

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XXIV.

June 16, 1878. *MESSIAH'S KINGDOM.* Dan. vii. 9-14.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre."—Ps. xlv. 6.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Dan. vii. 1-14. Daniel's vision.
T. Dan. vii. 15-28. The angel's interpretation.
W. Isa. ix. 1-22. The strong nation.
Th. Ps. xlv. 1-17. The righteous sceptre.
F. Ps. lxxii. 1-20. The everlasting kingdom.
S. Micah iv. 1-7. The reign of peace.
S. Rev. xxi. 1-27. The new Jerusalem.

HELPS TO STUDY.

As Nebuchadnezzar beheld the four empires of the ancient world in his vision of the great image, so Daniel afterward saw them under the forms of four beasts rising up in succession. This vision was granted to Daniel in the third year of Belshazzar, the very year in which Babylon was captured by the Persians. The lesson, therefore, precedes, in order of time, the one which relates to the capture of Babylon. The four beasts represent four great world-powers; but there is some difference of opinion as to which these are. We have not space to consider these various interpretations. According to the traditional theory which has been held by the Church from the earliest times, and which is still maintained by the majority of scholars, it was Babylon's power, swift and strong, which was portrayed by a winged lion; Persia stood forth as a bear, crushing and devouring all the nations; Macedonia came as a leopard with wings, flying to the ends of the earth, divided into four heads, the successors of Alexander; and lastly came imperial Rome, a strange, nameless creature with iron teeth, overwhelming all the world, its ten horns predicting ten kingdoms, among them one, small and insignificant at first, but soon growing to greatness and claiming universal power—a type of Papal Rome. But whatever differences of opinion may exist as to these, it is agreed by all, without exception, that the fifth kingdom is that of Messiah, the Son of Man. Our lesson speaks of his throne, his judgment, and his dominion.

I. THE THRONE.—Verses 9, 10.

Not affrighted by the terrors he had witnessed, Daniel beheld till thrones were set; not "cast down," as the authorized version has it, and as if reference was made to the overthrow of the earthly thrones, but "placed," ready, that is, for the judges who were to sit upon them, perhaps the angels and glorified spirits who are frequently represented as the assessors of the Messiah in the judgment: Ps. lxxxix. 7; Matt. xix. 28; 1 Cor. vi. 2, 3; Rev. ii. 26, 27; iii. 21; iv. 4; xx. 4. The Eternal sits in judgment, clad in garments, as snow, white, symbolical of purity and righteousness: Isa. i. 18; Dan. xii. 10; Rev. iii. 5, 7, 14. The hair of his head was like wool, pure. The reference is to the whiteness of the wool. Matt. xvii. 2; Rev. i. 13, 14. Snow and wool are often thus coupled together: Ps. cxlvii. 16; Isa. i. 18.

His throne was the fiery flame, emblematical of the fire of his love and righteousness, which consumes ungodliness, and purifies and glorifies the people: Ex. iii. 2; xix. 18; Ps. xviii. 8. The throne was upon wheels, running, as it were, through all history and all space.—Ezek. i. 15-28. The fiery stream is symbolical of the outgoings of God. Thousands stood before them (Deut. x. 8; 1 Kings xvii. 1) and ministered unto them.

II. THE JUDGMENT.—Verses 10, 12—was set, that is, the judges took their seats. The books, the records of human actions, were opened: Ex. xxxii. 32; Ps. lvi. 8; lxxix. 28; Isa. iv. 3; Matt. iii. 16; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5; xxi. 7. Many think that this passage refers, not to the final and general judgment, but to providential judgments in time, for the destruction of the fourth beast and its horns, which is now judged for his great words, blasphemies: Verses 8 and 25; Ch. xi. 36; Rev. xiii. 5. His punishment was the Babylonian one of death by fire: Ch. iii. 6; Rev. xix. 20; xx. 1. The power of the first three was taken away, yet their lives were prolonged.

Although the supremacy of these ancient empires over the world passed away, yet Babylon continued in decaying splendour for centuries; Persia still survives as a nation, though in poverty and depopulation; and Macedonia retained its existence long after the brilliant but brief era of Alexander. For a season and a time, that is, periods which, though definitely fixed, are not known to man: Dan. ii. 21; Acts. i. 7; 1 Thess. v. i.

God judges nations here, and will judge individuals hereafter. Those who utter boasting words will be brought to naught, and every enemy of God's cause is sure to meet with failure and destruction in the end. An infidel was boasting of his cornfield, ploughed, planted, and hoed, all on the Sabbath. "See, here it is October, and what a fine crop! Don't tell me that there is a God!" "Well," said a Christian neighbour, "God does not always settle up His accounts in October!"

History is the working out of God's thought and purpose.

III. THE DOMINION.—Vers. 13, 14.

Daniel now beheld the glad vision of the Son of Man: Matt. viii. 20; x. 23; xvi. 13; xxiv. 27.

While the kingdoms of the beasts pass away, a higher and nobler power appears, with Jesus Christ, Son of Man and Son of God, as its exalted head. He who is our king, is also our brother.

He came with the clouds of Heaven: Matt. xxiv. 30; xxvi. 64; Mk. xiii. 26.

Heaven is the source of this kingdom and its power. Man did not form it. God prepares it: Dan. ii. Christ

receives it from the Father: Ps. ii. 8; viii. 6; cx. 1; Matt. xi. 27; xxii. 2; xxviii. 18; 1 Cor. xv. 27; Eph. i. 22; Heb. i. 8, 9; Rev. iii. 21; v. 12.

It is glorious: Matt. vi. 13.

It is supreme, all must yield to it. All shall serve them. But this service is not servitude, it is perfect freedom.

It is universal. It shall include all people. It is adapted to all, and bestows its privileges upon all.

It is everlasting, and shall not pass away. Thus it differs from all other kingdoms, and especially in one great feature, which does not appear here, but which is most conspicuous in the New Testament.

Here we might think that Messiah's Kingdom will issue only in the destruction of its enemies: Ps. ii. 8. But when the brighter light of the cross streams across the sacred page, we see that the grandest of the King's conquests will be the conversion of His enemies. But even here there is a suggestion of this in the title, Son of Man. We find it applied to Ezekiel and Daniel, and evidently there indicating the weakness of our human nature. And when Christ took it as His own particular name for Himself, it was an acknowledgment of His being "in all things like unto His brethren," "in fashion like a man," "in the likeness of sinful flesh." Heb. ii. 17; Phil. ii. 8; Rom. viii. 3. Fifty-five times we find Him in the Gospels calling Himself the Son of Man (without counting parallel passages), and almost always in connection with His humiliation. Yet not always. Twice He distinctly refers to this prophecy of Daniel, which all the Jews acknowledged as Messianic, and, by applying it to Himself, claimed to be Messiah: John v. 27; Matt. xxvi. 64.

THE REAL GOSPEL.

The peculiar plan by which the love of God has provided salvation for sinners, is the atoning death of Christ on the cross. Our Lord says to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

By being "lifted up," our Lord meant nothing less than His own death upon the cross. That death, He would have us know, was appointed by God to be "the life of the world." (John vi. 51.) It was ordained from all eternity to be the great propitiation and satisfaction for man's sin. It was the payment, by an Almighty Substitute and Representative, of man's enormous debt to God. When Christ died upon the cross, our many sins were laid upon Him. He was made "sin" for us. He was made "a curse" for us. (2 Cor. v. 21; Gal. iii. 13.) By His death He purchased pardon and complete redemption for sinners. The brazen serpent, lifted up in the camp of Israel, brought health and cure within the reach of all who were bitten by serpents. Christ crucified, in like manner, brought eternal life within reach of lost mankind. Christ has been lifted up on the cross, and man looking to Him by faith may be saved.

The truth before us is the very foundation-stone of the Christian religion. Christ's death is the Christian's life. Christ's cross is the Christian's title to heaven. Christ "lifted up" and put to shame on Calvary is the ladder by which Christians "enter into the holiest," and are at length landed in glory. It is true that we are sinners;—but Christ has suffered for us. It is true that we deserve death;—but Christ has died for us. It is true that we are guilty debtors;—but Christ has paid our debts with His own blood. This is the real Gospel! This is the good news! On this let us lean while we live. To this let us cling when we die. Christ has been "lifted up" on the cross, and has thrown open the gates of heaven to all believers.—*Ryle*.

EXPERIENCE OF BELIEVERS.

It was to companions who could sympathize in his feelings that he unbosomed himself. At that period it was not common for inquiring souls to carry their case to their pastor. A conventional reserve upon these subjects prevailed even among lively believers. It almost seemed as if they were ashamed of the Son of man. This reserve appeared to him very sinful; and he felt it to be so great an evil, that in after days he was careful to encourage anxious souls to converse with him freely. The nature of his experience, however, we have some means of knowing. On one occasion, a few of us who had studied together were reviewing the Lord's dealings with our souls, and how he had brought us to himself all very nearly at the same time, though without any special instrumentality. He stated that there was nothing sudden in his case, and that he was led to Christ through deep and ever-abiding, but not awful or distracting, convictions. In this we see the Lord's sovereignty. In bringing a soul to the Saviour, the Holy Spirit invariably leads it to very deep consciousness of sin; but then He causes this consciousness of sin to be more distressing and intolerable to some than to others. But in one point does the experience of all believing sinners agree in this matter, viz., their soul presented to their view nothing but an abyss of sin, when the grace of God that bringeth salvation appeared.

You read your Bible regularly, of course; but do try to understand it, and still more, to feel it. Read more parts than one at a time. For example, if you are reading Genesis, read a psalm also; or, if you are reading Matthew, read a small bit of an epistle also. Turn the Bible into Prayer. Thus, if you were reading the first Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you, and kneel, and pray, "O Lord, give me the blessedness of the man," etc. "Let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly," etc. This is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible, and of learning to pray. In prayer confess your sins by name—going over those of the past day, one by one. Pray for your friends by name—father, mother, etc., etc. If you love them, surely you will pray for their souls. I know well that there are prayers constantly ascending for you from your own house; and will you not pray for them back again? Do this regularly. If you pray sincerely for others, it will make you pray for yourself.

WORDS OF THE WISE.

It is with men as with trees; if you lop off their finest branches, into which they were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over some rough boss, some odd excrescence; and what might have been a grand tree expanding into liberal shade is but a whimsical misshapen trunk. Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow, which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty; and the trivial erring life which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered.—*George Eliot*.

DESCRIPTION OF CALUMNY. Appellus painted her thus:—There sits a man with great and open ears inviting Calumny, with his hands held out, to come to him; and two women, Ignorance and Suspicion, stand near him. Calumny breaks out in a fury; her countenance is homely and beautiful, her eyes sparkle like fire, and her face is inflamed anger; she holds a lighted torch in her left hand, and with her right twists a young man's neck, who holds up his hands in prayer to the gods. Before her goes Envy, pale and nasty; on her side are Fraud and Conspiracy, behind her follows Repentance, clad in mourning, and her clothes torn, with her head turned backwards as if she looked for Truth, who comes slowly after.

DARKNESS is an emblem of ignorance and error; and an emblem the most striking. As the pall of darkness is drawn over the world the fair face of nature fades from the light; every object becomes indistinct or as wholly obscured; and all that can cheer the sight, or direct the steps of man vanishes. So the gradual accumulation of religious errors, thickening in every age, banishes the knowledge of God and His truth from the understanding of men, till all that was sublime in speculation, cheering to the heart, supporting to the hopes, or directive to the actions of men, passed away from the soul, and left the intellectual world like that of nature deprived of light. The heaven of the soul was hung with blackness, and "their foolish heart was darkened."—*R. Watson*.

EXPLAIN as you will the new current of spiritual life that dates its opening with Christ's appearance, by ignoring his Messiahship; eliminate from His Gospel all that you find in the saying of seers and sages that came before him, and you account for what is incontestably His own—His own truth which is crystallized in society, art, government, and religion, by attributing to him a mere human character and place in history. He is the prophet of all that is most precious to the human heart and human hope. He illustrates in His own character all that is noblest and most to be desired in the possibilities of being. Love in His life, and death, and sacrifice, has its superior expression. Whether men know it or not, from Him flows whatever colors their existence with their fondest hopes, and flavors it with the truest enjoyment.—*H. N. Piers, D.D.*

"Is the vessel full that contains the needed supply? And is that supply as free as it is various and suitable? Then, with all our manifold wants, and with all our emptiness and infirmity; with all our complaints and petitions; with all our sorrows and sins; with all our cares and burdens, let us come up to the fountain and dip in our vessels. 'With joy let us draw water out of the wells of salvation.' Thus, not only shall we be refreshed by the water 'springing up into everlasting life,' but out of us shall flow rivers of living water upon others. Is the promise sure to them who thus draw near? Is it written, 'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you?' Is it written, 'Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not?' And are not these promises commands as well as invitations? Then what is there wanting to induce us to come? How can we remain away? Why do we stand afar off?"—*Dr. H. Bonar*.

"ACHOR is called 'a door of hope' (Hosea ii. 15), God, when He gives one mercy, opens a door for him to give, and us to expect, more mercy through it. God compares his promise to the rain which maketh the earth 'bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater' (Isa. lv. 10). Why shouldst thou content thyself with half the benefit of mercy? When God performs his promise, and delivers thee out of this trouble, and that strait, thou art exceedingly comforted, and thy heart possibly enlarged into thankfulness for the same. It is well; here is 'bread for the eater,' something that at present feeds thee. But where is 'the seed for the sower.' The husbandman doth not sell all his corn that he reaps, but saves some for seed, which may bring him another crop; so, Christian, thou shouldst not only feast thyself with the joy of thy mercy, but save the remembrance of it as hope-seed, to strengthen thee to wait on God for another mercy, and further help in a needful time."—*Gurnall*.

"LET things go as ill as we can fear in this world, if we are sincere Christians there is a far better state to come, to which we shall be admitted when we are once out of this troublesome and sinful world. We are assured that we are under the constant care of Divine Providence. The tranquillity of our minds in this world depends very much upon the esteem we have of Providence, and the trust we repose in God. We cannot alter the methods of Providence by our solicitude; God will govern the world by his own measures and not by ours. The government is his, the duty of submission is ours. Let us not then be peevish and quarrelsome at what He doth; but make the best use of an extraordinary instance of his providence which seems intended for our good unless we turn it another way. But it is not enough to be merely contented with Providence, but we ought to be active and useful in our own places to promote the common interest, and not to repine and murmur at what is necessary for the support of it. Let us not torment ourselves with fears of what may and what may not happen; but let us commit ourselves to God in well-doing as to our Creator and preserver."