

were under suspicion; and even forbidden by the Lord's prophets as places where feasting, drunkenness, licentiousness and idolatry were too common.

From the tower.—Whence the watchman watched his sheep or vineyard. It shows how the land was honey-combed with idolatry when it reached such lonely spots.

10. Images—(R.V. pillars). Stone pillars perhaps carved but not actual images symbolic of the presence of Baal.

Groves—(R.V. Asherim). Along with Baal a female god was worshipped, sometimes under the name of Astarte (Greek Venus) Jud. 2: 13; 10: 6, sometimes Asherah, which is translated in A.V. as grove, but is really the goddess's name. 1 Kings 18: 19; 2 Kings 23: 6.

Large wooden pillars (Judges 6: 25.) were raised under the trees by the altar of Baal, betokening the presence of the goddess. Those are spoken of in the text as groves. The combined worship of the male and female gave rise to sensual thoughts and practices.

11. When the Lord carried away.—These iniquitous practices were taken from the surrounding nations. Their idols could not save them from Assyria, and yet Israel did not take warning.

12. Served idols, and wrought wicked things, two inevitable concomitants. See India, Africa, etc.

The Lord had said—The law.—See Ex. 20: 1-4, as the whole of the Ten Commandments. So they did not err in ignorance. They were further warned by prophets.

13. Testified.—Spoke again and again—admonished solemnly by prophetic messages.

By all.—Heb.: by all the prophets, every seer, a rhetorical way of saying by every kind of prophetic message. God sent in those days, as to-day, men of different character and ways, bearing the same message about sin and salvation, but they did not hear. Do we?

14. Did not believe.—Unbelief is the secret of sin just as faith is the secret of a holy life. Unbelief makes men stiff-necked, to follow their own devious courses.

Faith makes men easily led of God to true and noble conduct. Jesus says "except ye be converted, and become as little children, i.e., simple in mind, trustful, ye shall not enter the

kingdom of Heaven." Except we be willing to be led of God we shall not be saved.

15. His statutes.—They rejected. (1) *The law* which God as king gave his creatures. (2) *The covenant*, which as a matter of sheer graciousness he made with his people. (3) *The testimony.*—The pleadings, remonstrances of a long-suffering God by his prophets.

Vanity.—"Whatever man sets before him as the object of his life apart from God, is vanity and idolatry, and leads to worthlessness and corruption." (Keil.) See Rom. 1: 21-25; where the downward path is sketched by a master-hand.

16.—When they got away from God's leading to their own devices the downward path was easy. First Jehovah worshipped by molten images, (later as Baal) then Asherim (A.V. Groves), then the whole host of heaven:

17.—Then they worship the fierce Moloch, and fierce like him sacrifice their own children. "The Rabbins tell us that this idol was made of brass, and that the head was that of a calf with a crown upon it. It was made hollow and a furious fire was kindled within it.

When the arms were red hot the victim was thrown into them and was almost immediately burned to death, while its cries were drowned with drums," (Schaff) cf. Milton Paradise Lost, 1: 392-405. Moloch, horrid king besmeared with blood of human sacrifice and parents tears," etc.

Divinations.—They tried to discover the secrets of the future by foolish superstitious rites, instead of leaving the future to God.

Enchantments.—They tried to attain their ends by magic spells, instead of waiting on God to do his will.

18.—So far we have only had an account of the conduct of Israel against God,—their idolatries, etc. Now comes the inevitable doom. "The Lord was angry and removed Israel out of his sight." See Luke 20: 18.

Judah.—The present faith of Judah saved that little people against all the arms of Assyria, but when the Jews in their turn forsook God, he forsook them, and they likewise were taken into exile.

PRACTICAL LESSONS.

1.—God rules the destinies of nations as of men. Amos 9: 7. He brought Israel out of Egypt and took them into exile.