

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XVIII.

May 5. } THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH. { Jer. lii.
1878. } 1-11.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed," Lam. i. 8.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Jer. xxxvii. 1-21. Jeremiah's prophecy.
T. Jer. xxxviii. 1-28. Jeremiah in the dungeon.
W. Jer. xxxix. 1-28. Jerusalem taken.
Th. Jer. lii. 1-11. The captivity of Judah.
F. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 11-16. Jerusalem destroyed.
S. Lam. i. 1-16. The prophet's lament.
S. Ps. lxxiv. 1-12. The carved work broken down.

HELPS TO STUDY.

I. THE KING'S FOLLY: Verses 1-3.
Zedekiah the twentieth and last king of Judah and the youngest son of Josiah and Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah (2 Kings xxiii. 31) was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years. His real name was Mattaniah, which was changed to Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar. (Note 1.) He was a man of weak will and infirm purpose, who, at the head of affairs in a great crisis, had not strength of character to enable him to do what he knew to be right.

It was Nebuchadnezzar who set up Zedekiah as king and took of him a solemn oath of allegiance. But he left him little more than the shadow of a throne. All the treasures of the temple and palace, and all the chief inhabitants, the warriors and the artisans, were sent to Babylon. (Note 2.) He did evil . . . according to all that Jehoiakim had done. Jehoiakim, originally called Eliakim, was the second son of Josiah, and eighteenth king of Judah. Under him the idol-worship which Jehoahaz had tolerated once more grew and spread with great rapidity. All the abominations which had existed under Manasseh re-appeared. He was the tool of the heathen party; he not only did not listen to the prophets, he hated and persecuted them. He caused the prophet Urijah, who had fled from him to Egypt, to be brought back from thence, and to be put to death. Jeremiah barely escaped death. 2 Kings xxiv. 3, 4, also shows that he shed much innocent blood. It appears from Ezek. viii. 7-18, and 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14, that towards the close of Zedekiah's reign idolatrous rites were carried on even within the precincts of the temple.

The Lord therefore in His anger, permitted events in Jerusalem and Judah so to take their course that the folly of the king brought punishment.

The king should have remained loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, by whom he had been placed on the throne and to whom he had taken an oath of allegiance. His present subjection was the chastisement for his sins, and he should have been penitent and waited in humble submission for deliverance to come from God. In vain did the prophet Jeremiah utter his solemn warnings. These were all set aside. A new king had ascended the throne of Egypt. And the weak minded Zedekiah against his better judgment was influenced by the popular Egyptian party to revolt from the Babylonians, as his brothers had done, and seek the alliance of Egypt. The narrative illustrates the perversity of sin. Thus Asa, when he should have trusted Jehovah only, hired the king of Assyria with the gold of the temple. (1 Kings xv. 16.) So Zedekiah when required to submit to the king of Babylon, insanely resists, without courage or capacity or resources. Perversity of all forms is always imbecile.

II. THE KING'S FATE: Verses 4-11.

The king's folly is speedily punished. His conduct exasperated the king of Babylon. A short time before this the provinces of Tyre and Sidon had revolted, and Nebuchadnezzar had dispatched an army to reduce them, but Tyre was so well fortified he found nothing but time and starvation could reduce them. He sent therefore his armies against Jerusalem. Perhaps he thought the sight of such an army would be sufficient, but the city closed its gates and would not surrender. The Egyptian king started to aid his allies, and Nebuchadnezzar raised the siege, and went to meet him. The sight of that mighty army was sufficient, the Egyptians fled. The siege was renewed.

The famine was sore. A terrible year passed over the sin-smitten city. The bread had long since vanished, and the horrors of that terrible famine have been pictured in the Lamentations of Jeremiah. The faces of men grew black, their skin became shrunken and parched; rich and noble women searched the dunghills for offal; children perished, and were devoured by their parents; water was sold at a price, and a third part of the inhabitants died. At last the people were so demoralized that the city walls could no longer be defended.

Then the city was broken up; the Babylonians made a breach in the wall, and the king and his soldiers tried to effect their escape. The breach was made in the wall of Manasseh, but the middle wall separating the cities still formed a protection. The king fled through his garden, which was between the Hinnom and Kidron valleys, and proceeded down the Tyropoeon valley to the way toward Arabah, which led eastward over Olivet to Bethany and Jericho. Here he was caught in a snare by the besieging forces, and all were taken. To Riblah, (Note 3) on the great highway between Palestine and Euphrates, by way of Damascus, the royal family were brought before Nebuchadnezzar. There seems to be some excuse for punishing Zedekiah severely, but it was wanton cruelty to slay his own sons before his eyes. Perhaps after that sight he regretted little that his own eyes should be put out, and that, loaded with chains, he should be taken to Babylon.

There he was put in prison, where he remained till the day of his death, forced, according to Jewish tradition, to work, like other slaves, at a mill.

Nebuchadnezzar seems to have hesitated for a little while what to do with the city which had given him so much trouble; but he soon came to a decision. About a month after the capture of the city, the captain of the guard arrived to carry out his orders. The entire city, with all its dwellings, and with its splendid temple, was set on fire and reduced to ashes, and its walls were broken down, and its defences destroyed. A large number of the people were carried captive to Babylon at this time; and five years later, on the occasion of some disturbance, there was another deportation of people from the surrounding country. Gedaliah was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to govern the few people that were left in the country; but, on his being assassinated, the Jews became so fearful of experiencing Nebuchadnezzar's displeasure, that they voluntarily migrated to Egypt for protection, against the remonstrances of Jeremiah, whom they forced to accompany them, and whom they soon afterward stoned to death. Wicked men are often God's instruments in punishing other wicked men.

God punishes sin by suffering it to work out its own legitimate fruits.

God is long suffering; but there are limits to his patience, and no escape from His judgments.

Even in judgment there is mercy. In the case of Israel the two great moral results sought by means of this destruction of city and temple, and of the seventy years' captivity, were, (1) to cure the nation of idolatry; (2) to break down this false reliance on the mere externals of their religious system. The whole book of Ezekiel should be read with these points in mind. Every chapter, almost every verse, shines in the light of these truths, and bears to their illustration.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. Zedekiah's history is contained in the short sketch of the events of his reign given in 2 Kings xxiv. 17 to xxv. 7. Jer. xxxix. 1-7. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 10; and also in Jer. chs. xxi. xxiv.-xxix. xxxii.-xxxiv. and xxxvii. xxxviii.; and Ezek. xvii. 1-21.

2. This was the third time that Jerusalem was taken by Nebuchadnezzar; the first capture having taken place in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim, and the second of that of Nebuchadnezzar, 606 B.C.; the second in the fourth month of the reign of Jehoiachin, and the eighth year of that of Nebuchadnezzar, 599 B.C.; and the third, in the eleventh year of the reign of Zedekiah, and the nineteenth of that of Nebuchadnezzar, 588 B.C.

3. Riblah "still retains its name. It is situated on the Orontes in the Coele-Syrian valley, near the point where the valley opens into a wide and fertile plain. It is conveniently placed for communicating with upper Mesopotamia by way of Aleppo, with Babylon by way of Palmyra, with Egypt and Phœnicia by the route round the southern skirts of Lebanon, and with Judæa by way of the Coele-Syrian valley. Pharaoh-necho seems to have been the first to perceive its importance; afterwards Nebuchadnezzar made it his headquarters."

FREEMASONRY.

It is not often that the mysteries of Freemasonry are such as to attract public attention. There was a time during the middle ages when the members of the Order claimed for it an antiquity amounting to the marvellous. By some it was alleged to have been introduced into Egypt by MIZRAIM, grandson of the patriarch NOAH; by others its origin was traced to the building of SOLOMON'S temple; while the secrecy of its proceedings suggested a Pagan connection with the Eleusinian mysteries; and HALE asserted that these were borrowed from the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It is, however, certain that in rather more modern times, Freemasonry was introduced into England towards the end of the seventh century, and that the Grand Lodge of York dated its origin from the year 926. The members of the fraternity are believed to have contributed materially to the creation of the beautiful minsters and cathedrals which adorn the history of the middle ages. In the twelfth century these Masons appeared in Kilwinning, in Scotland; and although it was not till 1725 that the first French lodge was formed, they are reported as having existed in the sixteenth century. The Grand Lodge of Ireland dates from 1730, and in 1731 another was formed for Holland at the Hague; in 1735 the German Lodge was established, whilst in 1736 the Grand Lodge of Scotland took a new start after the last Baron of Rosslyn, having no sons, surrendered the hereditary office of Grand Master, which he and his ancestors had held by grant from King James the Second of Scotland, as associated with the beautiful chapel of Rosslyn, which is still an object of attraction to English tourists.

Some of the mediæval Popes seem to have even encouraged Freemasonry for the sake of their æsthetic architecture. But in 1738, when its various lodges were spreading over Europe, Pope Clement XII. issued a Papal Bull of Excommunication against all Freemasons. More recently Freemasonry has been denounced by various Popes along with Bible societies, as if their secret organization was perilous to the Church as well as the State. These Papal bulls have not at all tended to damage Freemasonry in this country, and it has been always regarded as politically a very innocent and even charitable institution, and, at all events, not more objectionable than other clubs as alike holding out temptation to convivial intemperance. The well-known Freemasons' Tavern in Great Queen-street, Lincoln's-inn-fields, was erected in 1876, and about the same time the charity for female children was instituted in connection with it. In the hall of this great and famous tavern, which was rebuilt a few years ago, the Bible and Missionary Societies for many years held their Meetings, until they migrated to the more commodious but not more comfortable edifices erected in the Strand and Piccadilly.

It is but a few years since the Marquis of Ripon had to resign the Grand Mastership of England on his perversion to Rome, and his vacant seat was accepted by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales. We believe that the change then effected was the last occasion on which the doings of Freemasons attracted more than a passing notice. But a recent Atheisti-

cal movement on the part of the Grand Orient of France has stirred the leaders of the English Grand Lodge and given rise to a counter-protest against holding any communion with Freemasons who eliminate from their ritual "the name of the Great Architect of the Universe." In this counter-movement the Earl of Carnarvon, acting as Pro-Grand Master, has taken the lead, and in another column there appears a report of the Committee appointed at the last Grand Lodge "to inquire into the circumstances relative to the elimination of the name of the Great Architect of the Universe from its ritual by the Grand Orient of France." Lord Carnarvon, as Pro-Grand Master, in the absence of the Prince of Wales, before introducing the Report, requested the Grand Secretary to read the old and new regulations of the Grand Orient of France. The Grand Secretary read the old regulations, which declared that the "principles of the Order are the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and human solidarity," and it excluded no person on account of his belief. In the altered regulations the words regarding the existence of God and the immortality of the soul were eliminated, and there were substituted the words "absolute freedom of conscience."

The Pro-Grand Master then said the Committee, having regard to the circumstances of the case, proposed four resolutions, one stating that the Grand Lodge viewed with profound regret the steps taken by the Grand Orient of France in thus removing from the regulations its foundation upon the existence of God and the belief in the immortality of the soul. This removal was declared to be opposed to all the history and traditions of Freemasonry from the earliest times to the present date. This Resolution was received with unanimous cheers. The second Resolution was that the English Grand Lodge, while most anxious, in the most fraternal spirit, to greet brethren from foreign lodges initiated in lodges where the true and genuine principles were adopted, could not admit those initiated in lodges which denied or ignored the belief in the existence of God. It would therefore be necessary to state, that no brother from a lodge could be admitted unless his certificate showed that he had been initiated in a lodge where the landmark of the Order was observed, or was vouched for as one so initiated, and also that he admitted his belief in the Great Architect of the Universe to be an essential landmark of the Order. The fourth Resolution was to give effect to the other three by transmitting them to all lodges working under the Grand Lodge of England, to the sister Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland, and to all Grand Lodges in connection with this Grand Lodge.

The Earl of Carnarvon then formally moved the adoption of these Resolutions, which sever the English Grand Lodge from the Grand Orient of France, so long as it professes Atheism. He did so with expressions of deep regret, but considered that a rejection of the acknowledgment of the Great Creator of the Universe, struck at the root of the Order of Freemasons. The motion was seconded by the Earl of Sherborne, and unanimously adopted in one of the largest gatherings of the Grand Lodge ever held.

We think that this lay demonstration against the rising tide of infidelity in this country, coming as it does from such an unlooked-for quarter, ought to encourage our Bishops and other dignitaries of the Church to assert somewhat more boldly the Truth of God's Word written, and not allow the crude assertions of "modern criticism" to be accepted as a sufficient call to surrender one by one the citadels of the faith once delivered to the saints, and so overturn, if it were possible, "the Rock of Ages." The Archbishop of Canterbury has in his published letter condemned "the exaggerated candour exhibited in admitting the force of the reasoning of sceptical writers;" and his Grace has not hesitated to declare that "ordinary readers may naturally be startled and unsettled by the apparent readiness" with which the statements of sceptical writers are accepted "as proved" in the *Argument from Prophecy*. But this is not the only specimen of the mischievous tendencies of the series of tracts entitled "Scepticism and Faith," as the Rev. Charles Bullock has fully demonstrated in his able letter to the *Record*. And we, therefore, do not wonder that the question is often asked, whether something more is not required from the twenty-seven Bishops, under whose presidency these books and tracts appear?

Is not the example of the lay Grand Master of the Freemasons of England in defence of the faith, one which might be advantageously followed by the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England? Do not the solemn obligations of their high and holy office impose on them the duty of publicly defending from insult and attack the integrity of "Moses and the Prophets," with the rest of "God's Word written?" If the "exaggerated candour" of books written under their nominal patronage, be, according to the Most Reverend Primate's admission, calculated to "startle and unsettle" ordinary readers, are not the people entitled to look for explanation and defence to those who are recognised as their "Right Reverend Fathers in God"?—*The Record*.

MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY.

- BARRIE.—At Barrie, on Tuesday, 30th April, at 11 a.m.
LONDON.—In First Presbyterian Church, London, on Tuesday, 9th July, at 2 p.m.
GUELPH.—In Chalmers' Church, Guelph, on Tuesday, 14th May, at 10 a.m.
GLENGARRY.—At Alexandria, on Tuesday, 9th July, at the usual hour.
OTTAWA.—At Bank Street Church, Ottawa, on the first Tuesday of May, at 2.30 p.m.
TORONTO.—First Monday and Tuesday of May, at 11 a.m.
KINGSTON.—At Picton, on Tuesday, 9th July, at 10 a.m.
QUEBEC.—In Morrin College, Quebec, on Tuesday, 16th July, at 10 a.m.
PETERBORO'.—At Millbrook, on Tuesday, 2nd July, at 11 a.m.
LINDSAY.—At Lindsay, on Tuesday, 30th April, at 3.30 p.m.
SAUGEEN.—Next ordinary meeting at Mount Forest, on second Tuesday of July, at two o'clock.