

April 28th.] B. C. 607. [Jer. xxxv: 12-19.

## THE RECHABITES.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words! saith the Lord." verse 13.

HOME READINGS.—M. Jer. 34: 1-22. T. 2 Kings 10: 15-25. W. Num. 6: 1-12. Th. Jer. 35: 1-19. F. Prov. 1: 20-23. S. Jer. 7: 21-34. S. Jer. 11: 1-14.

This story of the Rechabites belongs to an earlier date than last lesson. The circumstances narrated occurred in the reign of Jehoiakim, about three years before his death. The plot, if we may so call it, was intended to serve the purpose of an illustration, differing from a parable in that the real personages are introduced. Such a "sign" as Jonah was to the Ninevites was this exhibition of obedience and adherence to principles—a reproof and an example to the Jews. The scene is laid in the court of the temple, v. 2, to give it due solemnity, and that it might convey a lesson to the priests as well as the people. WHO WERE THESE RECHABITES? A wandering tribe belonging to the Kenites of Hamath, 1 Chron. 2: 55; descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, Judges 1: 16. They originally came into Canaan with the Israelites, but, instead of settling down, chose a roving life, dwelling in tents, Jud. 4: 11. Jehonadab here contracted *Jonadab*, of the house of Rechab, seems to have organized them into a peculiar sect, about 300 years before this time, and bound them together by a solemn vow (1). To drink no wine. (2). To build no houses. (3). To sow no seed. (4). To dwell in tents. That Jehonadab was zealous for God appears in 2 Kings 10: 15-27, and that the Rechabites remained faithful to their vow during all this long period, though living in a land where wine was as plentiful as water, is clearly stated in the narrative.

Then came the word of the Lord: during one of the invasions of Nebuchadnezzar, when the Rechabites had sought a temporary asylum in Jerusalem. The idea of taking advantage of their presence in this way did not originate with Jeremiah, it came from the Lord, v. 1. So Jeremiah had no scruples about it, knew that he ran no risk in placing temptation in their way, although it put the Rechabites to a severe test. Had it been any one else, they would have resented the attempt to tamper with them as an insult, but Jeremiah! the Lord's prophet—had as good as said to them, "your vow only bound you to abstinence while you remained under canvas, now that you have come to live in Jerusalem, do as other people do, come drink wine with us." How many yield to temptation by just such plausible arguments! How many travellers to the Holy Land even now-a-days leave their religion behind them in Europe or America! Not so the Rechabites. "We will drink no wine," even though a Jeremiah offers it to us, "for thus Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us." That was noble!

APPLICATION.—"Go and tell the men of Judah." See how the Rechabites respect the vows laid upon them by a man like themselves, v. 1, but you have disobeyed your Maker—the father of your spirits. Jonadab is long since dead, still they obey God, by his prophets has been speaking to you all your lives, v. 15. Nay, saith the Lord, "I myself have spoken unto you" v. 14. But ye will not hear. THEREFORE the Rechabites shall rise up in judgment and condemn you—the same argument used by Christ, Matt. 11: 21. Therefore the Chaldeans shall destroy Jerusalem and you yourselves shall go into captivity. Therefore, also, mercy is promised to the Rechabites, v. 19.

LEARN that vows should not be rashly made, but deliberately and from a sense of duty. It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Eccles. 5: 5. Obedience to earthly parents is the first commandment with promise. Our Heavenly Father has higher claims on our reverence and service, Heb. 12: 9, 28-29.

May 5th.] B. C. 588. [Jer. lxi: 1-11.

## THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed." Lamentations 1: 8.

HOME READINGS.—M. Jer. 37: 1-21. T. Jer. 38: 1-28. W. Jer. 39: 1-28. Th. Jer. 52: 1-11. F. 2 Chron. 36: 1-16. S. Lamm. 1: 1-16. S. Ps. 74: 1-12.

It was now over 900 years since the children of Israel had left Egyptian bondage. How many vicissitudes of fortune had they experienced! Enjoying prosperity so long as they served the God of their fathers; frequently "brought low" because of their apostasy. The ten tribes revolted B. C. 975, or 176 years after their occupation of Palestine. In the year 721 they were carried captives into Assyria. Judah and Benjamin held out for 135 years longer, but at frequent intervals, the kingdom had been invaded by the neighboring monarchs of Egypt, Assyria, Nineveh, and Babylon. Judea virtually lost its nationality, became a province of Babylon. Its kings reigned by the grace of Nebuchadnezzar and were deposed at his nod. The whole community became steeped in corruption. The long threatened judgment advanced apace.

Zedekiah, placed on the throne by the tyrant of Babylon, was the last vassal king of the now enfeebled remnant of Judah. He was not even allowed to retain his own name, originally *Mataniah*, 2 Kings 24: 1. Although he enjoyed the advantage of having Jeremiah for a counsellor, to whom he often listened, but want of resolution, rather than depravity, added to the universal degeneracy of the people, combined to effect his ruin. "He did evil in the sight of the Lord, v. 2. Verse 3, "Through the anger of the Lord," Zedekiah had made a solemn compact with Nebuchadnezzar, calling God to witness, and now, against the express advice of Jeremiah, he rebelled against him, 2 Chron. 36: 12-13. To revolt he added perjury. They who do such things shall not prosper, Ezek. 17: 15. To make matters worse for himself, he foolishly made a league with the king of Egypt, the sworn enemy of Nebuchadnezzar. How could he then expect mercy from that quarter? "So it came to pass that Jerusalem was besieged, v. 4. During 18 months the siege continued, the people, meanwhile, suffering from famine as well as all the horrors of war, v. 6. At last, when resistance was no longer possible, they resolved to evacuate the city under cover of night, not knowing whither to go, hoping somewhere to escape the sword. But the strong arm that had helped Jehoshaphat was not raised in their defence. They had forsaken God; and now God has forsaken them. The Chaldeans overtook them in the plain of Jericho and slew them, "with-out compassion," 2 Chron. 36: 17. All that escaped the sword were carried captives to Babylon: among the rest, Zedekiah who was made to witness the execution of his sons, and then had his eyes put out, was bound in chains, and imprisoned for life. Some of the Nineveh sculptures represent the king with one hand holding a captive by a hook passed through his lip, and with the other burning out his eyes with a red hot iron. Babylon was now at the zenith of its splendor. Its walls were four square, 240 feet high! each side 15 miles long. The city was divided by 51 streets crossing each other at right angles, terminating in 100 gates, and forming 644 squares with a garden in each. But it had no charms for the captive Jews.

"By Babel's streams we sat and wept,  
When Zion we thought on,  
In midst thereof we hanged our harps  
The willow trees upon."

Psalm 137: 1.

LEARN that though sin be permitted of God, He was not the author of it, James 1: 13. That while the Lord is merciful and long-suffering, he is also a just God, and will by no means clear the guilty. Exo. 34: 6-7. That eternal life is promised to all who believe and obey. Deut. 30: 15. Mark 16: 16. Romans 2: 6-9.