not the pyramids, which are supposed to have been built centuries before this time, but store cities, the great buildings of Rameses' capital at Zoan, or Tanis, perhaps also his great work upon the Sweet-Water Canal, and the great wall which extended from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, nearly parallel with the present Suez Canal, but farther east.

THE SCHOOL OF ADVERSITY.—In this hard school the Israelites learned some useful lessons.

1. The sufferings were not unjust, for the Hebrews had doubtless greatly corrupted themselves in Egypt, and had become in their masses very like the people around them. This was in them a sin that could not pass unpunished. God cannot suspend His moral laws even for His own people.—J. Carr.

2. To wean them from Egypt; to make them willing to leave when God's time came. Otherwise they might have become so pleasantly settled in business, so encumbered with property, that, as many ages later in Babylon, they would not be willing to enter upon the hard and dangerous enterprise of journeying to Canaan.

3. The oppression would keep them separate from the Egyptians, prevent intermarriages, and preserve from the debasing contact with idolatry. It was the danger from the surrounding idolatry that was one great reason in the divine providence why they were sent away from Canaan into Egypt.

4. Their oppression united them into one nation, binding them together in common sorrows, dangers, and hopes and plans. A common enemy makes a united people.

5. It turned their hearts toward the God of their fathers. It awakened religious feelings, hopes, and needs. The Egyptian gods were their enemies. Only Jehovah could be their help. The promises to the fathers became clearer and more precious to them.