

## HIGHER RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

Results of Examinations, January 31, 1891.

M = medal, P = prize, D = diploma, C = certificate given to those whose marks are creditable but not up to the diploma standard.

The exact number of marks obtained will be furnished to those only who ask for it. No minute report of values received for each answer will be sent this year as was done last examination.

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## SENIOR ESSAY.

(The examiner has not yet reported.)  
The writer of the essay bearing the motto, "Come, Holy Spirit," will please send name and address to the Convener.

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## Sabbath School Teacher.

## INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

## ISRAEL'S OVERTHROW FORETOLD.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.—Luke viii. 18.

## INTRODUCTORY.

The prophet Amos, of Tekoa in the kingdom of Judah, uttered his prophecies chiefly at Bethel and Samaria, in the kingdom of Israel. As long as he denounced the iniquities of other nationalities and foretold the judgments that were to come upon them, the authorities and the people were apparently well disposed toward him, but when he began to show the people of Israel their transgressions and announce the coming judgments of God on the impenitent, they manifested their dislike to the prophet and sought his expulsion.

I. The End Approaching.—To arouse the attention of their hearers, to make the truth plain to their understanding and fasten it on their memories, the Hebrew prophets made use of symbols and allegorical illustrations. In the prophecy of Amos there are several instances of this impressive method of teaching the truth of God. In the present instance he brought home to those that heard him not only the certainty of the calamity that was about to befall the people of Israel because of their iniquity, but that the doom foretold was near at hand. The vision presented to the mind of the seer was a basket of summer fruit. That was a sign that the end of the season had come. The fields had been reaped, the produce of the land stored up and now the summer fruits were gathered in. The season was over and would soon be followed with the desolation of winter. So it was with Israel. They had long enjoyed God's season of mercy, but now it was over. The Lord's message by the prophet is. The end is come upon my people of Israel, I will not again pass by them any more. They had enjoyed manifold opportunities and privileges. These had not only been suffered to pass unimproved and neglected, but they had been perverted. Instead of being more devoted to the service of God, they had misused His temporal blessings, and had sunk into deeper sinfulness. Now the period of forbearance was coming to its close. The people would be called to a reckoning for their mispent opportunities, their perverted privileges and their grievous transgressions.

II. Wicked Ways.—The contrast between the outward condition of things and what the prophet saw in his vision is very striking. Instead of joyous songs in temple and palace there would be heard howlings of misery and despair. The places thronged by busy people would soon be covered with the bodies of the slain, cast forth in silence, in deep dejection and hopelessness and because those that survived would be convinced that the terrible evils had come upon the nation because of their transgressions. The reason why God's judgments were about to fall are clearly set forth in the direct appeal of the prophet, "Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail." There were people whose greed of gain made them unjust, especially to the poor and helpless. Such covetous persons used the opportunities they had of preying on the necessities of the helpless. There were dishonest traders in those days. They kept up religious forms, but were utterly devoid of the spirit of true religion. They kept outwardly the appointed days for religious observance, the new moons and the Sabbaths, but they begrudged the time that interrupted their dishonest pursuits. They had no heart in the religious services in which they pretended to engage. It is not likely that the people whom the prophet's words describe would acknowledge to themselves that they were guilty of dishonesty. They would call their practices by less ugly names than deceit; but that is what it actually was in God's sight. The ephah, the measure by which grain was sold, was made small to the purchaser, while the shekel, by means of the deceitful balance, had to be overweight to satisfy the rapacity of these dishonest traders. When the unfortunate victims of these heartless practices became so poor that, being stripped of everything, they themselves were sold. The poor in many instances had been reduced to a state of abject slavery. "That we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat."

III. Impending Judgment.—Possibly these covetous Israelites may have supposed that God took no notice of the way they managed their business. Here, confirmed by a solemn oath, we have the Lord's own declaration, "Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this?" As the waters of the Nile overflow the land of Egypt, so the wars and commotions ending in the captivity are likened to a flood that would overflow and desolate the kingdom of Israel. The destruction about to fall would be swift and unexpected. The change would be like the setting of the sun at noon, like the darkening of the earth in the clear day. Gloom and despair would fill the hearts of the people. Feasts would be changed into funerals, the songs of mirth would become the wail of lamentation. The land would be filled with mourning. As in Egypt the last of the plagues, the death of the first-born in every home caused universal lamentation, so in Israel the mourning in its intensity would be like that for the loss of an only son. The prophet announces that God was to send a famine on the land. Terrible are the ravages of famine when the means of living are cut off, but the predicted famine was to be a deprivation of something far more valuable, "of hearing the words of the Lord." The people were anxious to get quit of Amos and God's message which he brought. Well, the time was to come when that message, with its guidance, its hope and its comfort, as well as its timely warnings, would be silent. They should long for it. Nay, they should wander over the world in search of "the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." They had disobeyed and despised that word and now it was to be silent when they felt that they needed it most. To show how widespread among the people will be the felt need of divine guidance and instruction, it is said that the "fair virgins and young men will faint for thirst." The young and most hopeful will become dispirited because of the absence of the word of the Lord. The ruin and hopelessness of the nation will be complete. "They that swear by the sin of Samaria," the devotees of idol worship. They would look to their form of religion for deliverance when calamities should overtake them. The people who had crowded to the idol shrines at Bethel and Dan, and who had upheld idolatry and sworn by it, will find when the divine judgments fall upon the nation that they had been as far astray in their belief as they had been in their practice. In their case, as in all others, the truth of the divine saying, "The nation that will not serve God shall perish."

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The abuse of God's mercy and forbearance prepares the way for His judgments.

Wickedness and oppression are condemned by God's Word, and end in the punishment of the guilty.

Conscience bears testimony to the righteousness of God's judgments.

The greatest calamity that can befall a nation is when there is famine of hearing the word of the Lord.