

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He warns that he may save us from the consequences of our own sin and folly. He longs to redeem us. Even on the cross the penitent thief found pardon. It is never too late to turn to God and find forgiveness. It is never too late to turn over a new leaf and start the formation of right habits. However much the patience of God has been tried, it has not yet been exhausted. When John Bunyan was a boy he was very wicked. He had a bad reputation especially for blasphemy. But God did not make his way easy or permit him to sin without warning. One day the voice of conscience spoke to him so definitely and clearly that it sounded to him like a voice straight from heaven, saying: "Wilt thou forsake thy sins and go

to heaven or keep thy sins and go to hell?" On another occasion he overheard the conversation of a group of good women talking about religion and he saw in the incident, that impressed him profoundly, the hand of God. God was working with him, wooing him from his evil ways, trying to save him from the consequences of his own wickedness. At last he yielded himself to God. He writes of that day: "That was a good day to me; I hope I shall not forget it. I thought I could have spoken of his love and of his mercy to the very crows that sat upon the ploughed lands before me had they been capable to have understood me." God longs to have us all give ourselves to him, and when we yield ourselves to the wooings of his love he cannot do too much for us. Our God is gracious.

THE LESSON GRADED

This section embraces teaching material for the various grades in the School.

For Teachers of Bible Classes

Read carefully 2 Kgs., chs. 23-25. Review the main features of the history of Judah from the reign of Hezekiah to the Fall of Jerusalem.

1. *Conquerors and conquered.* The teachers should make clear to the members of the class the course of events during this period. The Assyrians were at the height of their power during the reign of Hezekiah. Their ambition caused them to interfere in the affairs of Palestine. In B.C. 722, Samaria had fallen; in B.C. 701, Judah had been saved only as by fire. In B.C. 625, Assyria began to break up. Babylonia, one of its vassal states, revolted. In B.C. 607, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, fell before the allied armies of Cyaxares, the Mede, and Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian. The Babylonians now claimed all the possessions of the defunct Assyria in Palestine. Egypt disputed the claim. It was in resisting the armies of Egypt that Josiah fell at Megiddo (see 2 Kgs. 23:29). The Egyptians were finally defeated in B.C. 605 by the Babylonians at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar forced Jehoiakim, who had been a vassal of Egypt, to recognize his sovereignty. Jehoiakim remained loyal for three years (see 2 Kgs., ch. 24). The Babylonians captured Jerusalem

and set up Zedekiah as king in B.C. 597, 2 Kgs. 24:11-17. Zedekiah revolted in B.C. 586. It is the second capture of Jerusalem which we study in this lesson. Draw attention to the incidents of the siege, the number of captives, and their treatment.

The fall of Jerusalem stunned for a time the people who had believed that they were God's chosen nation. On what prophecy did the people reply? (Isa. 31:4, 5.) Ultimately, they perceived that God was purging them for world service, Isa. 49:1-6.

2. *A nation in decay.* Judah had many warnings. The fate of the surrounding peoples and of Samaria should have caused them to think. The voices of the prophets—Isaiah, Micah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah—should have sobered their minds. What were the real causes of Judah's fall? (Read Ezek., chs. 8, 22; Jer. 5:7, 28; 17:5-7; 18:12.) What was the immediate cause? (Jer., ch. 27; Ezek. 17:15.) Immorality, corrupt religion, and bad politics usually go together. What influences are at work to save our modern democracies from the evil effects of similar sins?

3. *Imperishable elements.* The work of the prophets seemed, at the time, to have been fruitless. Yet two invaluable results came from it. The religion of Judah was preserved and purified in the Exile through the faith of those who believed the word of the prophets.