

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER: STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

B. C. 707. LESSON VI. THE CAPTIVES IN BABYLON; or, Favor for the Faithful. Dan. 1. 8-17. May 12.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE 8. DANIEL. One of the noblest personages in Bible history, eminent for his exalted rank, his pure character, and his high inspiration. He belonged to a noble, perhaps to a branch of the royal family in Judah, and was in the company of the princes who were carried captive to Babylon in the reign of Jehoiakim, B. C. 607, probably as hostages for the good conduct of those left behind. At the court of Nebuchadnezzar, his talents and character, aided by the favor of God, brought him into notice and honor. He interpreted the visions of the great king, and was advanced to high position, which he retained through all the changes of dynasty, until the reign of Cyrus. He lived to witness the return of his people from captivity, B. C. 536, but from his extreme age remained in Chaldea until his death, which must have taken place soon after. Purposed in his heart. It was a solemn, deliberate resolution, springing from the conscience, and fixed in the will. Noble deeds spring from noble determinations. What every age needs is young men like Daniel, who "dare to do right." Notice how this one man's purpose influenced others to the same course. Would not defile himself. 1. Because the Jewish law was very strict in reference to food, and the royal tables contained meats unceremonially "unclean." 2. At every banquet an oblation of food and drink was offered to the gods, thus making the partakers worship idols. 3. The food was often a part of idol sacrifices, hence to eat it would indirectly sanction idolatry. 4. The rich food of the palace tended to excess and corruption of morals. The luxury of Babylon was a great cause of its fall. 5. The purpose of the king may have been to make these young Jews satisfied with the place and forgetful of their own land. 6. Perhaps Daniel deemed banqueting and feasting unsuitable in captivity who were in secret mourning for Zion. The wine. Drunkenness led to Babylon's overthrow: for it was captured by Cyrus while the guards were intoxicated at a feast. The youths of our land can make no better resolution than to abstain from every thing that can lead to intemperance. Every year twelve hundred millions of dollars are spent in the United States for strong drinks, and seventy thousand people perish per annum as the results of its use. Requested. A gentle, respectful address may accompany a firm purpose—"the velvet glove over an iron hand." The utmost courtesy is not inconsistent with the strongest will. Prince of the eunuchs. Named Ashpenaz. He was the officer in charge of the young princes, and responsible to the government for their health and safety.

9, 10. GOD HAD BROUGHT. Whatever honor and affection we receive from men is the gift of God; for which he should be praised, and not ourselves be flattered. Favor and tender love. The gentleness and attractive character of Daniel, aided by the rare personal beauty of Daniel (verse 4) gained affection. We should aim for such a character as will not only please God, but will also win the regard of men. I fear my Lord. The king, having given orders concerning the food of the young men, might be enraged if he found his commands disobeyed, and, after the arbitrary manner of Oriental despots, without stopping to ascertain all the facts, might send the officer at once to the scaffold. Worse liking. Looking not so well. Children. Here, as frequently in the Bible, used to denote young men. Of your sort. Of your class or circle.

11, 12. MELZAR. Not a proper name, but an official title, signifying "steward." He was the officer in charge under Ashpenaz. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Daniel's three companions, whose names had been changed by the king of Shadrach, "messenger of the king," Meshach, "a ram," or "servant of the god Sheshach." Abed-nego, "servant of the god Nego." Prove. Put the matter to test. The faith which comes from personal experience is built upon the strongest foundation. Pulse. A general term, expressing anything grown from seeds, hence used with reference to all kinds of vegetable food. Water. A wise choice, in preference to the brain-consuming liquors of the king's table. If the people of our land would try the same test, half a million paupers and thirty-five million dollars spent in their support every year would be saved by the nation. (Teacher, urge your class to join "Daniel's Temperance Society.")

13, 14. BE LOOKED UPON. A fair test, to place these young abstainers beside those who partook of the royal banquets, and see which company presented the most healthy and vigorous appearance. No person who avoids intoxicants, ever need dread comparisons with those who indulge in worldly dissipations. He consented. A courteous request obtained favor which might have been denied to a peremptory demand. Proved them. They lost the delights of the banquets, the company of the revellers, the toothsome viands, and the delicious wines. They gained vigor of body, freshness of complexion, and strength of mind. It is an old saying that, "Loaden stomachs make leaden brains." Their consciences were kept in peace, their God was honored, and their companions held them in respect.

15, 16. FAIBER AND FATTER. The face is often the mirror of the soul. The glutton, the drunkard and the debauchee carry the stamp of their deeds upon their features. A depraved character corrupts even the flesh which covers it. The fair faces and vigorous frames of these young men came partly from their simple diet, partly from their pure life, but more than all else from the blessing of their God. "A crust of God's carving is better than a banquet of our own providing."—Beadle. Took away the portion. Thus the ten days' trial deepened into their habit for three years, at the expiration of which time they were presented to the king.

17. GOD GAVE THEM KNOWLEDGE. Though their strength of intellect and literary acquirements were the result of hard study, yet it was the gift of God. [Teacher, look to God for power to understand, to instruct and to apply his word.] Learning and wisdom. One word means information, the other skill in the use of it. Not every learned man is a wise man. Understanding in all visions. Obeisance, or the interpretation of dreams was a subject of study among the Chaldean sages, who had reduced it to a science, with certain fixed rules. By divine power this young Hebrew captive obtained a knowledge far surpassing theirs, who deemed themselves masters of their art. Dreams. At this time dreams and visions rarely possess any significance, being generally the vagaries of thought during sleep. But in ancient days, before the Scriptures were fully written, or the Spirit of God so abundantly bestowed, in the darkness of nature, God gave to men the flickering light of an instruction through these means. We do not possess it, because we do not need it, having a more sure guide.

GOLDEN TEXT: A good understanding have they all that do his commandments. Psa. 111, 10.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: Fidelity to conscience. The next lesson is Dan. 2, 36-45.

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