

Sabbath School Lessons.

April 10th, 1864.

JEPHTHAH.

Read Judges xi. 29-40.

I. What happened before the Victory.

Ver. 29. *The Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah.* God was grieved for the misery of his idolatrous people (see chap. x. 16), and he thus endowed a man with all the requisite courage to lead Israel to success. *Pursued ever Gilead*—it lay on the east of Jordan; *Manasseh* on the west; *Mizpah* at the extreme north-east of Gilead—his levies were concentrated there.

Ver. 30, 31. He had now done all his duty—he looks to God—the God of battles. *His vow.* It was common to make such vows—Jacob—Hannah. *Whatsoever cometh forth to meet me*—a most rash vow! What could come forth to meet him but some of his family? *A burnt-offering.* The law appointed death as the mode of consecration to God.

Ver. 32, 33. The victory was complete. The pursuit extended twenty miles south-east, from Aroer, on the plains of Jordan, to Minnith, in the country of Ammon.

II. What happened after the Victory.

Ver. 34, 35. The triumphant Jephthah returned to his city and his home at Mizpah. None knew of his vow. He might have warned his daughter, but it would have been an infringement of his vow.

Imagine the scene. With flying banners and sounding trumpets the victors approach Mizpah—its gates are thrown open—forth stream old and young to welcome their deliverer—the horsemen advance through the crowd—the general's war-chariot, surrounded by his guards and gay with trophies, draws near—when forth to meet it comes a band of young damsels, with cymbal and dance, with flowery wreaths and songs for the victor—the first and fairest is his own daughter—his eye catches hers—he covers his face with his hands, and turning away, bitterly exclaims, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low!¹⁹

It was customary for the women thus to celebrate a victory—David's over Goliath—Miriam at the Red Sea.

Cannot go back. He would have willingly sacrificed any foe to save her, but he could not go to God. The righteous man is ever true to his promise, Psalm xv. 4.

Ver. 36, 37. *The magnanimous answer of his daughter*—her country is safe—she will willingly die.

Ver. 38-40. What was done is matter of

dispute. Some think he consecrated her to the service of the Lord, as one of those females who waited on the temple, Exod. xxxviii. 8. Others that she was really slain. The Jews hold this. Whichever way, Jephthah performed his vow, and with a bleeding heart. *Did with her according to his vow.*

APPLICATION.

1. *God's Spirit fits for duty.* God's Spirit raised up and fitted Jephthah and the other judges. Saul, 1 Sam. x. 9; Paul, Eph. iv. 11. Nothing can be well done without God's Spirit, John xv. 5. Not even a common day's work (see Bezaleel, Ex. xxxi. 2, 3). Seek God's Spirit for your daily duties.

2. *Be slow to promise.* Jephthah suffered for his rashness. Never promise hoping to escape from performing your promise. He that keeps his word with God will keep it with men, Eccles. v. 5. God hates liars.

3. *Be sure to perform.* How nobly Jephthah stood to his vow!—had he said nothing, men would never have known though he had broken his vow. It always costs most to break your promise—it costs God's favour. Have you said you will serve Christ? Remember you cannot go back. Fearing men makes us lie.

4. *God never calls us to suffer needlessly.* Jephthah made his own sufferings—"troubled" his daughter and himself without being so required. God sought no such vow—he sees no excellency in suffering for its own sake. Try to keep God's law with your heart, and you will have work enough, Matt. xv. 9; Deut. xiv. 1.

5. *Seek a large loving heart.* Jephthah's daughter, a youthful girl, could die willingly for her country, though she could not fight for it; so Eli's daughter-in-law, 1 Sam. iv. 21. Simeon rejoiced when he saw the Saviour of the world, Luke ii. 30-32. Do you feel happy when others hear the good news of Christ, and believe in him?

SUBORDINATE LESSONS.

1. How true death is the only way to God! ver. 31—"dead to the world."

2. How submissive to her father was that daughter! ver. 36.

3. How becoming a daughter—an only daughter—to sympathise and rejoice with her parents! It makes them happy.—Edin. S. S. Lessons.

April 17th, 1864.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Read Luke xv. 11-32.

I. The departure, ver. 11-13.

God is the Father of all, Isa. lxiii. 16. All