



LESSON XII.—DEC. 18.

The Captivity Of Judah.

Jeremiah lii., 1-11. Memory verses, 9-11. Read II. Kings xxv. and Jer. viii.

Home Readings.

- M. II. Kings, xxiv., 1-20.—Zedekiah's evil reign.
- T. Jer. viii., 1-22.—'No man repented him of his wickedness.'
- W. Ezek. xli., 1-28.—Ezekiel foretells the captivity.
- T. II. Kings xxv., 1-30.—'So Judah was carried away.'
- F. Jer. lii., 1-11.—The captivity of Judah.
- S. Matt. xi., 20-30.—Woes denounced for unbelief.
- S. Heb. xii., 1-29.—'See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.'

Golden Text.

'Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.'—Jer. xxix., 13.

Lesson Story.

We come now to the story of the last king of Judah. We have studied the lives of nineteen kings of Judah, descendants of David,—Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah stand out as types of godly rulers, while Jehoram, Athaliah and Ahaz are among the worst. The good kings made great reformations among the people, but the bad kings taught the Jews to do worse even than the heathen around them. The weak characters among the kings were easily led astray, because they did not seek strength from Jehovah.

Zedekiah, brother of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. Zedekiah pleased himself and did evil in God's sight. God had sent many warnings to his people to turn to him and serve him only. But they would not listen to his prophets and despised his threats. For three hundred and fifty years he gave them opportunity to repent, and the few who did so were 'the remnant' whose safety and ultimate prosperity were promised (Isa. xi., 11; Ezek. xxxvii., 21-28). But to those who mocked at Jehovah and served abominable idols of their own making, punishment had to come. (Deut. xxviii., 15, 25, 36, 37.)

Zedekiah foolishly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who had already invaded Judah a number of times and had made Zedekiah a vassal king only, over the land. God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to carry away kings and leaders of the people (II. Kings xxiv., 11-17), thus giving those who were left warning and time to repent. But they would not. So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign Nebuchadnezzar came with an immense army against Jerusalem. But the city was strongly fortified and the siege lasted eighteen months. Inside Jerusalem the people suffered indescribable torture with famine as there was no way of obtaining good supplies from outside. One night the men, knowing that they could live there no longer without food, opened the gate of the king's garden and sought to escape. But the Chaldeans pursued them, captured the faithless Zedekiah and brought him to Nebuchadnezzar, who, after having his sons slain before his eyes, blinded him and cast him into prison. After this Nebuchadnezzar sent and burned up the temple and destroyed the city of Jerusalem and took most of the people captive, leaving only enough peasants to till the ground and dress the vines.

Thus did Jehovah punish his people for their prolonged and aggravated disobedience. The Lamentations of Jeremiah refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophecies of Ezekiel also belong to this period. These should be thoughtfully studied.

Lesson Hints.

'Zedekiah'—son of king Josiah and Hamutal. Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, his brothers, had reigned before him.

'Hamutal'—daughter of Jeremiaah of Libnah near Jerusalem. Nothing farther is known of this Jeremiah.

'Evil'—a man of weak character. No man need be weak if he will seek the strength of Jehovah. Obedience to God brings strength.

'The anger of the Lord'—the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plentiful in mercy, because he is merciful he is

slow to punish, but because he is just he is sure to punish those who will not repent.

'From his presence'—from the place where the glory of God was manifested, in the temple (Psa. xxvi., 8; xxvii., 4), from the land of promise.

'Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon'—to whom he was a tributary and by whom he had been set upon the throne. He had sworn allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and breaking this oath was the final act of faithlessness. He who keeps not faith with God cannot keep faith with man.

'The tenth month'—the end of December, B.C. 588, or January, 587.

'Nebuchadnezzar'—a great Assyrian conqueror and ruler. It is said that nine-tenths of the bricks found in Babylon are stamped with his name.

'Besieged'—the enemy settled down outside the walls and daily attacked the city with their huge battering-rams and other implements of warfare. Houses inside the city were broken down that the stone might be taken to make the wall stronger.

'Chaldeans'—Nebuchadnezzar's army was made up of fierce warriors from his tributary and allied nations.

'Riblah'—a city about two hundred miles north of Jerusalem.

Questions.

1. What relation was Zedekiah to the former king?
2. What was the character of Zedekiah?
3. Who destroyed Jerusalem and took Zedekiah captive?
4. Why did God allow Jerusalem to be destroyed?
5. Where was Zedekiah taken?
6. How can we find God?

Suggested Hymns.

'He is able to deliver thee,' 'Only a step to Jesus,' 'Weeping will not save me,' 'Jesus, my Lord, to thee I cry,' 'Out of my bondage,' 'Ho, every one that is thirsty in spirit,' 'Jesus saves.'

Practical Points.

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The captivity of Judah. Jeremiah lii., 1-11. Zedekiah was the son of Josiah. He walked not in the ways of his good father, but did evil like his wicked brother. Verse 1, 2.

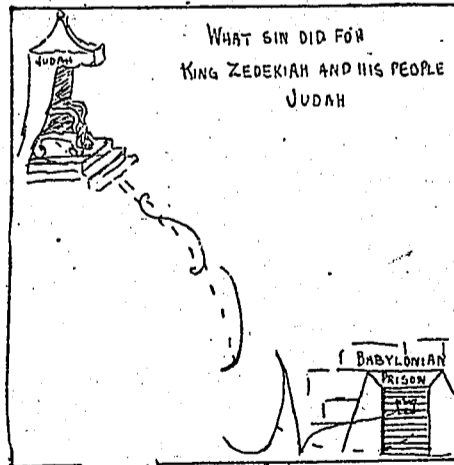
Sin will never go unpunished. Verse 3. Jehovah often used the heathen nations to chastise his chosen people. Verses 4, 5.

Zedekiah's cowardly attempt to escape was foiled. With God against him he became an easy prey to his enemies. Verses 6-8.

Zedekiah's lot was hard because he chose the way of transgressors, not realizing that the end thereof was death. Verses 9-11. Prov. xvi., 25. Tiverton, Ont.

Lesson Illustrated.

Sin is a downward road always from the moment we enter upon it. Not always though can we see so clearly the rapid descent as in this lesson. We begin with Zedekiah upon



the throne of Judah, we end with him a blind prisoner in the dungeons of Babylon.

'They fall farthest who have farthest to fall' is an old saying, and it is always easier to fall than to rise, to go down than climb up. Every added sin gives greater impetus on the downward course. It is easier to sin next time. But down, always down, till we grasp the hand of Christ and with him start on the upward way again.

Christian Endeavor Topics.

Dec. 18.—How to enjoy our religion.—Neb. viii., 8-12; I. Pet. iv., 2-12, 13.

Memorizing Scripture.

Why is it and how is it that the practice of memorizing scripture verses and hymns is passing away? That it is dying out, the record of almost any Sunday-school and the story of the home abundantly attest. Perhaps it is due to the excessive memorizing that prevailed in the time of Robert Raikes, when the competition throughout England and on the Continent in the matter of memorizing scripture texts led to the cramming of hundreds of texts into the brains of little children, and in the main to no good purpose, but resulting in harm to the child. But to whatever the loss of the habit of scripture memorizing be due, it ought to be resumed. It is not necessary to go to any extreme in this matter; but it ought not to be difficult for the child to acquire say five verses a day, or fifteen or twenty bible verses, or a hymn or two a week. Treasured in the memory, these selections become a personal possession of inestimable worth.

In this relation it may be profitable to recall the testimony of one of the wisest and greatest of men, Mr. Gladstone. 'Who doubts,' he asks, 'that times without number, particular portions of scripture find their way to the human soul, as if embassies from on high, each with its own commission of comfort, of guidance, or of warning?' And he adds: 'What crisis, what trouble, what perplexity has failed, or can fail, to draw from this indescribable treasure-house its proper supply? What profession, what position is not daily and hourly enriched by these words which repetition never weakens; which carry with them now, as in the days of their first utterance, the freshness of youth and immortality? When the solitary student opens all his heart to drink them in, they will reward his toil. And in forms yet more hidden and withdrawn, in the retirement of the chamber, in the stillness of the night season, upon the bed of sickness, and in the face of death, the bible will be there, its several words how oft winged with their several and special messages to heal and to soothe, to uplift and to uphold, to invigorate and stir. Nay, more, perhaps, than this; amid the crowds of the court or the forum, or the streets or the marketplace, where every thought of every soul seems to be set upon the excitement of ambition, or of business, or of pleasure, there, too, even there, the still small voice of the holy bible will be heard, and the soul, aided by some blessed word, may find wings like a dove, may flee away and be at rest.' How is it in your home?—'American Paper.'

Pray For Your Scholars.

I cannot close without saying, finally, that no teacher can expect the blessing of God upon his labors unless he prays daily for each member of his class personally. Where classes are large I know the petition must be brief; but, at least, we should daily call the roll of our scholars in our Father's presence. It is one help, certainly, in this matter, to divide our scholars into classes as we pray—those who are Christians and those who are not. Then, by arranging them alphabetically in our minds, the number will be no serious obstacle in our prayers. The power of prayer is not a question for our discussion; we all believe in it. We can never teach successfully if we leave our best weapon unused. If I may be allowed another personal allusion, many years ago I had a young man who was for a time a regular attendant at the Sunday-school. But he fell under evil influences and drifted very far away from God and the truth. For years prayers were daily offered for that young man, and he knew it. Thanks to our Father's love, he was brought back again by new friends to see truth and duty. He died recently west of the Rocky Mountains, and the home missionary pastor wrote me that in his last hours one of the thoughts that he continually expressed was this, referring to the old bible-class teacher, 'Was he not good, to pray for me so long?' 'And he spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.' Did not the Lord, when he spake of this, have the discouraged Sunday-school teacher in mind? I know not how better to close these very simple suggestions than by repeating words which I have used elsewhere, that the root of all methods must be an intense love for the salvation of men, and that this is a germ and growth of God's planting. Love will always find a way to work, and the poorest method with God is better than all others without him.—S. B. Capen, in 'Superintendent and Teacher.'