

For the Sabbath School.

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON VII.—FEBRUARY 18.—GEN. XVIII: 22-33.

God's Judgment on Sodom.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right."—Gen. xviii, 25.

THE THREE STRANGERS.—Chap. 18: 1-9. One day, not long after God's renewal of his Covenant with him, Abraham, (now ninety-nine years old) was sitting in his tent door in the heat of the day, when suddenly, looking up, he saw three strangers near him. He immediately went to them and welcomed them in the Oriental manner, and entertained them with the utmost hospitality. It was not long before he perceived, by what they said and did, that they were angels, and one of them was no less than Jehovah himself, in bodily form, the God who had in some way appeared to him five times before. The whole scene is primitive and Oriental, and "presents a perfect picture of the manner in which a modern Bedawee Sheykh receives travellers arriving at his encampment."

Those three strangers had two messages to Abraham. One was that soon would be born to him the expected heir of the promises. The other that his nephew Lot was in great danger, because Sodom where he lived must be destroyed for its wickedness.

HOSPITALITY. ENTERTAINING ANGELS UNAWARES.—Abraham supposed these strangers to be men; but his course toward them was such that he had no reason for regret when he found they were angels. That is a good way of treating everybody whom we encounter, so that, if they should turn out to be angels, they would have no reason to complain of us, and we nothing to be sorry for in our treatment of them. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13: 2). The friendless orphan, aided and loved, has in after years become to his benefactor the friend in need. The homeless child, cared for and trained, has become the support in old age. There are multitudes of people whose presence in the home is as precious as angels' visits. The hospitable homes are doubly blessed. "The houses of holy men are full of these heavenly spirits, though they may not be seen."

THE RIGHTEOUS SAVING THE COUNTRY.—The one deadly enemy to a country is unrighteousness. The ancient civilizations have perished by this poison. Greece and Rome did not fall till they were permeated with unrighteousness. And if ever Macauley's vision of "some traveller from New Zealand" who "shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's," or on Brooklyn Bridge to sketch the ruins of New York, it will be because of unrighteousness alone. The righteous save the city (1) by the hope that the leaven of righteousness will permeate the whole people. I have heard that Robert Ingersoll said that if he had made the world he would have made health catching and not disease. But it is true now that in a wide view health is more contagious; that goodness has more power to change a people than evil has. A few earnest, determined, righteous men

can leaven the city. (2) The fact that the wicked are saved for the sake of the righteous tends to make them turn to that which is good. God desires to save all his creatures, and punishes only because it is necessary in order to save. Now if anything can accomplish the same purpose, if the work and faith of the good can lead others to good, if their self-sacrifices to save men from sin can touch the heart, then God will work in this way, and spare all the punishment he can. (3) The way to save the country is by earnest prayer and the use of means. If the whole body of good people prayed as earnestly as Abraham for Sodom, we would not need to exclude foreigners, but to evangelize them; and we would break the power of intemperance as has just been done by prayer and hard work on the part of a few in some of the cities of Massachusetts.

THE ANSWER.—His prayer was answered, though not in the way Abraham expected.

"The prayers I thought unanswered once
Were answered in God's own best way."

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.—A nature given to hospitality is a great blessing,—hospitality to people, to ideas, to experiences, to God. Such are sure sometimes "to entertain angels unawares."

It is a high privilege to pray for others, for our enemies, for the worst of people. One's nature is shown in his prayers. Lot prayed for himself. Abraham for others.

One privilege of prayer is that thus we can help those whom we can help in no other way.

The righteous are the salt of the earth; the leaven of good through which God may purify and save the world from wickedness. "When God took Lot out of Sodom, he took Sodom out of the world."

If the salt has lost its savor, and the leaven is inactive; if the righteous are partakers of the sin by contamination or by not doing all they can to make the world good, then they must suffer in a measure with the overthrow of the wicked.

There is no way of escape from destruction except by leaving sin. Salvation is from sin, not in sin.

God sends his angels to warn and entreat and help us to escape,—the Bible, the Holy Spirit, afflictions, joys, conscience, teachers, friends, examples.

"Stay not in all the plain." In the outworks of sin, in good resolutions, in religious forms, in general morality, in vague hopes, in partial reformation, in anything short of Mount Calvary, Jesus Christ and him crucified.

It is necessary, when the wicked are beyond hope of reformation, and are only a leaven of evil in the world, that they should be destroyed. Their punishment is both justice and mercy.

The wicked have within them the elements of their own punishment,—their moral natures, memory, conscience, bad character, remorse. These are often dormant till God's outward punishment sets them aflame. As Milton's Satan says, "Myself am hell."

LOT'S ESCAPE.—Lot was saved so as by fire, but he lost everything for the sake of which he had gone to Sodom. His wife and some of his children were destroyed; the others were contaminated. He escaped a poor, forlorn, seemingly broken-down man. The poorest investment he ever made was in property in Sodom.

INTERNATIONAL SCHEME OF SABBATH-SCHOOL LESSONS

ADOPTED BY THE SABBATH-SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

1894			FIRST QUARTER.			1894		
1894.	BIBLE LESSON		PROVE THAT	COMMIT TO MEMORY				
				PROOF.	GOLDEN TEXT.	CATECHISM.		
Jan. 7	The First Adam.....	Gen. 1: 26-31; 2: 1-3	Man was created truly noble.....	Ps. 8: 5	Gen. 1: 27	Question. 82		
" 14	Adam's Sin and God's Grace.....	Gen. 3: 1-15	Our hearts are deceitful.....	Jer. 17: 9	1 Cor. 15: 22	83, 84		
" 21	Cain and Abel.....	Gen. 4: 1-13	God accepts only heart worship.....	John 4: 24	Heb. 11: 4	85		
" 28	God's Covenant with Noah.....	Gen. 9: 1-17	God fulfills His promises.....	Heb. 10: 23	Gen. 9: 13	86		
Feb. 4	Beginning of the Hebrew Nation.....	Gen. 12: 1-9	Great benefit reward obedience.....	Isa. 1: 10	Gen. 12: 3	87		
" 11	God's Covenant with Abram.....	Gen. 17: 1-9	The pious family is blessed.....	Pro. 3: 33	Gen. 12: 6	88		
" 18	God's Judgment on Sodom.....	Gen. 18: 1-33	We should pray for all men.....	1 Tim. 2: 1	Gen. 18: 24	89		
" 25	Trial of Abraham's Faith.....	Gen. 22: 1-13	Faith subdues difficulties.....	Matt. 21: 21	Heb. 11: 17	90		
Mar. 4	Selling the Birthright.....	Gen. 25: 27-34	Godless people make bad bargains.....	Isa. 59: 3	Luke 12: 23	91		
" 11	Jacob at Bethel.....	Gen. 28: 10-32	Angels help the righteous.....	Heb. 1: 14	Gen. 28: 15	92, 93		
" 18	A Blessing to all Nations.....	Gen. 28: 17-28	God men are great blessings.....	Matt. 5: 16	Gen. 18: 18	94		
" 25	REVIEW		God is a Father to his people.....	1 Cor. 6: 18	Matt. 22: 34	REVIEW.		