

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XI.

Mar. 17 } HEZEKIAH AND THE ASSYRIANS { 2 Chron. xxxii. 1873 } { 9-21 }

GOLDEN TEXT—"With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles."—Verse 8.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. 2 Chron. xxxii. 1-23. Assyrian invasion.
T. Isa. x. 5-34. Woe to the Assyrians.
W. Isa. xxxvi. 1-22. Rabshakeh's blasphemy.
Th. Isa. xxxvii. 1-20. Hezekiah's prayer.
F. Isa. xxxvii. 21-35. Deliverance foretold.
S. Ps. lxxvi. 1-12. The stout-hearted spoiled.
S. 2 Kings xx. 1-21. End of Hezekiah's reign.

HELPS TO STUDY.

The greater part of the material for the lesson this week lies outside the portion appointed for reading. The passages marked for home reading should be carefully studied.

When Hezekiah came to the throne he found himself a tributary of Assyria. Ahaz had done homage as a vassal to Tiglath-pileser, and sent him some of the treasures of the temple. Hezekiah, with the same spirit and courage with which he attacked idolatry, threw off this foreign yoke, trusting in God for protection. About the same time Hoshea, the last king of Israel, who had been subdued by Sennacherib, did the same. (2 Kings xvii. 4.) This brought an Assyrian army into Palestine. Samaria was first attacked, taken after a three years' siege, and the kingdom of Israel finally overthrown. Jerusalem's turn would come next.

But an unexpected delay took place. The whole force of Assyria was for five years occupied in besieging Tyre, unsuccessfully after all; and in the interval Sargon succeeded Sennacherib in the throne of Nineveh. In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, however, the long threatened blow descended. Sargon's army invaded Judah, and took all the fenced cities. In 2 Kings xviii. 13 and Isa. xxxvi. 1, either "Sennacherib" is a copyist's mistake for "Sargon," or Sennacherib was then the general in command. (In every other place referring to this invasion, the expression is merely "the king of Assyria.") Sargon is mentioned in Isa. xi. 1, and as no such name occurs in the ancient historians, it was a complete puzzle until the Nineveh monuments showed that a king of that name immediately preceded Sennacherib.

What did Hezekiah do? He quailed before the storm, and submitted in the most abject manner. "I have offended," he said; "return from me; that which thou puttest on me will I bear." And a crushing ransom had to be paid to ward off the blow. 2 Kings xviii. 14-16.

This is the darkest hour in Hezekiah's reign. It is supposed that Shebna, who was then chief minister, was the evil adviser on this occasion, and that Isaiah's denunciation of him and indication of Eliakim as his successor, followed on the faint-hearted submission. (See Isa. xxii.) We may be sure that Isaiah himself had no part in such a policy. On the contrary, in the very chapter (Isa. x.) in which he vividly pictures the enemy's conquering march (verses 28-32) he exclaims, "O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian." (Verse 14.)

In the same year, whether before or after the submission, we know not, occurred Hezekiah's "sickness unto death." Here, again, we see his despondency and feeble faith; but God graciously gave him a miraculous sign of his recovery and prolonged life, and he reigned fifteen years more, during which a son and heir was born to him. Then came the depopulation from Babylon, which is full of interest in connection with the Assyrian monuments, but I have not space to enlarge upon it. Merodach-Baladan probably wished to secure the alliance of Judah against Assyria, to which Babylon was then tributary; and most significant is Isaiah's prophecy, when rebuking Hezekiah for his vanity in showing off his treasures, that Babylon, and not Assyria, would by and by be the conqueror of Jerusalem. (2 Kings xx. 14-18.)

Some years passed away. Assyria and Egypt were engaged in deadly conflict, and Judah was let alone. Hezekiah, under Isaiah's influence, resolved to throw off the yoke again, and vigorously set to work to fortify the city. And it was while encouraging his people to this work that he uttered the noble words chosen for the Golden Text, "Be strong and courageous; be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him; for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles." "And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah." (2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 8.) When we are brave, and trust in God, others will rest upon us.

I. THE IMPIOUS CHALLENGE: Verses 9-19.

Sennacherib soon heard that Hezekiah had thrown off his yoke, and sent three of his servants (Note 1) to awe the Jews into submission. Sennacherib was himself at this time laying siege to Lachish. (Note 2.) A fuller account of the interview of the Assyrian officers with Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah, the servants of Hezekiah, will be found in 2 Kings xviii. 17-37. Rabshakeh was the spokesman for the Assyrians. He ridicules the confidence of the Jews. Whereon do ye trust? What madness is it to which Hezekiah is driving you? The horrors of famine and thirst are before you. Hath not the same Hezekiah taken away the altars of your God? He has heard that the altars and high places have been taken away; and he either imagines that the people have been robbed of their religious privileges and that the God of the land is angry; or he pretends to think so, artfully trying to excite the prejudices of those Jews who may not have been pleased by Hezekiah's reformation.

Know ye not what I have done to . . . other lands?—He had crushed the revolt of Babylon, ravaged the Aramean nations along the Tigris and Euphrates, conquered a part of Media, reduced Zidon, Tyre, and Edom into tributary condition, and waged successful war against Egypt. How much loss . . . your God.—As Judah was least among the nations, a mere fragment between Syria and Egypt, so its God was deemed correspondingly feeble. Dan. iii. 15.

He wrote also letters. He did so, because he was alarmed at the approach of an Ethiopian army, and he hoped to compel instant submission. 2 Kings xix. 8-13. By the blasphemous pretensions of this letter, the King of Assyria made the war a conflict between himself and Jehovah. Job xv. 25.

Then they cried . . . unto the people. This verse in the order of time precedes the last. On comparing 2 Kings xviii. and xix. it is clear that Sennacherib only sent the letter to Hezekiah after his general had informed him of the fruitlessness of his efforts to induce the people of Jerusalem to submit; while the calling aloud in the Jews' language to the people on the wall took place in the first negotiations with the ambassadors of Hezekiah.

This device was resorted to, because it was known that there was among the Jews an Assyrian idolatrous party discontented with the reforming tendencies of Hezekiah, and ready to revolt against him.

The great question is: "Whereon do ye trust?" Do you rely upon the promises of God, or upon the delusive promises and threats of the prince of the world? Ps. ii. 12; xxxiv. 8; lli. 7; lxxiv. 12; cxlvi. 5; Prov. xi. 28; xvi. 20; Jer. xvii. 5; Matt. iv. 8, 9; 2 Cor. iv. 4; Eph. vi. 12.

The one who lays siege to our soul has a great multitude with him. How many he can boast of having overcome! Nevertheless, fear not, for there are more with us than with him. With us is the Lord our God to help us fight our battles. Luke xxii. 3; John xii. 31; xiii. 2; 1 Cor. xv. 57; 2 Cor. iv. 4; Eph. ii. 2; Rom. viii. 37; 1 John iv. 4; v. 4. How haughty and ignorant is unbelief. The taunts of the wicked are harmless. The gods of earth are worthless.

II. HEZEKIAH'S PRAYER: Verse 20.

Hezekiah took the letter, and "spread it before the Lord." He had not heard of the rumour which was the cause of its being written. He was not aware that there was any aid approaching from Egypt. He was shut up to his God for help. All the better for him that he was. God helped more in a single night than the king of Egypt could have done in a lifetime. The prayer is the utterance of direct and simple faith. The act of spreading it out before the Lord shows his child-like confidence in God. The prayer is a petition to God to accept the challenge that Sennacherib has thrown down. He prays that God would save, not because of any glory that would accrue to the king, but all the other gods having been proved impotent, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, and thou only." He pleads the most strongly with God who pleads for God's honour.

Isaiah too who had been the king's counsellor, joins him in supplication. (1.) It was earnest prayer, for there was urgent need. (2.) It was devout prayer. The king spread out the writing before the Lord in the temple, as if to cast the burden on him. (3.) It was confident prayer. He who is God's servant has right to look to his master for protection. (4.) It was united prayer: the king and the prophet combining their faith. (5.) It was prevailing prayer, bringing an immediate and abundant answer.

III. HELP FROM GOD: Verse 21.

The answer to the prayer came through Isaiah, in one of the grandest prophetic passages in the whole Bible, Isaiah xxxvii. And swiftly came the righteous vengeance. The Lord sent his angel. No doubt some instrumentality was employed, for God works through natural law. Perhaps it was a pestilence, which in a hot climate has been known to sweep away whole armies; or a simoon, the wind of the desert enshrouding the camp with its burning blast. "God's quiver has more than one arrow." Cut off all the mighty men. To the number of 185,000, as recorded in Isa. xxxvii. 36. Shame of face. The monuments mention victories after this, but no war against Palestine. Slew him. Sennacherib was murdered by his own sons, while worshipping in the idol temple. So perish all who defy the God of Israel! The forty-sixth, seventy-fifth, and seventy-sixth Psalms belong to this period and add much to the interest of the history.

Thus God maketh even the wrath of man to praise Him.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

Servants.—In 2 Kings xviii. 17, they are called Tartan, Rab-saris, and Rab-shakeh; but these were not personal, but official names. In Jer. xxxix. 13, they stand side by side with the personal names of those who bore them at that time. Tartan, or general, was the "captain of the life-guard" (2 Kings xxx. 8,) or commander-in-chief. Rab-saris, prince of the eunuchs, but not himself a eunuch, had charge of all the officers and servants of the court; the office was known in Egypt (Gen. xxxvii. 36) and in Babylon (Dan. i. 3,) and is at this day one of the highest offices in the Turkish court. Rab-shakeh, chief cup-bearer, an officer in the Egyptian court also (Gen. xl. 21,) was likewise an important official; Nehemiah once filled the office (Neh. i. 11.) These three officers, then, were the highest civil and military officers in the empire. Sennacherib sent three such officers in order to give importance to the mission. It appears that they were accompanied with a large force (2 Kings xviii. 17,) but with the design of intimidating the people, rather than with the intention of besieging the city. No military operations were attempted: the army merely encamped on the west side of the city (2 Kings xviii. 17.)

Lachish, meaning invincible. It was a town of great natural strength of position, and extensive fortification; situated about forty miles south-west from Jerusalem, on the direct road to Egypt. It was a strong place even before the conquest (Josh. x. 32,) was fortified by Rehoboam (chap. xi. 9,) and probably by Aza (chap. xiv. 7,) and was selected by Amaziah, king of Judah, as a place of refuge from con-

spirators at Jerusalem (chap. xxv. 27.) The main body of the Assyrians, together with the king, prosecuted the siege of this city, while this detachment went to Jerusalem.

3. It is interesting to find in the annals of Sennacherib a full account of this campaign. "And because Hezekiah, king of Judah," says Sennacherib, "would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms, and by the might of my power, I took forty-six of his strong fenced cities; and of the smaller towns which were scattered about I took and plundered a countless number. And from these places I captured and carried off as spoil 200,150 people, old and young, male and female, together with horses and mares, asses and camels, oxen and sheep, a countless multitude. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in, and raising banks of earth against the gates, so as to prevent escape. . . . Then upon this Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms; and he sent out to me the chiefs and the elders of Jerusalem, with thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver, and divers treasures, a rich and immense booty. . . . All these things were brought to me at Nineveh, the seat of my government, Hezekiah having sent them by way of tribute, and as a token of his submission to my power." It is needless, however, to particularize the points of agreement between these narratives. The only discrepancy is in the amount of silver which Sennacherib received. Layard, however, suggests that the Bible may only include the actual amount of money in the three hundred talents of silver, whilst the Assyrian records comprise all the precious metals taken away.—*Rawlinson's Bampton Lectures.*

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTRY.

The Church of God has been purchased with the blood of his dear Son, and, to estimate the responsibility of the ministry, we have to "print in our remembrance that to us is entrusted the care of immortal souls." "All souls are mine," is a text to which I have often thought we ought to give prominence; it should be on our study wall, that the eye may rest upon it when we are preparing for our public ministrations; it should ever be in our remembrance, wherever our lot be cast, whether amongst the cultured and refined classes, or amongst the illiterate and degraded. "All souls are mine." And as each one committed to us has a soul to be saved, to be plucked as a brand from the burning, the salvation of each separate soul depends largely, humanly speaking, on the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of our ministrations. God is pleased to use human instrumentality in connection with the carrying out of His divine purpose toward mankind. He might have created a new race, and thus superseded the race fallen from righteousness. He might have saved a fallen race without the intervention or co-operation of any instrument; but it is in the kingdom of grace as in every department of creation—God uses means towards the accomplishment of His will. Ours is at once the privilege and responsibility of being fellow-workers with God. To each soul we are a saviour of life unto life, or of death unto death. Every sermon we preach furthers a soul's salvation or increases its condemnation. Every private monition, as it is received or rejected, is helpful to the spiritual life, or makes its growth less possible; for the judgment day is being every day rehearsed, and is now being carried out, either in the adding daily to the Church of such as shall be saved, or in the condemnation of the reprobate, either in the sealing of the elect, or in the branding of the lost. How grave, how momentous, therefore, our work, when we set before us, calmly and distinctly, the issues for weal or woe, which may hang on our ministry! And this the more so when we remember that the laity are, as a rule, very dependent on the recognised ministers of religion for instruction in things spiritual. It is now as it has ever been. Men have been set apart from their fellow-men for the definite and distinct work of the sacred ministry, and, with comparatively rare exceptions, the mass of the laity look to the clergy for spiritual instruction and guidance, as we look to a physician for medicine, to a lawyer for counsel. The very distinctness of our office, the peculiar character of our vocation, the recognised authority of the ministry, the assumed or allowed superiority in the knowledge of God's Word, and that deference to our sacred calling which the laity spontaneously accord, and only reluctantly cease to pay, all this establishes an especial claim on us in their estimation; it makes them quick to notice where we fall short of their ideal of the ministry, and equally quick to appreciate and commend whenever we in any measure realize what they do: unnaturally look for at our hands.—*Rev. F. Dickson.*

THE POPIH HIERARCHY IN SCOTLAND.

It is, we think, very much to be regretted that so many of the Protestants of this country feel very little concern about the doings of the Pope and his Court in relation to this matter. They admit that it is both impudent and presumptuous for Pope Pius IX. to send his bulls into our land, and map out our country into as many episcopal dioceses as he thinks fit. But why, they say, trouble ourselves, or make any outcry on the subject? They are only his own subjects, the members of his own Church, that are affected by it, it touches neither our civil nor religious liberties as Protestants; and if he chooses to alter the ecclesiastical relations of his own people, why need we interfere in the matter? But such views are regarded as very greatly mistaken, and betray only the ignorance of those who express them of the policy of the Church of Rome, and the effect which this act of the Pope will most assuredly have on the religious and political standing of every Roman Catholic in Scotland. For it will, to a certainty, change the relation in which the Roman Catholic community will stand to the civil government and laws of the country, and modify the allegiance which they will in future give to them. To see this clearly, we may state that since the Reformation, Scotland has been regarded as a missionary district only of the Roman Church, and not an integral portion of the Pope's ecclesiastical empire. And although its bishops have in later times been styled "Vicars