

Sabbath School Lessons.

June 5. THE FIERY FURNACE.

Lesson Dan. 3: 13-25. Golden Text, Ps. 43: 2.
Memory vs. 16-18. Catechism Q. 80.

Nebuchednezzar besieged Jerusalem three times, 606, 598 and 585, B. C., each time carrying away captives. The last time the city and temple were destroyed. Daniel and his companions were carried captive the first time, and from this siege also dates the 70 years captivity. The events of this lesson took place probably between 585 and 580 B. C., about the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. Daniel and his companions had been 15 or 20 years in Babylon. Jeremiah was living at Jerusalem, Ezekiel at Chebar, Daniel at Babylon. The place of this story in Bible history is soon after the completion of the conquest narrated in 2 Kings 25 v. 1-24; 2 Chron. 36: 11-21; Jer. 34: 1; 39: 1-18.

I. The Kings threat, vs. 13-15.

II. The Hebrews' answer, vs. 16-18.

III. The threat carried out, vs. 19-23.

IV. The deliverance, vs. 24-5.

I. vs. 13-15. Nebuchednezzar had conquered nearly the whole known world and now he wished to consolidate his empire. One great means of doing this would be to have uniformity in religion, with the centre at Babylon, the capital. To this end he had made a great image of gold, gathered a vast assembly, and commanded that all should bow down and worship it. The three young Hebrews would not bow. The king was angry that any should dare to disobey. They were called before him, and given one chance for life with the threat of being cast into a burning furnace, if they should refuse.

II. vs. 16-18. *We are not careful*—not anxious nor uncertain, as to our answer. *If it be so*—that you do this, *Our God is able*—Yea more—*He will deliver*. But if not—Even though God do not interfere in this special way, *We will not*—Enough for them to know the right, to do their duty and leave results with God. It is not known where Daniel was; perhaps in some distant part of the Empire on official business. We know that he was not among the worshippers of the golden image. But to their credit they stood as firmly as he could have done had he been present.

III. vs. 19-23. *Full of fury*—His will was never crossed, and that any should dare to assert their own wills, enraged him beyond all bounds. *Seven times hotter*—So great was his fury. *Most mighty men*—So that there should be no escape. *Urgent*—hurrying them on, no time to prepare themselves. *Slew these men*—The flames leaped forth with such violence that it destroyed them, making the miracle the more wonderful.

IV. vs. 24-25. *Astonished*—He had sat watching, and now he is astonished and terrified. *Four men loose*—The Babylonians bound their prisoners with chains. Jer. 40: 4; 52: 11, and the miracle of their being unbound, and yet unburned, was all the more wonderful. *No hurt*—God completely protected them. *Like the Son of God*—The article is not in the original, and the expression would mean "a son of the gods" a Divine Being. Probably it was "The Son of God" who as "The Angel of the Lord" frequently appeared in old testament times.

Sir Walter Scott said: "Teach self-denial and make its practice pleasurable, and you create for the world a destiny more sublime than ever issued from the brain of the wildest dreamer."

June 12.

THE DEN OF LIONS.

Lesson Dan. 6: 16-28. Golden Text, Dan. 6: 23.
Memory vs. Catechism Q. 81.

Time, 538-536 B. C., in the two years that Darius reigns jointly with Cyrus before Darius dies and Cyrus reigns alone, and the Jews return to their own land. Fifty years have passed since the fiery furnace. Daniel is now an old man of four score. The kingdom of Babylon has fallen and the Medo Persian with Cyrus and Darius, in a kind of kingly partnership, has taken its place. 68 of the 70 years' captivity have come and gone, and the time of return from exile is near. The three brave youths who with Daniel had determined not to touch the luxuries of the royal table, had their test of faith in their early manhood in the furnace of fire, half a century before. His is to be in his old age. Tell the points of likeness and difference between the two cases.

In earlier life Daniel had been prime minister. Later he had lived a retired life. Now again under Darius he was one of the three presidents over the 120 governors of the provinces. These men hated him. He belonged to a despised race, and his honesty stood in the way of their selfish aims.

They first tried to find fault in Daniel but as with the Holier one of a later date, they could "find no fault." Then they made His very goodness a ground of attack. Flattering the king with the offer of Divine homage, they induce him to sign the fatal decree. The Persians were accustomed to pay Divine honors to their king, and Darius being a Mede conciliates the Persians by yielding to their request. They watch Daniel and hasten to the king. He finds the trap in which he has been taken, and labors to undo his mistake, but in vain.

I. The den of lions, vs. 16-20.

II. The deliverance, vs. 21-23.

III. The retribution, v. 24.

IV. The new decree, vs. 26-28.

I. vs. 16-20. *The king commanded*—He need not have done so, but, as with Pilate, the fear of man prevailed. *Brought Daniel*—Sentence was carried out, according to custom, on the evening of the day on which it was passed. *Cast him into the den*—A common mode of punishment in Babylon. *He will deliver*—Or, may He deliver thee. *Sealed it*—A lump of soft clay was attached to the stone and stamped. They think they have triumphed. Tell the point of likeness between this and the sealing of Christ's sepulchre and the brief triumph of the Jews. *Arose very early*—He seemed to have some hope that Daniel still lived.

II. vs. 21-23. *Live for ever*—A common way of saluting a king. *Sent His angel*—Was the angel visible? Did Daniel have company as did the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace? Who can tell? No doubt God seemed very near and very real. *Take up Daniel*—The law had been fulfilled. Daniel had been cast into the den. Now he could be taken out. *No manner of hurt*—Like the three in the furnace of fire.

III. v. 24. *Brought those men*—Those of the 120 who had accused Daniel. *Children and wives*—A man's family was one with himself and shared his doom. So yet, if men sin their families suffer.

IV. vs. 25-28. A heathen king makes a decree that all men worship the true God. Give instances of similar and contrary decrees. *Daniel prospered*—If men trust God and do the right, all trials will but work out their greater good, sometimes temporally, always spiritually.