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BIBLE LESSONS.

FROM PELOUBET'S SELECT NOTES

First Quarter.

Lesson XII. Jan. 17. Jer. 35: 12-19.

THE FAITHFUL RECHABITES.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"For unto this day they drink none, but obey their father's commandment."—Jer. 35: 14.

I. THE RECHABITES.—(I.) 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. Moses, when he fled hither from Pharaoh of Egypt, married a daughter of his track. 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 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 in village life; but to live in tents, moving from place to place as they could find pasturage.

(III.) 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 RECABITES COMING TO JERUSALEM. Nebuchadnezzar was advancing with a great army of Chaldeans and Syrians upon Judah (Jer. 35: 11). 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 companies of the Rechabites. The army of Nebuchadnezzar was so vast, so widespread, and so terrible, that even these Arabs of the fields did not feel safe.

(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 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, indeed, fitted to read a lesson to the community at large, 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 larg 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 them and to the men of Judah, to utter the words of the lesson for to-day.

III. LESSONS TO ISRAEL FROM THIS SCENE.—12. *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.* Lord of the heavenly hosts of angels, of all earthly forces and powers, of the host of worlds in the universe. *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. *Jonadab* ("Jehovah impels"): see above, and 2 Kings 10: 15-17. *Not to drink wine.* This was the most important of the commands to the Rechabites, and the one to which they had just been tested by Jeremiah. They would not even raise grapes or plant vineyards, less they be tempted to disobey this command. *Are performed.* Are *established*, i. e., are maintained in full force. *Unto this day*, i. e., for more than 275 years, and even before Jehonadab's time the rule had been partially kept. *Their father's.* Their ancestor, their organizer Jonadab. *Notwithstanding.* Rather, yet; the words *I*, *you*, *we*, and *me* being emphatic. 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 is earnest and full of his mission.

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 should dwell in the land.* Righteousness is the only safety of any nation.

IV. REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.—Vers. 16-19. (1) PUNISHMENT OF DISOBEDIENCE. 16. *Because.* For as much as.—*Rev. Ver.*

17. *Therefore.* Because of their disobedience. *The evil that I have pronounced against them.* In Deut. 28, Lev. 26, Jer. 25: 8-16.

Note.—(1) The punishment was in part a natural consequence of their sin. (2) It was partly a divine infliction. (3) God send it reluctantly, after every means of keeping the people from sin had been exhausted. (4) It was sent in love, to save them from their sins. (5) It was an object lesson, for all time, that there is no possible escape from punishment is to turn from sin.

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

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. *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.*

THIS PROMISE HAS BEEN FULFILLED IN TWO WAYS. (1) *By the existence of Rechabites to the present day.* Dr. Wolff, of our own century, in his printed Journal for 1829, says the Jews of Jerusalem and Yemen told him he would find the Rechabites of Jer. 35 living near Mecca. He found them near Senaa. 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 Cambridge 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. To "stand before God" is the usual phrase for ministering acceptably in his presence. The tribe of Levi was chosen "to stand before God" (Deut. 10: 8, and 18: 5-7). There is evidence that the Rechabites were adopted into the families of Israel, and this evidence can be brought down remarkably to the present time. (3) *This promise is fulfilled spiritually* in those who adopt the temperance principles of these people, some of whom call themRechabites. (4) Of course the promise may have been conditional on their continued obedience. But it is implied that they would continue to obey.

Aphra's Sunday-School.

Aphra laid aside her Bible, and leaning on the window seat, looked out enjoyingly upon the lovely landscape spread before her. The misty blue haze lay soft upon the mountain-side, tender lights and shadows crept over the wood and meadow, and even in the song of the birds and the chirp of insects there seemed an indefinable peace and rest, setting apart that sweet summer Sabbath afternoon from other days.

Aphra's sensitive heart took in gladly all the beauty of the scene before her, and she murmured to herself, "He hath made all things beautiful in his time."

But voices floated up to her from the veranda below—tired, fretful little voices.

"I do think Sunday afternoons are so long and tiresome here! Mamma's lying down and won't talk, and I haven't got anything to do."

"I've read all the books we brought," chimed in another small, discontented tone; "and, oh, dear, I wish night would come!"

"Fred, stop pulling my ribbons off!" said some one, imperatively, the command and charge showing that "mischief" was fast being found for the little "idle hands" and minds below stairs.

Aphra looked at the Bible on her lap. Were there not in it sweet lessons and stories to render the Sabbath afternoon no longer tiresome, but blessed and holy, to the tired little ones? She hesitated. "Why should I go? If Mrs. Eaton spends the afternoon sleeping, is it my duty to amuse and instruct little Rose, or the other boarders' children?"

Somehow the words of a hymn she had been singing during the day came back to her:

"And the least you do for Jesus
Will be precious in his sight."

It was pleasanter in her quiet room, but Aphra took her Bible and went slowly down stairs. The children sat listlessly about the veranda.

"How should you like to hear some Bible stories, and have a little talk about them?" asked Aphra, pleasantly, as she joined the group.

"Oh, will you read to us?" cried little Bessie Lovell in delight, catching Aphra's hand and drawing her to a chair.

But Rose hesitated. "I don't want to say any lesson, its tiresome."

"No, I won't say any Bible lesson either," said her brother Will, stoutly.

"I like to hear about Goliah and Samson, do you know 'bout them?" queried Fred, throwing aside the stick with which he was working death and havoc among a colony of ants at the foot of the steps.

We will not have any lesson exactly," said Aphra, secretly wondering how she was to please her small, but fastidious congregation, and wishing herself back again up-stairs. But Bessie came to her relief by asking if "Miss Aphra would read about when Jesus was a little baby."

So Aphra read the story of Bethlehem, and as she made gentle, simple comments, Fred's restless heels grew still, and Lillie forgot her ribbons and flounces, and Rose, who didn't want any lesson, began to ask questions, and then to answer Aphra's. Will drew nearer, and then Bessie remembered some "verses about Jesus" which she wanted to say.

With the interested little faces looking into hers, it was easy now to speak of the Saviour who loved and died for children. And neither they nor Aphra noticed how the shadows were gathering on the lawn; nor that more than one of the older boarders sat near the open windows, and also heard of "Jesus and his love."

"Let's sing," said Rosie, when Aphra paused. And the childish voices rang out sweet on the evening air, as they sang "the old, old story." But they did not sing alone, for Miss Newell, the fine soprano, softened her high notes to suit the children's, and gay Lilla Benton joined with a tender alto, and Rosie's papa, when he could command his voice, added his rich bass.

"It was a *beautiful* Sunday-school, Miss Aphra," said Bessie.

"And you'll talk to us again, next Sunday, won't you?" asked Fred.

"And read some more, and sing?" said Rose and Will, in a breath.

"May I come, too?" said Miss Benton, laying her white hands on Aphra's, "I want to learn more about the Bible."

So Aphra promised, and she lay down that night with a glad but humble joy in heart, that she had made an effort for Jesus' sake, and tried to help some, perhaps, of the least of his little ones, on the Sabbath afternoon.—*The Congregationalist.*

A Good Story.

Dr. M. D. Hoge, of Richmond, Va., tells of two Christian men who "fell out." One heard that the other was talking against him and he went to him and said: "Will you be kind enough to tell me my faults to my face, that I may profit by your Christian candor and try to get rid of them?" "Yes, sir," replied the other, "I will do it." They went aside, and the former said: "Before you commence telling what you think wrong in me, will you please bow down with me and let us pray over it, that my eyes may be opened to see my faults as you will tell them? You lead in the prayer." It was done, and, when the prayer was over, the man who had sought the interview said: "Now proceed with what you have to complain of in me." But the other replied: "After praying over it, it looks so little that it is not worth talking about. The truth is, I feel now that in going around talking against you I have been serving the devil myself, and have need that you pray for me and forgive me the wrong that I have done you." Dr. Hoge tells the story very well, and here and there in almost every community is a man or woman who might profit by it.—*Bap. Weekly.*

The Baboon and the Kitten.

I took one of these baboons—it was a female—along to my home in Germany, because she had always proved to be of extraordinary sagacity, and actually exhibited a far greater intelligence than the average country women of Thuringia, where I was living. Apes, in general, like other creatures, provided they submit to their caressing and fondling. My baboon at first concentrated her tenderness upon the children of the village, but, to her great sorrow, found no reciprocity. Then she turned to cats and dogs, and teased and tormented them in every way.

A bright pussy, which most of the time she carried in her arms, was tired one day of her company, and attempted to escape. The ape strongly objected, and the kitten in its struggle scratched her in the shoulder. Gravely, the baboon seized one of the paws of her pet, examined it carefully, and finding, probably, the sharp claws a dangerous superfluity in so small a being, bit them all off, one by one.—*Popular Science Monthly.*

—The good character of many a boy has been ruined by the influence of bad companions. It is strange what a fascination a bad boy has for his associates. We once heard a man, in speaking of a bad boy, say: "That boy has done more harm among the boys of this community than the good influence of the whole neighbourhood can counteract. He makes his evil ways appear smart and manly to the boys; and many of them, good and pure in character, have fallen into bad habits just through his influence." Boys beware of such companions. Do not be afraid to say no, when they tempt you to do wrong. The boy who can withstand the temptations offered by his boy associates and abstains from bad habits, has in him far more true manhood than the boy who yields, however much the appearance of a man his indulgences may give him.

—In Constantinople the Rev. Mr. Somory, a missionary of the Scottish Free Church, has had encouraging and even surprising success, and has been God's instrument, by laying open the true meaning of Messianic Hebrew prophecy, of convicting some bigoted Talmudists of the truth as it is in Jesus, and thus imparting the consolations of the Gospel. Abram Goldner, a proud, talented, and fanatical defender of the Talmud, consented to sit down by Mr. Somory, and prayerfully go over the prophetic writings, and was finally so converted from his blindness that he desired baptism; and when he, with seven others, publicly received this ordinance, three hundred Jews assembled to hear the sermon, from Acts ii. 41, 42, and were deeply impressed by it.

—Two Baptist missionaries in Russia report 1,500 conversions and 400 baptisms, as the fruit of their labors for two years.

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