

The Sabbath School.

LESSONS FOR MARCH.

FIRST SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*The Cities of Refuge.* Josh. 20: 1-9. *Golden Text,* Ps. 46: 1. *Parallel Passages,* Deut 33: 27, Ps. 59: 16, Heb. 6: 18

The information which the Scriptures give us respecting the Cities of refuge, is contained chiefly in Num. 35th Ch., Deut. 19: 1-10, and in the chapter which forms our lesson. In Patriarchal times the duty of putting the murderer to death, appears to have devolved by common consent upon the nearest male relative of the murdered person. Some such arrangement appears to have been necessary in the absence of established laws and settled governments: and seems to have received countenance from Gen. 9: 5-6. The custom still exists in some oriental countries, as for instance in Arabia; but it is evident that to entrust the power of inflicting punishment in such cases into the hands of private persons, thirsting for vengeance, must have often led to terrible abuses. Against these abuses the institution of the cities of refuge was intended to guard.

These cities were to be six in number, three of them in Canaan proper, and the other three in the district beyond Jordan. On reference to the map it will be seen that these were so placed that one of them might be easily reached by any inhabitant of the country. They were all Levitical cities—probably because the Levites, from their training and duties, would be the most suitable and impartial judges, and most able to calm the stormy passions of the avenger of blood. The roads which led to them, (see Deut. 19: 3,) were to be kept in good condition, the brooks and rivers were to be spanned by good bridges, the width of the roads was to be 32 cubits, or about 48 feet, and at all the cross roads sign posts were to be erected with the words "Refuge, Refuge," painted on them. They were not designed to shield from punishment the wilful murderer, but to deliver from the hand of the avenger of blood the man who had killed another unintentionally and without malice. By fleeing without delay to the nearest city of refuge he would find a safe asylum till his case was regularly tried before the congregation—that is, till he was publicly tried, probably by the authorities of the place where the accident had occurred. If proved guiltless of any criminal intention he was restored to the city of refuge, and was obliged to remain there till the death of the High Priest, after which he might return in safety to his own home. If he should leave the city before the High Priest died, the avenger of blood might slay him with impunity. These arrangements divested the custom of devolving the duty of punishing homicide upon the next of kin of the slain man—or "goelism" as it is called—of its greatest abuses. They tended however to

show how sacred human life is in the eyes of God. The unintentional manslayer was exposed to danger of losing his own life, and to the evils of more or less protracted banishment from his own home.

The manslayer fleeing from the avenger of blood, is a striking emblem of the sinner fleeing for refuge from the wrath of God; and the cities of refuge are a type of the Saviour. Their names set forth his perfections.—*Kedesh—holy*—implies the holiness of Jesus. *Shechem—shoulder*—"the government shall be upon his shoulder." Isa. 9: 6. *Hebron—fellowship*—believers are called into fellowship with Christ. *Bezer—a fortress*—Christ is such to all who trust in Him. *Ramoth—high*—for Him hath God exalted. *Golan—joy*—for in Him all the saints are justified and shall glory. As the manslayer was delivered from banishment by the death of the High Priest, so by the death of our great High Priest sinners are delivered from the punishment threatened against sin.

SECOND SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*The Altar of Witness,* Joshua 22: 21-27.

When the tribes of Reuben and Gad which possessed much cattle, saw that the land on the east of Jordan afforded good pasturage they asked Moses that they might be permitted to remain there and to receive the district as their portion of the promised inheritance. The request looked selfish; besides, it argued a lack of that faith which Moses had, who in beholding Canaan as a type or Heaven longed so earnestly to pass over Jordan and see the goodly land.

On receiving the assurance, however, that the men fit for war belonging to these two tribes were quite willing to go over Jordan and aid the other tribes in the conquest of the land, Moses consented to the request and allotted them the portion asked. As the district was too large for these tribes the northern portion was assigned to a part of the tribe of Manasseh, the other part subsequently receiving its portion nearly opposite on the west side of the Jordan. See Numb. Ch. 32.

After the death of Moses, when Israel under the conduct of Joshua crossed the Jordan, we find that forty thousand armed men of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh passed over before the children of Israel, (Joshua 4: 12, 13). When Moses and Eleazar took in the plains of Moab the number of the men who were able to go to war in Israel, Reuben gave 43,730; Gad, 40,500; and Manasseh, 52,700. Accordingly the two tribes and a half must have had about 100,000 fighting men. All therefore did not go over Jordan, although all expressed their readiness to go. Some remained behind to take charge of the women and children, and flocks. Joshua would make a selection of those who should go. As the war of conquest lasted a considerable time, some think seven years, the persons first chosen may after a period of service have been exchanged for others, or been permitted occasionally to visit their families.