

Religion was almost extinguished. The vices of the times were most debasing.

(2) The coming of Christ brought light into the world. It was like the rising of the sun after a long, black, dark night. Light is a benediction. We have only to think of all the blessings which came into the world with Christianity to get some idea of the great glory which broke upon the world that first Christmas night when Jesus was born. He brought forgiveness for sin, comfort for sorrow, joy for tears. Light shows us the way—Christ came to reveal to us the way to God. Light nourishes life—Christ gives life and nourishes life in all who accept Him.

(3) Christ came into the world as a little child, and yet He was not a common child. The names which are given to Him here tell of His greatness and glory. He is called Wonderful—He was wonderful in His character; human, yet divine, the object of wonder on earth and in heaven. He is called Counselor. This refers to His work as a teacher. Wonderful were the words which Jesus spoke. He is able to give advice to every one in any experience. This we all need. Bad advice has many times wrecked lives and destinies. Christ is always a safe counselor. He is called also the mighty God. Yet there are those who say that Christ was only a man. We cannot read the gospel story and account for the words and work and life of Jesus Christ in any other way but by assuming His deity.

(4) Christ came as a king. The lesson speaks of the government that shall be upon His shoulders, and tells us that there shall be no end to its increase. He was to sit upon the throne of David. The kingdom of Christ began in a very small way. He did not look much like a king the night He was born—sleeping His first sleep in a manger. He looked still less like a king the day He died—hanging upon the cross. Yet He was a king all the while, ruling over men's hearts and lives. Now His kingdom extends through all lands, and in heaven He is called King of kings.

(5) Christ is called the Prince of Peace. The night He came the angels sang, "On earth peace," and ever since that hour peace has been finding its way throughout the world. The disciples were bidden to say at every door as they knocked, "Peace be to this house." Christ's peace has been entering homes and making beauty, joy, and gladness there ever since. The last night He was in this world Jesus said to His disciples, "My peace I give unto you." When He arose, as He met His friends again, the greeting was, "Peace be unto you." Thus peace is the key-word of Christ's gospel.

We should not forget the true meaning of Christmas while we observe the day. To make it only a time of rejoicing and of the giving of gifts, leaving out the thought of Christ, would be to leave out the heart of it all. Let us remember that Christmas is ours because Christ came from heaven to be our Saviour.—*Westminster Teacher.*



LESSON 14.—DEC. 31, 1899.

Review.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."—*Psa. 103: 2.*

DAILY READINGS.—Monday: Luke 2: 1-11. Tuesday: Esther 3: 1-11. Wednesday: Esther 8: 3-8, 15-17. Thursday: Ezra 8: 21-32. Friday: Neh. 1: 1-11. Saturday: Neh. 4: 7-18. Sunday: Neh. 8: 1-12.

Introduction.

The lessons of this quarter form quite a connected

history, and cover not a great period of time. The main thought through the quarter is the history of Judah after the dedication of the second temple. Their oft falling into sin shows how far short legal religion comes in keeping men steadfast; hence the need of a Redeemer. Our quarter beautifully closes with Isaiah's vision of the days of the Messiah. This hope was what upheld the people, and as they cherished it they gave heed to God's law.

Notes on the Lessons.

Lesson 1. "Joy in God's House." Though written by David, B.C. 1045, this Psalm appears to be among those collected by Ezra and Nehemiah after the captivity of Judah, and used by the people then, B.C. 536. If this Psalm was calculated to stir the hearts of the people to cherish Jerusalem as the Holy City, where God would manifest His presence to them, the ark being placed there; then surely it was suited to the returned captives who had been separated from the city for seventy years. If we conclude this to be the Psalm of the Jews upon their hearing the edict of Cyrus granting their return to Jerusalem, it will show how faithfully they returned to the customs of their religion.

Lesson 2. "Haman's Plot Against the Jews." The history contained in the Book of Esther belongs in the time between the dedication of the second temple and the coming of Ezra to Judea. "When the temple was finished there came a pause of nearly sixty years in the history of the Jews. During this time the Medo-Persian empire became larger than any previous kingdom in the world, so that its ruler was surrounded with splendor and wealth almost beyond imagination. Its ambition was to conquer Greece, and extend its sway over the known world."

Lesson 3. "Esther Pleading for Her People." When Haman had fairly completed his plan and was waiting to execute it, God turned the balance and caused his plot to be fulfilled upon himself. He was disappointed, humbled, exposed and put to death. His position, honor, wealth, and power were given to Mordecai. The people rejoiced at the promotion of a good man, but mourned not for the fallen tyrant. Esther's courage and loyalty are to be admired and imitated.

Lesson 4. "Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem." In this lesson we have Ezra's account of his mission to Jerusalem. He was a thorough student of the Bible, especially of the law of Moses (chapter 7: 6-10), and God had filled his heart with a desire to teach the law to the people.

Lesson 5. "Psalms of Deliverance." In Psalm eighty-five we have a prayer that the people might realize the full blessings of restoration. A portion of this Psalm implies that the people were in a state of great distress and weakness, such as is described in Ezra and Nehemiah. Psalm one hundred and twenty-six is a thanksgiving for return from captivity.

Lesson 6. "Nehemiah's Prayer." "Thirteen years of silence pass between Ezra's work and the beginning of Nehemiah's history. He was a noble example of Christian patriotism. He was a man of profound piety, connecting everything, great and small, with the will of God. He found his way to success through prevailing prayer."

Lesson 7. "Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem." To-day we see the answer to Nehemiah's prayer. At the end of four months he returned to his duties as cupbearer. The king observed that his countenance was sad and inquired of his trouble. Then Nehemiah made known his request to the king, the