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SABBATH SCHOOL.

Bible Lessons.

Studies in the Old Testament.

THIRD QUARTER.

Lesson XI. Sept. 9. Num. 14: 1-10.

THE UNBELIEF OF THE PEOPLE.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."—Heb. 3: 19

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES: A REVIEW. The children of Israel were on the very borders of their promised land. The command had been given them to go up and take possession under the guidance and by the power of their God. Twelve of their chief men had gone through the length and breadth of the land, and had brought back a glowing report of the richness of the country, together with specimens of its fruits; while at the same time the country was described by warlike races, some of them giants in stature, defended by fortified strongholds. Two of the spies declared that they could go up immediately and conquer the land; for God had doomed the inhabitants on account of their great wickedness, and himself would lead them on to victory; and he had proved his power in many an instance within the preceding two years. The other ten spies, frightened themselves, inspired fear in the people. At this point our lesson begins.

II. UNBELIEF SHOWN BY MURMURING AND REBELLION. 1. *And all:* the movement was universal,—Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua being the only known exceptions, and they were not counted among the congregation. *Lifted up their voice and cried:* in loud wailing. Instead of lifting up their ensigns with a heroic resolve to march forward to the land of promise, defying all enemies in the name of the Lord, they sat down in impotent despair, and like so many frightened and fretting children, gave way to sobs and tears.

2 *The children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron.* In murmuring against their leaders they murmured against God, by whom those leaders were appointed. This is clear from the language of Moses (Ex 16: 8).

Observe how one sin led to another: first, there was disappointment proceeding from unbelief in the promise and power of Jehovah (ver. 1); then murmuring against their divinely appointed leaders (ver. 2); then murmuring against Jehovah (ver. 3); then the appointment of their own leaders, and the formal institution of a rebellious movement to return to Egypt (vers. 3, 4); and, finally, the determination to kill those who had brought a truthful report from the land (ver. 10). Had they committed this crime, they would have proceeded further to kill Moses himself. *Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt!* The more carefully the language of these malcontents is weighed, the more aggravated does it appear. They forgot that Omnipotence could bring them in thither as triumphantly as it had brought them out of Egypt. The past, with all its miracles of mercy, is hidden from their eyes, and the dreadful future, painted by unbelief, is all that stands before them. They wish rather to die criminals under God's justice, than live conquerors in his favor. Who can wonder that, as appears from the sequel (vers. 28, 29), they soon had their wish?

3. *And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land.* They now murmur directly against their God, as before they had indirectly. Thus do they in effect charge that God who is Love itself, with the worst of malice, and Eternal Truth with the basest hypocrisy; suggesting that all the kind things he had said to them, and done for them, hitherto, were intended only to decoy them, and to cover a secret design carried on all along to ruin them." *Thot our wives and our children should be a prey?* Unbelief always tries to find some pious excuse for its opposition to God; and especially is it prone to plead humanity in opposition to religion, as if they were not one.

4 *Let us make a captain:* a leader in place of Moses. Nehemiah, a thousand years later, says that "they appointed a captain to return to their bondage (Neh. 9: 16, 17).

5. *Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces:* in prayer to God in this great emergency. A defenceless attitude before men, but the attitude of strength before God.

Murmuring.—1. Murmuring is a sign and a fruit of unbelief in God's promises and goodness. 2. Murmuring is on the high road to rebellion. It is the deepening twilight of the rebellious spirit. (3) It is a most wretched, unhappy spirit. There is no comfort, no joy, no sunlight in it. It abides in the lurid shadow of the pit. 4. It is as useless as it is wretched. It removes no evils, but intensifies them. It turns away from every source of help.

The Credulity of Unbelief.—Some one has said, "O infidel, great is thy faith!" i. e., credulity. The Israelites could not believe in God, to trust him to lead them on into the promised land, on whose borders they stood; but they could trust themselves and a leader of their own choosing, to lead them back through the great and terrible wilderness in which they would long ago have perished but for God's miraculous providence. Unbelief is always credulous. Those who cannot believe in the inspiration of the Bible, will trust imitation messages from unknown spirits. Those who cannot trust God, will follow their own wisdom.

Other Lessons—1. Unbelief is noisy, cowardly, and weak. 2. There are many giants in our way, giants of intemperance, infidelity, crime, ignorance, oppression. But unbelief never conquered a single one. 3. "According to your faith it shall be done unto you." 4. Unbelief is the short and straight road to failure. 5. Unbelief is wretched and gloomy, and unhappy. It has no songs, but only wailings. 6. Prayer is the true resource in the hour of trouble,—earnest, humble, unselfish prayer. 7 But with the prayer we should do all in our power.

III. THE TWO FAITHFUL BUT UNPOPULAR MINORITY. 6 *Joshua . . . Caleb:* The two spies who brought a good report. *Rent their clothes.* This was done by grasping the outer robe at the back of the neck, with both hands, and rending it downward. It was a customary mark of strong indignation (Acts 14: 14), or of deep mourning (2 Sam. 1: 11); here it was dictated by both feelings.

7 *And they spake unto all the company.* Nothing could well be a stronger proof of their undaunted courage and incorruptible fidelity.

THEIR ARGUMENT. (1) *An exceeding good land:* and therefore worth every effort to obtain it. The two would conquer the fear of the multitude by hope.

(2) 8 *If the Lord delight in us.* Their next point was the ability of Israel to conquer it. This ability they found, not in the people, but in Jehovah, who had led his children thus far in safety.

(3) The danger of refusing to go. 9. *Only rebel not ye against the Lord:* revolt, be apostates, by refusing to trust him and to obey his commands.

(4) The defenceless condition of the inhabitants. *For they are bread for us:* that is, we shall devour and consume them as a hungry man does bread. As if they should say: We seemed, indeed, as but grasshoppers to them; but we say unto you that they shall be bread for us; we shall utterly destroy them. *Their defence is departed from them.* The original Hebrew is far more expressive: "Their shadow, or shade, has departed from them;" that is, their defence, covert, protection. The departed defence was also, if not chiefly, the withdrawal of God's favor on account of their sins. The cup of their iniquity was full, and the time for their punish nent had come. *And the Lord is with us.* It was *if* in ver. 8. Now he assures them of the fact. God's plans for the redemption of the world required the success of the Israelites.

THE ARGUMENT OF A BAD CAUSE. 10. *But all the congregation bade stone them:* said, *i. e.*, proposed. Such have ever been the thanks of fidelity and truth. Crowned wickedness proves desperate; and, instead of yielding, seeks for revenge. Nothing is so hateful to a resolute sinner as good counsel. *The glory of the Lord:* some sudden outburst of dazzling light (from the cloudy pillar) which shone with a dense and angry glow, bringing the riotous people at once to their senses. It came in answer to prayer (ver 5), and just in time to preserve the lives of those who were most faithful. *Before all the children of Israel:* to awe them with the danger of the crime they were about to commit, to awaken their conscience, and to show them the terror of resisting the loving protection and gracious promises which had been granted them, and of rebelling against their God.

Modern Applications—1. Work and prayer for a good cause must go together. 2. Stand up boldly for what is right and true, although it be in the face of the whole world. 3. Faith and pluck go together. 4. Kindly logical persuasion is the argument for a good cause. 5. Nothing is impossible when God is with us. 6 It is infinitely safer to have all the world our enemies, than to have God against us. 7. Violence is the argument of a weak, bad cause. 8. God appears in time to defend his children. 9. The manifest presence of a holy God awakens the conscience, convinces of sin, and tends to lead to repentance.

Satan's Picture Book.

BY JOSEPH SANDERSON, D. D.

The origin, history, and influence of playing cards seem to justify the name by which we designate the little bundle of oddly painted pieces of pasteboard used in playing games. Their origin is enveloped in darkness, but can be traced to the Pagans of Hindostan, who placed upon them emblems of the incarnation of their deity Vishnu, and who used them only for fortune-telling and similar purposes. It is asserted in the Chinese dictionary that dotted cards were invented in the reign of the Chinese Emperor Seun-ho, for the amusement of his numerous wives. The Arabs appear to have introduced them among Europeans, about five centuries since, and their use, for amusement and gambling purposes, became so general in France and Italy, in the early part of the fifteenth century, that St. Bernardin was moved to preach so eloquently and effectively against them as to incite their possessors to make a fire in the public place, throw their cards into it, and thus consume them.

The appropriate signs upon the first cards imported into England from Italy were cups, swords, money, and clubs; and because of the immoral tendency of the games in which they were used, the use of the cards was forbidden. It is supposed by some that cards were invented in France, with varied colors, and in fantastic shapes, to amuse Charles II. when he lost his reason and was subject to fits of melancholy. One thing at least is certain, that when literature and art prevailed in France social gatherings were seasons of noble, intellectual enjoyment, the faculty of good conversation was cultivated, and afternoons and evenings were thus passed in delightful intercourse. But as the cultivation of literature and art decayed, the material for familiar interchange of thought passed away, the very capacity for conversation was lost; and, to meet the emergency, cards were resorted to as the panacea against ennui. Gambling by means of them soon became the rage, the saloons were filled with rows of tables, on the opposite sides of which ladies and gentlemen were seated, where for several hours nothing was heard but the rustling of cards, the ringing of money, and bursts of anger or rejoicing. But the Revolution soon followed, and swept away, like the whirlwind, the cards, the card tables, and the card players. When the passion for cards regained the ascendancy, the places of the card kings were filled by the portraits of four noted Frenchmen, Moliere, the comedian and actor; La Fontaine, a writer of licentious novels; and the infidels Voltaire and Rousseau.

No wonder that, with such an ancestry and history, the family card table should have been considered after its introduction to Europe as "destructive of moral," and a "great blot on the manners of the English nation." It is sad to think that so many professing Christians in this gospel age indulge in this card playing amusement, that is the cherished pursuit of the degraded and the dissolute, that is resorted to by so many for the purpose of killing time and for gambling purposes, that has no redeeming quality to recommend it; and that, wherever it is indulged in, so manifestly saps the vitals of piety and proves an obstacle to the progress of religion. But this is not the worst: Members of the church who are parents will not only permit card playing by their children in their presence, but will introduce the card table itself into the family circle, teach their children the names and use of the several cards, train them in the mode of winning, and thus prepare them for taking their place in the society of the worldly, the dissolute, and profane. Surely this is not training them up in the way they should go, but teaching them to walk in the path of the godless, leading them into temptation and ensnaring them to a snare.

The lessons in this picture book of Satan have been in their origin and history only the tools of the fortune teller and the gambler, have led multitudes to learn the art of defrauding their fellows, to forsake the home of their youth, and the society of the righteous; to neglect their business, and to consort with the spendthrift. We cannot, therefore, understand how Christians can countenance the presence of this picture book of Satan in their houses, or participate with any propriety in its use. That which Satan uses so largely to ensnare and to destroy, must be essentially bewitching and destructive. That which is found in the breast pocket of so many disreputable characters, on the table of every rum seller, and in the adjuncts of every dancing house and theatre, must be a chosen instrument in Satan's hands for the overthrow of everything that is good in time, and for the ruin of immortal souls. No amusement can be good that is the favorite recreation of the vile. A card playing party is, in our judgment, not only tenting towards Sodom, but is nearing the vestibule of the Satanic home.

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ARTHUR P. TIPPET.
WM. F. BURDITT.

Referring to the above notice I beg to announce that the business of Manufacturers' Agents and Commission Merchants will be continued under the name and style of Arthur P. Tippet & Co., at the old stand, 3 and 4 North Wharf, and would respectfully solicit for the new firm the same liberal patronage accorded to Tippet, Burditt & Co.

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