

The Sunday School

✓ Our Bible Lesson.

Notes and Suggestions on the International Lessons.

By S. John Duncan-Clark.

A Preview of the Fourth Quarter.

WITH the coming quarter we finish the present series of Old Testament lessons. During the last three months they have been what we might call studies in lights and shade, and such they will continue to the end of the year. For, although last month we left the people restored to their own land and in the midst of building the Lord's house, encouraged by the prophetic utterances of Haggai and Zechariah, all is not yet sunshine and calm. Our study opens with a song of rejoicing, but the evil machinations of Haman, the backsliding of Israel, and Malachi's words of rebuke and condemnation mingle in an undertone that is heard throughout the whole series. The lessons of this quarter are largely narrative, but have no lack of rich and varied instruction for the teachable mind. Let us seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we may understand aright the truths contained in these interesting stories and selections from His Word.

A Song of Pilgrimage.

(Psa. 122. Lesson for Oct. 1.)

The appropriateness of this Psalm in its present use is of course found in its following our lessons dealing with the rebuilding of the temple. The date and circumstances of its composition were long prior to the time of the restoration, it having in all probability been written by David, as Cotton Mather suggests in his edition of the Psalter, for the use of pilgrims to the three great annual feasts at Zion. There can be little doubt, however, that it was applied by the Jews of post-exilic days to the celebration of the restored city and house of their God; it seems to have a place in a collection, possibly made by Ezra or Nehemiah, for the use of the people after their deliverance from captivity.

It breathes the very spirit of true worship which finds its highest motive and aspiration in the worthiness of Him upon whom it is set. To the Jew the house of the Lord was the visible, tangible manifestation of all that was vital to his nationality and religion. A dismantled and ruined temple would be in the thought of a devout Israelite the greatest calamity conceivable. The gladness of entering the precincts of the holy building lay in the fact that upon it Jehovah had seen fit to set His name, and with it to associate His power and glory. It was God's condescension to the desire of the human heart for that which might be appreciated by the senses. All about them, the heathen evidenced this natural tendency in the fashioning of their deities from wood and stone and metal.

GOD FORBADE A PRACTICE SO DEGRADING in influence as this. A man will never rise above his conception of God, and any thought of Him that can be expressed in picture or image, must of necessity be limiting to man's possibilities of spiritual development. Thus God prohibited all efforts to give form to the Divine. Once He Himself had made a being in His own likeness, and until the day came when in His redemptive plan that image

might again be reproduced, none other should attempt it. But He met this desire of the human heart for the tangible, as He meets all our desires. He deigned to localize Himself, if we may use the term, for the worship of His people, first in the tabernacle and latterly in the temple. Still, never in the thought of Israel was the truth lost sight of, that God was greater than His house. All the prophets and leaders of religious thought among the people emphasized this fact of supreme importance: Jehovah was not a mere national or tribal Deity; He was the alone God, supreme in all the universe.

The glory of tabernacle and temple with their significant symbolry of sacrifice and ritual was but type and figure of

THE COMING CONSUMMATION,

toward which the present age is a step in advance, when God shall again rest satisfied in the contemplation of His image mirrored in redeemed mankind, and there shall be no more need of a temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof. To-day we see the ruined temples of God in the wasted, sin-cursed lives of our fellow men, and we see the glory of God's dwelling place in the renewed character and conversation of those who have been made new creatures in Christ Jesus. God dwelleth now no longer in temples made by hands; but in the yielded, blood-washed hearts of men and women. If it was with gladness that David heard the summons, "Let us go into the house of the Lord"; how much more shall we rejoice to-day when the message comes to us, "Know ye not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost?" and the consequent command follows, "Be filled with the Spirit." No brick and mortar device of human rearing stands now between us and God. By His Spirit He is within us, and through His Son He has summoned us within the heavenlies, where by a new and living way, through the rent veil, that is to say His flesh, we have boldness by the sprinkled blood to enter in. Therefore "let us draw nigh." (1 Cor. 6: 19, 20; Heb. 10:19-22.)

PEACE IS THE ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH GOD DWELLS.

Wherever He takes up His abiding in admitted supremacy, peace will prevail. There is no peace in the world to-day because men have shut God out of His world. He has no recognized place in commerce, no acknowledged rulership in politics, no revered presidency in society; even the church, fervent in oblation, falters and fails in obedience. Like a mighty mountain the peace conference has travailed and brought forth a mouse, that will scuttle to its hole at the slightest shake of the forefinger of national self-interest, greed of gold and lust for power. We do well to pray for peace, but better to pray for the coming of Shalome, its Prince. The peace of the world to-day is contingent upon the peace of Jerusalem, and the sovereignty of David's greater son over a restored people in a repatriated land. While the Jew is a wanderer upon the face of the earth, outcast and homeless, only trouble can come to the nations, as witness for a present example the case of Dreyfus. But in the good time of God, Israel will come to his own again, and they who have befriended the persecuted brethren of the Lord will prosper in that day of restoration, under Messiah's righteous rule. Therefore, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."