

GOLDEN TRUTHS.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF 1877.

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DECEMBER 2. Morning. SPIES SENT OUT. (Numb. xii 1-3, 17-33.) The people were now on the borders of the land, and, according to Deut. i 22, they asked Moses to send spies to search it out. He inquired of the Lord, and the Lord gave permission. Each tribe furnished a man; and they were commanded to go and see what sort of a land it was. They were to go into the Neglib, or south country, which was dry and arid, and thence into the mountainous parts of Canaan inhabited by Hittites, etc., etc. (Deut. i. 7-19). The time was about August, when the first grapes ripen. They went (ver. 21) and searched the land from the desert of Zin to Rehob, near Hamath, i.e., from south to north, or through its whole extent. This is the general statement. Then follow some particulars. They came to Hebron, or Kirjath-Arba, a very ancient city, having been built seven years before Zoan-Tanis, in Egypt, the residence of Pharaoh in the time of Moses. There (ver. 22, 23) they cut down clusters of grapes in the valley of Eschol, which received its name from this circumstance. The branch was so large that it was carried on a pole by two men; they also found pomegranates, figs, and other fruits, which grow in this neighbourhood in rich profusion. They were forty days absent, and on their return they brought a report that the land was indeed a fruitful one; but ten of the men said that the people were so strong, and their cities so great that the Israelites were unable to go and possess the country. Caleb, and with him Joshua (ch. xiv. 6) gave a different account, and said they were able to go up; but the rest laid stress upon the difficulties, and talked about the giants of the land (ver. 28-33).

Afternoon. THE DELIVERANCE. (Acts xxvii. 27-44.) Long was the ship driven about in the Adriatic Sea, when the sailors thought that they were not far from land. They threw out a line, and found that they were in twenty fathoms of water, and next in fifteen fathoms. Then, fearing lest they should be dashed on the rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for day. Ships were then constructed to anchor in this way, and not from the bows. (See Smith, p. 130-2). Anxiously they longed for day, not knowing what might happen. Then the seamen, to save their lives lowered the boat, under pretence of casting anchors from the bows also, which was sometimes done; but Paul told the centurion that all hands would be wanted, and the soldiers cut the ropes, or hawsers of the boat, and let her go adrift. They then lightened the ship by casting the wheat with which she was laden into the sea, and when day broke they cut off the anchors, loosed the rudder band, hoisted the artemon, or foresail, to the wind, and made for a creek which they observed. They knew not the land, but it was the island Melita (Malta). The creek had a sandy bottom, and was in a place where two seas met, which accords with modern observations of the island; they saw the ship aground, and her forepart stuck fast on the mud, whilst the hinder part was broken by the violence of the waves. The soldiers (ver. 42-44) were awed, and would have killed the prisoners; the centurion saved them specially for Paul's sake. See the influence of one good man. All escaped, but some with great difficulty. A comment on Ps. cvii. 30, which learn.

Dec. 9. Morning. ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF. (Numb. xiv. 1-10; 26-31.) The report of the ten spies caused sad results. The people again murmured, and even proposed to make themselves a captain, and return to Egypt. Was ever such infatuation? Moses and Aaron were deeply distressed, and Caleb and Joshua rent their clothes. They sought to encourage the people, and assured them that it was a good land, and that Jehovah would bring them into it; but the congregation were disposed to stone them, when a special manifestation of the Divine glory was seen, which probably deterred them from their purpose. Moses interceded for the people; but it was now too late, and God resolved that that generation should not enter Canaan (ver. 26-29). All that were twenty years old and upwards should die in the wilderness, for they should wander in it for forty years until that came to pass; and the next generation only, with Caleb and Joshua, should possess the land. Heb. iv. 11 tells us that they could not enter in because of unbelief. They did not trust in God after

all that He had done for them; and this was the result. A promise of rest is given to us also—of the rest of faith now—of the Sabbath rest, or rest of heaven, hereafter. Let us take heed that we do not lose it through the same want of faith in God.

Afternoon. PAUL IN MELITA (Acts xxviii. 1-15.) On reaching the shore they found where they were by inquiring of the inhabitants. There is no doubt that Melita was Malta, near Sicily, which now belongs to the British crown. The islanders spoke a strange language, whence Luke calls them *barbarians*, but the word does not imply that they were a wild people; verse 2 shows the contrary. They were of Phœnician descent, and spoke a Punic dialect. They kindled a fire to warm the shipwrecked, and out of it came a viper, which the fire had aroused from its torpidity, and it fastened on Paul's hand, and probably bit him. The natives knew that its bite was fatal, and they supposed that Paul was a murderer, and would presently fall down dead; but the promise of Jesus (Mark xvi. 18) was now fulfilled, and Paul shook off the reptile, and felt no harm. It is said that there are no venomous reptiles in Malta now, but this fact is not to be attributed to the circumstance here narrated, for vipers often disappear as land is completely cultivated. Now the people thought that Paul was a god (verse 6), so soon did they pass from one extreme to another. Malta belonged to the province of Sicily, and had a Roman governor, called here the first man of the island. His name was Publius, and he received some of the party, including Paul and Luke, Aristarchus, and Julius, the centurion, as his guests for three days. He was richly repaid, for his father was suffering from dysentery, as Luke, who was a physician, intimates. Luke did not use his medical skill on his behalf, but Paul healed him by miracle. This led to many others, who were sick, being healed, and then the gratitude of the people was unbounded, and they gave their guests everything they need. The party remained in Malta three months from November to January of the year 61-2. A ship from Alexandria, having engraven on her prow the sign of Castor and Pollux, the tutelary deities of Greek and Roman sailors, had wintered in the island, but in February proceeded on her voyage to Italy, and in this ship the whole party sailed again. They reached Syracuse, S.E. coast of Sicily, eighteen miles distant from Malta; then, tacking about on account of the wind, or fetching a compass, they came to Rhegium, in Lower Italy, and thence, having a favourable south wind, they reached Puteoli in one day. This port was the most famous one in those days on the western coast of the promontory, and here Egyptian vessels were accustomed to unload their cargoes of grain. It was also the custom for travellers to proceed from here to Rome by land. Paul thought himself a debtor to all kinds of people (Rom. i. 14), and was glad to benefit all.

Dec. 16. Morning. MOSES' LAST BLESSING. (Deut. xxxiii.)—This is a grand chapter. Moses was now near his end, and, like a father (Gen. xlix.), he blessed the children of Israel before his death. He referred to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, where God came with ten thousand of saints, i.e., angels (Ps. lviii. 17, Gal. iii 19), and he spoke of God's great love to His people. He had made Moses king over them, and now as their king, representing Jehovah Himself, he gave the tribes his blessing. (Ver. 6.) *Reuben* (comp. Gen. xlix. 3). He was the first born, and the prayer was, Let him live and not die, and let his people be a small number, for for this is the meaning. Simeon was next in age, but he is passed by, for he was to be scattered abroad (Gen. xlix. 7). Ver. 7. *Judah* was the royal tribe, who was to lead the way as the champion of his brethren. Ver. 8-11. *Levi* was the priestly tribe. The *Urim* and *Thummim*—light and truth—which the high priest wore upon his breastplate, are regarded as belonging to the whole tribe. "Thy holy one" is Levi himself, and the proving at Massah refers to the chiding at Meribah (Ex. xvii. 1-7). Ver. 12. *Benjamin*, the son of prosperity, would dwell between Jehovah's shoulders, and would there be safe all the day long. Ver. 13-17. *Joseph*. His blessing, as a tribe, corresponds with Jacob's on his person and his two sons. Gen. xlix. 22. The language here is very beautiful. All precious things were to be his, and the myriads of Ephraim and of Manasseh were to be like oxen with strong horns, with which they would push all their enemies. Ver. 18, 19. *Zebulon* and *Issachar*. These were the two sons of Leah, but the youngest is named first. They were to dwell on the borders of the sea, "going out" in ships, and to dwell in tents, or lead a nomad life in connection therewith. The mountain is the mountain of the Lord's house where they