

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON VIII.

Feb. 24. } UZZIAH'S PRIDE PUNISHED. { Chron. xxvi. 16-23.
1875.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."—Prov. xvi. 18.

HOME STUDIES.

M. 2 Chron. xxv. 1-13. Amaziah overthrows the Edomites.

T. 2 Chron. xxv. 14-28. Amaziah slain.

W. 2 Chron. xxvi. 1-15. Uzziah's prosperity.

Th. Isa. ii. 1-22. The mountain of the Lord's house.

F. Isa. v. 1-12. Parable of the vineyard.

S. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16-23. Uzziah's leprosy.

S. Num. xvi. 1-35. Sacrilege punished.

HELPS TO STUDY.

The later years of Josiah failed to fulfil the promise of his childhood. After his guardian, Jehoiada, was laid in his honored sepulchre, the king turned aside from righteous ways, and transgressed against the Lord. His kingdom suffered, and he perished in dishonor. He was succeeded on the throne by his son Amaziah, who was at that time twenty-five years of age, and who reigned twenty-nine years, or from 839 to 810 B.C. He was a brave and energetic king, free from all complicity with the Baal-worship, and from all idolatry, except on one occasion which cost him dear. His first act was to punish the conspirators who had murdered his father. Having re-organized the military establishment of his kingdom, he collected an army for a war upon Edom, which had revolted from Judah in the days of Jehoram. He also hired a large force from the king of Israel, but at the last moment, on the remonstrance and advice of a prophet, he sent these mercenaries back; and they, indignant at the treatment, committed depredations upon a large number of villages on their way home. The attack upon Edom was completely successful; great slaughter of the Edomites was made, and the king returned with much spoil to Jerusalem. Among the rest were brought the images of the gods of Edom; and singularly enough, the king was beguiled into worshipping the gods who had not been able to protect their worshippers from him. Judgment was immediately denounced upon him by a prophet, and soon followed. Elated with his success, he undertook to call the king of Israel to account for the depredations of his mercenaries. The king of Israel remonstrated with him; but, on his persisting in hostilities, attacked and conquered him, and took and sacked Jerusalem, and demolished its wall for a considerable distance. This was the first time that the fortifications of the city were injured by an enemy. Amaziah himself was carried a captive to Samaria; but he was soon released, apparently by the death of the king of Israel, and returned to Jerusalem, where he reigned in comparative peace and prosperity for fifteen years. The punishment of his sin was not, however, yet complete. An extensive conspiracy was formed against him, and he was compelled to flee to Lachish, a fortified town in the extreme south-west of the kingdom. Here he was found by the conspirators, and put to death. His remains were taken to Jerusalem, and buried in the royal sepulchres. He was succeeded by his son Uzziah, who was at that time only sixteen years of age, and who reigned for the very long period of fifty-two years, or from 810 to 758 B.C. Like his father he was a wise, brave, and energetic prince, and was faithful to the worship of Jehovah, and therefore was very prosperous. The cities were built, the frontiers strengthened, the army increased, and the land advanced in all its interests. But success developed pride, and in an evil hour one act of sacrilege was followed by a fearful fall.

I. UZZIAH "LIFTED UP." Verses 16-18.

Uzziah was strong. (1.) In his security upon the throne, where he had been placed during a popular tumult. (2.) In the material prosperity of his kingdom, which had grown rich during years of peace. (3.) In the strength of his defenses and the number of his warriors. (4.) In his conquest of the surrounding nations, from Philistia to Ammon. (5.) In his fame and honor abroad.

Then his heart was lifted up. Prosperity led to presumption, strength to self-sufficiency, Deut. xxxii. 15; Hab. ii. 4. Great success is the mother of pride. Men forget the source of their power, and that after all they are but instruments. When one realizes that he is but an instrument in God's hands, then it keeps him humble: Isa. x. 15; Zech. iv. 6.

He transgressed, not as other kings in forsaking God's house, but in entering it sacrilegiously. "The good way is one; by-ways are many." He went into the temple, the holy place, where none save the priests might enter, to burn incense. (Note 1.) Why should he be excluded from a privilege which the pagan kings enjoyed, and which the king of Israel probably exercised. He sought to combine the regal and sacerdotal functions. Melchizedek was king and priest: Gen. xiv. 18. Jeroboam had officiated as high priest at Bethel, and Amaziah, his own father, had burned incense to the gods of the Edomites. David and Solomon, also, had offered sacrifices—but never within the sacred precincts of the temple or in usurpation of the peculiar functions of the priests. This Uzziah must have known. But pride has hardened his heart. He has forgotten the fate of Korah and his company, Num. xvi. He had to learn the humbling truth that before God a king is no greater than any other man. He needed a consecrated priest to intervene between God and him just as much as the poorest subject in his kingdom. No righteousness of his own gave him the right for a moment to stand within the holy place. Neither can any man now come before the Lord unrepresented. The Levitical priesthood was typical

of Christ, who says: "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," John xiv. 6. He, "within the veil," is our forerunner, "made an high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek," Heb. vi. 19, 20. He is the only way of access to God. Uzziah's fate bids us beware of substituting for Him any self-chosen ways of self-righteousness and worldly wisdom.

The king succeeded in entering the consecrated place. The priest suspecting his purpose at once went in after him, and with him four score valiant men, who stood by the right and for it manfully faced the king. Here is true courage. Acts iv. 19; v. 29.

The reproof was fearless, but calm, reverent, and without anger. That which the king intended, he was told, was not his duty or function. It belonged to the priest only. They remind him that he has already transgressed. The end of the way in which he is hastening can only be disaster and death. Neither shall it be for time honour from the Lord. Nothing forbidden by God can bring lasting honour to men. True honour is only to be attained by obedience and loyal service. But sin leads to dishonour. Disobedience drags men down. 1 Sam. ii. 26; xxv. 17; Ps. cxxxii. 18; Prov. iii. 3, 4; xii. 8; xvi. 7; John xii. 26.

II. UZZIAH "THRUST OUT." Verses 19-23.

Then Uzziah was wroth at the interference of the priests. It is hard for one who is accustomed to have his own way to give up, or to bear with opposition. Infatuated, the miserable king will not desist from his purpose; and his punishment came swift and terrible. The leprosy rose up in his forehead. (Note 2.) Num. xii. 9, 10; 2 Kings v. 27. A sudden judgment, in the very act of sin: a signal judgment, in its severity; a public judgment, before many witnesses; a conspicuous judgment, upon the forehead, the most exposed portion of the body. "Public offences must have open shame." The forehead of the high-priest bore the inscription, written in letters of gold upon his mitre, "Holiness to the Lord;" Uzziah's pallid brow bore witness to the divine holiness and justice.

The priests thrust him out. But there is no need now of force. He felt the hand of God upon him, and himself hastened to go out. What a fall from honour to disgrace, from royalty to contempt. A moment ago a haughty prince, now a humiliated, despised leper, driven like a dog from the sacred precincts. He went out as with the brand of Cain upon his forehead. His arrogance was changed to terror and his pride to despair. He had entered the temple the envy of all men; he left it in a condition such that the poorest subject in his kingdom would not have changed places with him. How little it pays to brave the anger of God!

Once surrounded by courtiers and servants, the leprosy king is compelled to dwell alone. (Note 3.) Uzziah even from his own family. And when he died his body was not allowed to rest in the royal sepulchres, lest they be defiled, but was buried in the adjacent field. It is a mournful history. The eighty-eighth Psalm, the darkest and saddest in all the Psalter, has been attributed to Uzziah in his leprosy; as it has also been to Jeremiah in the dungeon, Hezekiah in his sickness, Job in his sufferings. In each case this is the merest conjecture, yet we feel how appropriate to the fallen monarch is this song of darkness in which only one ray of hope breaks through the gloom—"O God of my salvation."

The grand truth set forth by the lesson is that there is no time when men need wisdom, self-control, and humility more than in prosperity and strength.

If Uzziah was "lifted up," he was only what most of us are at success. If a boy gets promotion from his employers, if a girl wins a prize at school, can they help being "lifted up?" But how is it that they are not, like Jehoshaphat, "lifted up in the ways of the Lord?" Why do not these very temporal mercies fill them with a sense of God's goodness and their own unworthiness, and elate them with joyful gratitude and a holy resolve to dedicate all to him? Few men have risen in life so wonderfully as Jacob. "With my staff," said he, "I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands." But what were his feelings about it? "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant." (Gen. xxxii. 10.)

That is the true spirit in which to bear success, to make it a reason for greater humility and more devotion. "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice," etc. (Rom. xii. 1.)

In Uzziah, how sadly different. His honours only drew him on to seek greater honours still, and that by breaking the law. And in a moment all his pride is turned into utter humiliation.

Seek the help of the Lord in everything; but when you have been helped, forget not the helper.

Let every mercy make you more lowly, more thankful, more loyal to God.

Seek not great things for thyself. "Pride goeth before destruction."

Reverence God's ordinances. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God."

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. The incense employed in the service of the tabernacle was compounded of four perfumes: toite, onycha, gallanum, and pure frankincense (Exod. xxv. 6.) All incense not made of these ingredients was forbidden to be offered. In addition to the four ingredients already mentioned seven others are mentioned, thus making eleven which the Jewish doctors affirm were communicated to Moses on Mount Sinai. The incense possessed the threefold characteristic of being salted, pure, and holy. Salt was the symbol of incorruptness, and nothing was offered without it except the wine of the drink-offering, the blood, and the wood. The incense thus compounded was specially set apart for the service of the sanctuary: its desecration was punished with death. Aaron as high priest was originally appointed to offer incense. The altar of incense was also called the golden altar to distinguish it from the altar of burnt-offering, which was called the brazen altar. That in the tabernacle was made of acacia-wood, overlaid with pure gold.

In shape it was square, being a cubit in length and breadth, and two cubits in height. Like the altar of burnt-offering, it had horns at the four corners, which were of one piece with the rest of the altar. It had also a top or roof on which the incense was laid and lighted. The altar stood in the holy place, before the veil; that is, by the ark of the testimony. The altar in Solomon's temple was similar, but was made of cedar overlaid with gold. From the circumstance that the sweet incense was burnt upon it every day, morning and evening (Exod. xxx. 7, 8), as well as that the blood of atonement was sprinkled upon it, this altar had a special importance attached to it. It is the only altar which appears in the heavenly temple (Isa. vi. 6. Rev. viii. 3, 4).

2. In the hot, dry, and dusty atmosphere of the East, there has always been great prevalence of all kinds of skin diseases; and of these leprosy has always been considered the most terrible. There are several different varieties of it, some of them producing results, in the disfigurement and decay of the body, too horrible for description. Leprosy was dreaded, not only for the pain and suffering caused by the disease, but also for the social disqualifications which it brought. The leper was loathed and shunned. Among the Hebrews he was compelled to live alone outside of the city, and was not permitted to join in public worship, or to mingle with people, or to touch any one, or to allow any one to approach without warning him with the cry, "Unclean" (Lev. xiii. 45, 46; 2 Chron. xxvi. 21).

3. In a several house, i.e., in a separate house. Some understand a "hospital" or "infirmary;" others translate "a house of liberation," and "a house of retirement." He was cut off from the house of the Lord; i.e., he was shut out from the temple, being obliged to withdraw from intercourse with others, and living in a separate place. So early as the second year of the Exodus, lepers were obliged to reside without the camp (Num. v. 1-4). When the Israelites came into their own land, and lived in cities, the spirit of the law thus far operated, that lepers were obliged to reside in a separate place, which was called "the house of uncleanness;" and from this seclusion not even kings, when they became leprosy, were exempted.

INTENDED REFORMATION.—How dangerous to defer those momentous reformations which the conscience is solemnly preaching to the heart! If they are neglected, the difficulty and indisposition are increasing every month. The mind is receding, degree after degree, from the warm and hopeful zone, till at last it will enter the arctic circle, and become fixed in relentless and eternal ice.—John Foster.

"HE hath made him to be sin." Though He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," yet He was looked upon, reckoned, and accounted as a sinner, and actually dealt with as the greatest, the chiefest of sinners. Why did He leave the throne of His glory and become a wretched sojourner upon earth? Why was He "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?" Why was He "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted?" Why was He condemned to death, and expired on the cross? On account of sin. Sin was the cause of all the humiliation, degradation, suffering, and woe which the blessed Jesus underwent. No sooner was sin laid upon Him than "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." The commission then was, "Awake, O sword, against the Man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts! Smite the Shepherd: smite, and spare not." Nor did the sword of justice cease to smite Him till "he bowed his head and gave up the ghost." Come, my brethren, and take a view of the interesting object here before you. Come and take a view of the holy Jesus, made sin.—From "The Sin Offering," by the Rev. R. Shuttler, D.D.

MAN'S DEPENDENCE ON A HIGHER POWER.—On the ground of analogy, we think it highly probable that ever department of Nature is subject to regular and stable laws; and on the same ground we may anticipate that, in the progressive advance of Human knowledge, many new fields will yet be conquered, and added to the domain of Science. But suppose every law were discovered,—suppose, even, that every individual event should be shown to depend on some natural cause, there would still remain at least two considerations which would remind us of our dependence. The first is our ignorance of the whole combination of causes which may at any time be brought into action, and of the results which may flow from them in circumstances such as we can neither see nor provide against. The second is our ignorance, equally unavoidable and profound, of the intelligent and voluntary agencies which may be at work, modifying, disposing, and directing that combination of causes, so as to accomplish the purposes of the Omniscient Mind. Our want of knowledge in either case is a reason for uncertainty; and our uncertainty in regard to events in which we may be deeply concerned is fitted to teach us our dependence on a higher Power.—Buchanan.

THE heart of a man is not sufficient for self-support, therefore naturally it seeks out some other thing to lean and rest itself on. The unhappiness is, for the most part, that it seeks to things below itself: and these, being so mean and so uncertain, cannot be a firm and certain stay to it. These things are not fixed themselves, how can they fix the heart? The believer only hath this advantage; he hath a rest high enough and sure enough, out of the reach of all hazards. "His heart is fixed trusting in the Lord." The basis of this happiness is, He trusteth in the Lord. So the heart is fixed; and so fixed, it fears no ill-tidings. This trust is grounded on the Word of God, revealing the power and all-sufficiency of God, and withal, His goodness, His offer of Himself to be the stay of souls, commanding us to rest upon Him. O the sweet calm of such a soul amidst all storms; thus once trusting and fixed, then no more fear, not afraid of evil tidings, nor of any ill hearing! not troubled before trouble with dark and dismal apprehensions, but satisfied in a quiet, unmoved expectation of the hardest things. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee." Isa. xvi. 3.—Archbishop Lightfoot.