

construction of a new polity, and in the erection of a new temple."—*Gilfan*. Rebelled against the king of Babylon. His chief rebellion was his alliance with Egypt, (see Introduction, April 21st). This occurred some three or four years before the events of this present lesson.

JERUSALEM BESIEGED.—V. 4-7.

V. 4. In the ninth year . . . tenth month . . . tenth day of the month . . . As the final catastrophe approaches, the historian becomes "more direct and exact in his dates, marking not only the year, but the month and the day, on which the siege began, no less than those on which it closed (v. 6). Compare 2 Kings, xxi, 1, and Ezek. xiv, 1; from which last passage we find that on the very day when the host of Nebuchadnezzar made its appearance before Jerusalem, the fact was revealed to Ezekiel in Babylon, and the fate of the city announced to him (Ezek. xiv, 6-14).—*Sp. Com.* Nebuchadnezzar. "A prince of extraordinary talent and energy; and he consolidated, if we may not say that he actually established the Babylonian monarchy. Having destroyed Nineveh, his next task was to recover that portion of his new conquest which the Egyptians had held in possession for two or three years. He overthrew the male Jehoiaikim tributary, taking away certain captives [B.C. 606]. He also took captive Jehoiaikim, the son of Jehoiaikim" [B.C. 590]; and now his capture of Zedekiah and destruction of Jerusalem command our attention. We shall learn more of this great king in the lessons following, which are taken from the Book of Daniel. All his army. Compare chapter xxiv, 1, where the vastness of his army is very strongly marked. In 2 Kings xxv, 1, it reads, "All his host." Against Jerusalem. "The army seems at first to have spread itself over all Judaea. It fought not only against Jerusalem, but against all the cities of Judah that were left," and especially against Lachish and Azekah (Jer. xxxiv, 7) two cities of the kingdom, which probably had been strongly garrisoned in order to maintain the communication with Egypt."—*Sp. Com.* Built forts against it. Forts were probably moveable towers provided with battering rams. These were pushed against the walls, and thus placed the fighting men on a level with those they were besieging.

V. 5. Unto the eleventh year, &c. The siege lasted a year and a half. The Lamentations ii, 20, 21; iv, 3-20; v, 9-12 and Ezekiel (v. 1-2) show us how dreadful the sufferings of those within the city.

V. 6. Fourth month. Corresponding to our July. Famine. The city seems to have been overcome more through the famine than the active hostilities. No bread—compare chap. xxxviii, 9; Ezek. iv, 16; v, 16.

V. 7. Broken up—broken into. A breach was made in the walls, and the city was entered at midnight. (Ezek. xii, 2-12, and Josephus.) "Through the darkness of the night the Chaldean guards silently made their way from street to street, till they suddenly appeared in the centre of the temple court, in the middle gateway which opened directly on the great brazen altar. Never before had such a spectacle been seen in the inviolable sanctuary of Jerusalem. A clang and cry resounded through the silent precincts at the dead hour of night. The first victims were those who, whether from religious or superstitious feelings and duties, were habitually occupants of the sacred building. The virgin marble of the court ran red with blood, like a rocky wine-press in the vintage."—*Dan Stanley*. All the men of war—and Zedekiah with them (chap. xxxix, 4). King's garden—situated to the south of the city, in the valley at the base of Mount Zion. By the way of the plain of Jehoshaphat, leading eastward over Olivet to Bethany and Jericho."—*Sp. Com.*

THE KING'S FATE.—V. 8-11.

V. 8. In the plains of Jericho—About six hours journey east from Jerusalem. Scattered from him—each one looking to his own safety.

V. 9. Riblah. This was the headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar's army, and a most fertile and convenient spot for superintending the operations against Tyre and Jerusalem, which were then engaging his attention. It was situated in northern Palestine, at the upper end of the valley of Lebanon, about a day's march from Jerusalem. (See map.) Gave judgment upon him. He had violated his oath, (Ezek. xvi, 13-19; 2 Chron. xxvi, 13).

V. 10. Slew his sons . . . before his eyes. Jeremiah had warned Zedekiah that his children would fall into the hands of the Chaldeans if he continued his rebellion (chap. xxxvii, 23). Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah—literally "dug out." This was doubly and brutally cruel—his eyes made to witness the cruel slaughter of his children, and that to be his last sight. Carried him to Babylon. "Jeremiah had prophesied distinctly that he would be carried to Babylon (chap. xxi, 5; xxxiv, 3). Zedekiah had said that he should not 'see Babylon.' (Ezek. xii, 13). His deprivation of sight before he was carried, to the conqueror's capital, fulfilled the predictions of both prophets."—*Sp. Com.*

PRACTICAL LESSON.

The certainty of God's punishment of sin. Though long delayed, it will come at last—and no escape.

May 12.—The Captives in Babylon.—

Dan. i, 8-17.—B. C. 606.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that keep His commandments; His praise endureth for ever."—*Psalm cxli, 10.*

INTRODUCTORY.

For the next six weeks we are to have our attention directed to the Book of Daniel, in studying which, it is important to recognise its apocalyptic character. "To the old prophets, Daniel stands in some sense as a commentator (chap. i, 2-19); to succeeding generations, as the herald of immediate deliverance. The form, the style, and the point of sight of prophecy are relinquished upon the verge of a new period, in the existence of God's people, and fresh instruction is given them, suited to their new fortunes. The change is not abrupt and absolute, but yet it is distinctly felt. The eye and not the ear, is the organ of the Seer; visions and not words are revealed to him. The Babylonian exile supplied the outward training and the inward necessity for this last form of Divine teaching: and the prophetic visions of Ezekiel form the connecting link between the characteristic types of revelation and prophecy."—*Smith's Bible Dictionary*. The book is usually divided into two equal parts: (1) Chapters i. to vi., are chiefly historical; while (2) chapters vii. to xii., are entirely apocalyptic.

Babylon. "Of the cities that have pride or power of man has built on the surface of the globe, Babylon was the greatest. Its greatness was secured by its natural position, on a platform of rock in the midst of the alluvial basin of Mesopotamia, defended on the south by a vast morass or lake, crossing the line of traffic between the Mediterranean coast and the Iranian mountains, just where the Euphrates becomes a navigable river. It was on the lowest computation, forty, on the highest, sixty miles round, and was really a court or camp enclosed in a city. Forests, parks, gardens, were intermingled with the houses, yet still the regularity and order of a city were

preserved. The walls are said to have been 300 feet high, and along their summit ran a vast terrace, which admitted of the turning of chariots with four horses, and which may therefore well have been more than 80 feet broad. The king's palace and the temple of Bel were remarkable structures. It must be remembered that this city was 'at the centre of a mighty empire, consisting of 120 provinces, each of which was a kingdom in itself. It may well be imagined that the state kept by its sovereignty would be most elaborate and grand.' To one feature of it, our attention is especially directed in this lesson. Well favoured boys, usually children of captive princes, were kept in personal attendance upon the king. Mr. Van Lennep, describing the state now kept by the Sultan and the Shah, speaks of '5,000 *gawds* (slaves) who live in the palace and attend the person of the Shah wherever he goes. They are promising boys, stolen or forcibly taken from Christian parents, and brought up as Moslems. They are kept in the *seraglio* (palace), under strict discipline, receive a good education and serve as valets, in the civil and military service.'"—*S. S. Union Notes*.

In our lesson we have (1) a purpose; (2) a test; and (3) a result.

THE PURPOSE.—V. 8, 9.

V. 8. Daniel.—"The richest prize that ever Babylon won from Jerusalem."—*Green*. It was of noble birth, if not of the royal family, (verse 3; 2 Kings, xv, 18); Josephus says that he belonged to the family of Zedekiah. His age when taken captive was probably from 12 to 15 years (B.C. 606). He was well educated in science and language by the king of Babylon (verse 4), and it is evident he had been carefully trained in Hebrew learning, and taught in the religion of his fathers, before his captivity. Purpose.—"To test his heart." "The case evinces both his conscientiousness in reference to the law of his God, and his noble self-control in the matter of appetite. These are among the first and most vital elements in the formation of a character; the best promise for efficiency and usefulness."—*Combs*. Would not defile himself—either by eating what to a Jew was considered as *unclean*, or by partaking of that which had been offered to idols. The prince of the eunuchs—(see verse 3). His special duty was to preside over the male attendants of the ladies of the harem. The position was one of honour and influence.

V. 9. Unto favour and tender love.—Compare the case of Joseph in Gen. xxxix, 21. His sterling uprightness and integrity of character would be the means used by Jehovah in inclining the prince of the eunuchs towards him. See Prov. xvi, 7.

THE TEST.—V. 10-14.

V. 10. The king hath appointed your meat and your drink. Opinions differ as to the object of the king in the diet ordered. Some suppose his aim was to secure the very best mental and physical development possible. Others, again (Dr. Cumming, for example), think it was "an artful plan to make them change their religion, and become thoroughly subservient to the Chaldean rule: (1) by changing their names; (2) by tempting them with luxurious living; (3) by compromising them with idolatry, through eating food offered to idols." Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar had both of these objects in view. Worse-looking—looking less healthy. Your sort—literally, your circle, age or class.

V. 11. Melzar means steward or chief butler. He was the man in special charge of that department. Hananiah, Michael, and Azariah. The first of these names means "Whom Jehovah hath favoured"; the second, "Who is to be compared to God?"; and the third, "Whom Jehovah helps." Nebuchadnezzar had them all changed (and Daniel's—*God is my Judge*—as well), to names connected with his own duties—*Shadrach*