

Apr. 20.—**Queen Esther.**—Esther 4: 10-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Ps. 37: 5.

LESSON BASIS.

The circumstances narrated in part in this lesson are supposed to have occurred in—

When?—In the 12th year of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), or about 447, B. C.

Where?—At the king's palace in Shushan.

What?—Plan for prevention of the execution of a cruel edict.

Whom?—Mordecai, a Jew; Esther, the queen, his adopted daughter; and the Jewish captives in Babylon.

Why?—That God's goodness to those who trust Him might be known by all men.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

By an edict of the cruel king Ahasuerus, the Xerxes of profane history, all the Jews in his dominions were condemned to be put to death on a certain day. Mordecai, who may be seen by reading the preceding chapters, had been the innocent cause of the trouble, was seen weeping and lamenting before the palace gates by some of the king's attendants who, knowing he was Esther's friend, came and told her. Esther sent at once to inquire the cause of his trouble.

So Mordecai sent her word, and also sent her a copy of the king's decree. This was, probably, the first intimation she had of the coming trouble, and of course her grief and anxiety were very great. What followed we shall find in the lesson; but as it gives us only a very small part of the story, all children are urged to read the Book of Esther for themselves, in order to see how graciously God delivered His people, and made the cruel designs of their enemies come back upon themselves.

LESSON TALK.

(10.) *Hatach*,—one of the chamberlains of the palace, in immediate attendance upon the queen. *Gave him commandment*,—told him what to say to Mordecai.

(11.) Here Esther briefly explains to Mordecai how difficult and dangerous a thing he had asked, or rather, it seems, commanded her (ch. 2: 20) to undertake. *Into the inner court*,—into the court, or apartment no one, not even the greatest favorite, dare enter unless specially called. If she did, as Esther said, there was but one law—death; unless, indeed, as possibly might happen, the royal king proved to be in a gracious humor, and stretched out the golden scepter, then, of course, the intruder was forgiven; but, adds Esther, *I have not been called these thirty days*.

(12, 13.) Esther's answer was fully reported to Mordecai who gave Hatach still another message to her. *Think not with thyself*,—that is, in thy own mind—*that thou, &c.* Here Mordecai evidently does Esther a great injustice. He seems to think that she is selfishly shrinking from personal danger, and flattering herself that, although the blow should fall, she (her nation) being unknown to the king) would escape unharmed.

Probably this implied suspicion arose from the fear that possibly such might be Esther's feeling, rather than from any settled belief that it was so; so easy it is for persons in great affliction and terror to suspect the motives and intentions of others.

(14.) *Enlargement and deliverance to the Jews shall arise*. Mordecai believed that what God had said through the prophets concerning his nation would in some way be fulfilled; but he warns Esther that unless she bestir herself, both she and her father's house will, in all probability, be cut off. *And who knoweth whether, &c.* Here was encouragement for Esther. It is possible that our God has placed you where you are for this very purpose—for such a time as this. It was not necessary that Esther should know beforehand

why she had been put in such a position. It was for her to do what was manifestly her duty, trusting only to God; and very bravely she did it. In the case of Esther we find a proof that the right way is always the safe way.

(15, 16.) *Fast ye for me, &c.* Fasting was a usual thing among the Jews in times of trouble, or danger, or for special spiritual discipline; and it was frequently, if not always, accompanied by prayer. There is no reasonable doubt but that the fast which Esther called for was a season of urgent prayer, though we are not told so. Throughout the book of Esther neither the name of God nor any direct allusion to His worship is found. This omission seems very surprising, and has been accounted for by some of the Jewish teachers thus; that this history had been originally incorporated with the chronicles of the Medes and Persians, hence the writer (probably Mordecai himself) purposely omitted the use of the sacred name of God—which every one knows the Jews held in profound reverence—from those heathen records. If this be true, which seems very probable, it is likely that similar reasons withheld the writer, however he was, from any allusion to special acts of Divine worship.

If I perish, I perish! Esther had made up her mind in the fear of God to do what she could to save her nation, even though she should lose her life. But, after such a season of humiliation and looking to God, she had the best of reasons for believing she should not perish, for God had promised—Ps. 50: 23; and doubtless she was familiar with the promise.

(17.) *My God, I have committed my way, &c.* Dear children, if you read this book for yourselves, you will see that God was then, as He is now, and ever will be true to His promise. He heard the cry of His people, and saved them from their enemies; and you believe His word, and put your trust in His Son. He will hear you too, and save you from the power of a far more cruel enemy than the wicked Haman, and from a more dreadful destruction than that which hung over the Jews.

April 27.—**The Coming Saviour**—Isaiah, 42: 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Matt. 3: 17.

LESSON BASIS.—the five W's.

The precise date of this prophecy is not known, but probably was uttered not far from—*When?*—712, B. C.

Where?—At Jerusalem.

By whom?—Isaiah, a prophet of God.

It is—What?—A prophetic view of Christ.

It is given—Why?—As God's testimony to men of the coming and mission of His Son.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

The prophet Isaiah, who, it is believed, uttered the words of this lesson, was an Israelite, the son of Amoz. Further than this we know nothing of his family, nor even to what tribe he belonged. His prophecies were uttered from time to time during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; and foretold events reaching down to the time of Christ, and probably to a time even yet in the future. He must have lived to an advanced age, probably not less than eighty or ninety years.

There is a tradition that he was placed in the trunk of a tree by order of the cruel king Manasseh, and killed by being sawn asunder. This seems to find some confirmation in Heb. 11: 37; as, except this, we have no known instance of the kind. The Hebrew prophet, were all poets; and among them Isaiah was none at all. He was a high priest. His predictions of Christ and His reign are marvels of tenderness and beauty; and his descriptions of the majesty, power, and glory of God are in the highest style of sublimity. But

we must not forget that these prophet-poets did not speak all those things of themselves; but it was God's Spirit that spoke through them. They wrote and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and very generally did not understand their own utterances (See 1st Peter 1: 10-12) as we may, if only we study them carefully in the light shed upon them by Christ and His Apostles.

LESSON TALK.

This prophecy was uttered for men. It represents God as speaking.

1st. To men concerning His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Verses, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

2nd. To Christ in man's hearing and for man's benefit. Verses, 6, 7.

3rd. As declaring the authority upon which those thoughts are said. Verses, 8, 9.

4th. As demanding universal praise. Verse, 10.

1st.

(1.) *Behold*,—look at, consider attentively. *My Servant*, &c., Phil. 2: 7. What was said by another prophet more than 700 years later? John 1: 29. To-day, dear children, your teachers say the very same thing—*Behold, the Son of God*. His character; become acquainted with Him—not by hearsay alone, but by experiencing the power of His grace to make your heart new. *Mine elect*,—chosen, or appointed One. 1st Peter 2: 4. *In whom my soul delighted*. For nearly the same words, uttered when Christ was on earth, read Luke 3: 22. To-day, if God would speak from heaven, He would say the same. *I have put My Spirit, &c.* Isa. 11: 2. *He shall bring forth judgment, &c.*,—that is, His own law of love, His Gospel.

(2.) *It shall not cry, &c.*—Shall do His work quietly and without praise; shall cause no lifting up of banners for the purpose of establishing any earthly supremacy; shall utter no proclamation of His own power.

(3.) *A bruised reed . . . the smoking flax, &c.* The meaning commonly taken from this verse, however true in itself, is not suited to the prophet's language. The first metaphor—a bruised reed, implies something unable to throw off, or raise above existing restraints;—the second, something slowly gathering force in order to do so. The true idea seems to be, that Christ, in prosecuting His distinctive work, would not directly interfere with the existing order of things; neither, on the one hand, turning aside to aid men in their schemes of oppression, nor, on the other, to quell the hearts of discontent; but would rather pursue unobtrusively His chosen work until His own law should be established, to the ultimate triumphing of truth and righteousness in the world. This interpretation is in harmony both with the prophet's language and the facts of Christ's life.

(4.) *He shall not fail*,—to do all He has undertaken; nor be discouraged (broken), till He have set judgment—His own righteous law—in the earth. Christ came to do a definite and pre-appointed work. He should not fail in the smallest particular to do it all; nor lay down His life until the purpose of His coming was fully accomplished. John 10: 18.

(5.) *Who saith thus? God, the Lord.* What has He said? The foregoing things concerning Christ. Who is God, the Lord? Not one of those blind gods of wood or stone whom men vainly worship!—not one of those false oracles that utter their lies in the name of some unseen and terrible one; but Jehovah, the Omnipotent; He who created the heavens, the earth, earth's innumerable products, all life, all creatures upon it, whether animal or spiritual. This is no doubtful authority!

2nd.

(6, 7.) *I have called thee in righteousness*, in pursuance of my own righteous purposes; and *will hold thy hand, and keep thee*—Ps. 91: 1, 12; and