

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

FOURTH QUARTER: STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

B. C. 1425.]

LESSON IX. ISRAEL UNDER JUDGES.

[Dec. 2.]

Judg. 2. 11-23.

[Commit to memory verses 11, 12.]



11 And the children of Is'ra-el did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Ba'al-im:

12 And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of E'gypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

13 And they forsook the LORD, and served Ba'al and Ash'ta-roth.

14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Is'ra-el, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies.

15 Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for evil, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed.

16 Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed

themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so.

18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they cused not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

20 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Is'ra-el; and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto my voice;

21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Josh'a-a left when he died:

22 That through them I may prove Is'ra-el, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not.

23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Josh'a-a.

General Statement.

The ship of state is now launched and on its voyage over the sea of time. What was the condition of Israel in that critical period when, with the war of conquest over and the conqueror in the retirement of old age, the people were left to work out their own destiny? They were in partial possession of an alien country. The mountains were theirs, though even here were cities in possession of their foes, like Bethel and Jebus; and under them every-where crouched the conquered people ready to rise against their oppressors. From their heights they could look down upon the Philistines on the southern plain with their five powerful cities; while the Jordan valley and the plains of Sharon and Esdraelon were occupied by the Canaanites. Besides these elements of danger in their own borders, there were Amalekites and Edomites on the south, and Moabites, Amoritcs, and Bashanites on the east. Israel was standing alone amid the nations, and in equal danger from their enmity and their friendship. We scarcely

wonder, when we realize the temptations around and the lusts within, that the people of God soon forgot their high vocation and their glorious history, and sank into the embraces of sin. They longed for a visible object of worship, like the people about them; they were charmed by the splendid rites, and were led astray by the seductive fascinations of idolatry. The generation that had seen the pillar of fire and had crossed the Jordan, the generation molded by such leaders as Joshua and Caleb and Phinehas, passed away. Their children grew up under other influences, and they fell under the power of temptation. Israel forgot her own almighty Jehovah, and bowed the knee to Baal. Sin brought helplessness, for Israel without God is weaker than a shorn Samson. Idolatry brought in oppression, and wave after wave of foreign power swept over the land, each in turn rolled back by the deliverers whom God in mercy for his people and in remembrance of his covenant raised up in the hour of need.

Explanatory and Practical Notes.

Verse 11. The children of Israel. It must be remembered that the Israelites held only the mountain region of Palestine, and that both the plain of Jordan and that on the sea-coast were occupied by their enemies. They were thus surrounded by their foes and in great danger. **Did evil.** Their great sin was in following the idols of the people around them. The evils of idolatry were in turning men from God to images, and in its tendency to every form of wickedness in the name of religion. (1) *How easy it is to fall into sin!* Just as easy as to have weeds grow in the garden. **In the sight of the Lord.** Expressive of the fact that, with God's eyes on them and God's law before them, Israel yet fell into sin. (2) *All sin is in God's sight, for God's law is the standard of righteousness.* **Served Baalim.** The plural form of the word Baal, "lord," or "master," which was the name of the chief male divinity worshipped by the nations surrounding Israel, and hence was used in its plural form as a general term for all idolatry. Baal was represented by images of various kinds, and worshipped in dances, often of an immoral character, and in human sacrifices.

12. They forsook the Lord God. We are not to suppose that all the Israelites were carried away by the popular frenzy for idol-worship. Throughout the entire history from the exodus to the captivity in Babylon, there were two Israels: a common, ignorant, sensual people generally tending downward; and a

small number of spiritual, earnest minds, men of faith and fidelity, the true Israel, the "remnant," who were the hope of the nation. (3) *There is a "remnant" now: do you belong to it?* Of their fathers. Thus by their backsliding they dishonored the memory of their ancestors the patriarchs, who came out of idol-worshipping lands that they might worship God. **Which brought them out.** They forsook the God that had given them victory, and followed the idols which could not save their own lands. **Followed other gods.** The motives to their idolatry were: 1. The craving of the human heart after a visible object of worship, as may be seen, for example, in the Romanist worshipping his crucifix. 2. The influence of association, "following the fashion." People dislike to be singular, and Israel was often taunted by other nations as having no gods. 3. The feasts and revels connected with idol-worship had a fascination for corrupt hearts, especially when drunkenness and licentiousness could be veiled under the name of religion. (4) *How many influences unite to lead hearts astray from God!* The people that were round about. On the Mediterranean shore by the south were the Philistines, new-comers like themselves, but already rich and powerful; on the northern coast were the Phoenicians, with the culture and civilization of commercial life; in the Jordan valley were still unconquered Canaanites; in the heart of the country were Jebusites and Hivites, tributary but still dangerous; east of the Dead Sea were the Moab-