

At the close of the war, and when God had given the people rest, Joshua dismissed the men of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh, giving them a full share of the spoil, and charging them to keep the statutes of the Lord. On returning home they resolved to erect a large altar on the east side Jordan, near the place of the passage, to show in all time that they had part and lot in the worship offered by Jehovah at Shiloh on the west side of Jordan. The act may not have been necessary; it may not have been prudent, for it might have led to idolatry; but it was performed with good motives. So soon, however, as their brethren on the west side heard what had been done, they determined to inflict summary punishment upon the supposed would be idolaters. On second thought they agreed first to send a commission of inquiry. These commissioners did their work most faithfully. Assuming that the strange altar implied a strange worship their language was bold and unspoken, for they had a zeal for the Lord of Hosts. Yet mark their affection in v. 19.—The reply of the accused is a model in its way. They did not recriminate. They said nothing about hasty judgments, want of charity, &c. They simply make a statement of what their design was and of what it was not. They repudiate the thought that they intended to commence a rival worship. On the contrary, their design was that it might be an enduring witness that they had part with their western brethren in all the sacrifices offered upon the altar of Jehovah before Shiloh, and that they have a right to join with Israel in all their public religious solemnities. This explanation was entirely satisfactory to Phinehas and the ten priests. They regarded it as an evidence that the Lord was among the people. And the report they brought back to Shiloh caused joy throughout the land.

This incident in Israelitish history certainly presents the people in a most favorable light. The zeal for the Lord of Hosts, the determination to suppress the first appearance of idolatry, the sending of a commission of enquiry instead of at once going to war, the faithful yet tender speaking of the accusers, and the reply of the accused—go to show that at this period the fear of the Lord was before the people. Would that it had been thus in all subsequent times!

#### LESSONS.

1. We should be jealous for the honour of God. We should not allow even the tenderest earthly ties to keep us from speaking when we should speak in the way of rebuking sin.
2. Let us not form an uncharitable view of the conduct of others, if such conduct can at all be explained in consistency with a religious life. Before pronouncing judgment, we should enquire. And while it may be our duty to enquire, and to enquire faithfully, let us do so tenderly, lovingly. And let us rejoice with true joy when all ground of suspicion is removed, and when what at first sight seemed to be prompted by evil motives is shown to have been prompted by good.

3. When brethren speak to us in the way of rebuke, because they suppose we are doing wrong when we are doing right, let us not recriminate but make all the explanation necessary, that they and we may rejoice together.

#### THIRD SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*Joshua's Warning*, Joshua 23: 11-16.

The good and grandly heroic Joshua was now about to lay down the burdens and honours of a long and most useful life. The warnings recorded in this chapter were uttered about 14 years after the conquest of Canaan, and 7 years after the division of the land by lot. He spoke to "all Israel" as represented by the Elders and leading men of all the tribes. He persuades the people by the remembrance of former benefits, by gracious promises, and by solemn threatenings.

V. 11.—To love God is the end and fulfilment of the law; it is the sum of all duty. See Deut. 6: 5; Matt. 22: 37. This is a warning that applies to every child and to every human being. Show how love is at the root of all good deeds. It binds us to God and to each other and makes life bright and joyous.

Vv. 12-13.—See in v. 10 the blessing that would come through obedience. In 12, 13 we see what the other course would lead to. There was still a strong remnant of the Canaanites in the land. If the Lord's people became friendly with them there would be intermarriages, and the effect would be terrible disasters.

They were strictly forbidden to form any alliances with the idolatrous natives; see Ex. 23: 32, 33, and Ex. 34: 11-17. It is true wisdom to shun the beginnings of sin and the temptations to it. No temptation is more dangerous than ungodly companions. If you cannot do good to such, avoid them for they are sure to do you harm, "acquaintance, friendship and marriage with persons of no religion, or of false religion, have generally been progressive steps towards apostasy on the part of the mere professor of religion," and towards coldness, uselessness and discomfort on the part even of the true believer, (Scott.) The history of Israel for thirty centuries is a melancholy proof and illustration of the text, v. 14-16. "The way of all the earth"—death and the grave.

As God is faithful in His promises so He will not fail in His threatenings. As his love is infinite, so is His justice, and so is His truth. See Dan. 9: 12-14.

God's promises and threatenings are as applicable to us as to His people of old. See Heb. 2: 1-4.

#### FOURTH SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*Review—God's Mercies to Israel*, Joshua 24: 1-13. *Golden Text*, Ps. 107: 8.

The last Sabbath of the quarter is always