

Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

FIRST QUARTER.

(Condensed from DeLaney's Select Notes.)

Lesson X. March 6. Jer. 39: 1-10.

THE DOWNFALL OF JUDAH.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."—Matt. 23: 38.

EXPLANATORY.

I. OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSORS.—God did everything He wisely could to prevent His people from rushing down to their own destruction. (1) He laid upon them several lesser evils as warnings to avoid the way which would lead them swiftly on to final destruction. These were devastations of the country from which a few years would suffice to recover. Then Jerusalem was captured and part of its treasure removed, but the city was not destroyed, and the temple stood. Kings were made captive as a warning to coming kings; but new kings were chosen, and the kingdom remained. Leaders of the people were carried captive to Babylon, but their places could be filled. These were warnings, not destruction. (2) These sieges were at intervals of six and twelve years. The doom came slowly, and in mercy, to give time for thought and repentance. (3) Prophets were sent to warn and entreat. Jeremiah had been speaking God's Word to them for forty years in Jerusalem. For nearly ten years Ezekiel, also from the land of captivity in Babylon, had been uttering earnest words to the Jews in Palestine. We cannot understand the history of these times without reading these prophets; not do we see the meaning of the prophecies without a clear and comprehensive view of the history and the times. These prophecies are "the pulp literature of the age." (4) All through the last investment and siege, in those times of despair, there were sent by Jeremiah gleams of hope, and promises of return and prosperity, of the Messiah and His kingdom (see Jer. 23: 3-8; 30: 15-22).

II. THE GREAT SIEGE. Lasting a year and a half, from December, B. C. 588, to July, 587.

FIRST. DATE OF COMMENCEMENT. 1. In the ninth year... in the tenth month, of the Jewish year, the month Thebet, corresponding to parts of our December and January, the king, with the new moon. The author of Kings says the siege began in the tenth day of this month.

SECOND. THE BESIEGERS. Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. The king of Babylon, who destroyed Nineveh, B. C. 608, and built up the empire of Assyria. Nebuchadnezzar, his son, was also his great general, and became sole emperor B. C. 604. He made Babylon glorious during his reign of 43 years.

THIRD. METHODS OF ATTACK. And all his army. A great host (Kings). This consisted of the fierce and cruel Chaldeans (ver. 10), with warriors from the surrounding nations, enemies of the Jews, and tributaries of Babylon, the Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites (2 Kings 24: 2). Besieged it. Surrounded it with their armies to prevent all provisions from entering, and to starve it to submission, if they could not break down its walls. They built around the city movable wooden towers, sometimes provided with battering-rams, which the besiegers advanced against the walls, thus bringing their fighting men on a level with their antagonists.

FOURTH. THE DEFENCE. Jerusalem was at this time a city of 20,000 inhabitants. Against the huge engines of Asiatic warfare the besieged citizens constructed counter-engines; and (such was the Jewish tradition) the struggle was worthy of the occasion—a combat of duel, not only of courage, but of skill and intelligence, between Babylon and Jerusalem.

FIFTH. THE SEVERITY OF THE SIEGE. Famine within the walls aided the besiegers without; and it was speedily followed, as is always the case, with an outbreak of pestilence.

SIXTH. THE DURATION OF THE SIEGE. 2. In the eleventh year... the fourth month. The middle of June to the middle of July. The ninth day. Therefore about July 1.

III. THE FALL OF JERUSALEM. Ver. 2, 3. The city was broken up. Broken into; i. e. a breach was made in the walls, and the city was entered at midnight (Josephus; see also Ezek. 12: 2-12).

4. And. This is to be connected with "Jerusalem was taken" at the close of the last chapter. The Rev. Ver. puts all between in parentheses. All the princes. Probably the generals who captured the city, and the highest officials. Only four are named, not six, as appears at first sight. The third is Sarai-shin the Rab-saris, a high Assyrian title, by some translated "the chief of the eunuchs." The last is Nergal-sharzer the Rab-mag; i. e. "the high priest," or "chief of the sorcerers."

IV. THE FATE OF ZEDEKIAH. A Zedekiah the king... and all the men of war fled. As the invaders were entering from the north, the king naturally fled toward the south; and the path which he chose was that which would down the Tyropoon valley, betwixt the two walls of Moriah on his left, and Zion on his right. This path came out in the king's garden, which was laid out near Siloam in the broad space formed by the junction of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys, at the south-east corner of the city. And he went out the way of the plain. That led to the plain. Literally, the Arabah, the depression bounding Palestine on the east along the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and extending down to the Red Sea. "The way of the plain" is the road leading eastward over Olivet to Bethany and Jericho.

5. The Chaldeans' army. Who surrounded the city, soon discovered the flight of the king, and pursued and overtook him. They brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon to Riblah. Riblah was an ancient city, situated upon the Orontes, between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon, thirty miles north-east of Baalbek, and about 200 miles east of north from Jerusalem.

6, 7. Slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes... he put out Zedekiah's eyes. The punishment of Zedekiah was doubly cruel; first, his being made to witness the execution of his own sons, and then his being deprived of sight, so that the last scenes impressed upon him would be the death agonies of his children. Blinding has long been a common Oriental punishment. Compare the blinding of Sanson, and the attempt of King John of England to blind Prince Arthur. Slew all the nobles of Judah. His friends' deaths, too, would remain a picture never to be forgotten in his blindness and chains. Bound him with chains. Margin, "with two brazen chains or fetters," as in 2 Kings 25: 7. To carry him to Babylon. Which was done; and he was kept in prison there till the day of his death (52: 11).

LESSONS FROM ZEDEKIAH'S EXPERIENCE.—(1) He went on in a wrong course against the Word of God, the warnings and entreaties of the prophet, and the experience of his brothers. God made the way of transgressors hard, not merely at the end, but all along the way, by the obstacles He placed in the downward course. (2) The opportunity to be saved was frequently given him; the way was clearly pointed out. (3) He was afraid to do right because of his companions. But they perished, and he with them. (4) There comes a "too late," when all efforts to escape are useless.

REMARKABLE PROPHECIES FULFILLED. God spoke by the tongue of Ezekiel one of the most mysterious and most curious predictions in the entire Bible. He declared that King Zedekiah should be led into Babylon a captive, should there live and there die, and yet he should never see the city. So singular is this record that we must read the verses just as he wrote them (Ezek. 12: 10-13). Now put with this a parallel passage. Jeremiah was thrown into prison by his monarch. While there under bonds, he in like manner predicted the downfall of Jerusalem; and he said that Zedekiah should speak with Nebuchadnezzar month to month, and see his eyes. Find the exact words (Jer. 32: 3-5). Mark, now, how the providence of the Almighty stoops, as it were, to work out the details of this almost contradictory prediction. Just two verses in the chapter before we here meet the whole difficulty (2 Kings 25: 6, 7). Nebuchadnezzar was at Riblah, not yet returned to his capital; and the unhappy king of Judah was brought to him, and condemned to have both of his eyes put out. When this was done, the suffering man was "led" into Babylon. There Zedekiah wore his life away, sad and sightless. So he saw the king, but did not see the city, and thus it was that an Assyrian heathen had unwittingly fulfilled a prophecy of God's Word.

V. THE COMPLETE DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY AND TEMPLE.—Vers. 8-10. There was a month's delay after the capture of the city before its destruction (compare 52: 6 and 12). Either the temple and the fortress held out so long after the capture of the lower city, or Nebuchadnezzar delayed for a time to send the orders for the complete destruction of the city. He had twice agreed it. Shall he do it again?

9. Carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people. Who had survived the horrors of the siege. And those that fell away. Who had deserted to him during the siege, for whom Jeremiah had promised safety. The rest... that remained. After the several deportations of captives in previous attacks upon the city, 12 and eighteen years before (see 2 Kings 24: 14-16; Jer. 52: 28-30). In 2 Kings 25: 13-17, and Jer. 52: 17-24, is a record of the temple treasures carried to Babylon.

10. Left of the poor of the people. Who were supposed to be unable to revolt. These had now some compensation for their poverty. They had been oppressed by the rich and great, as Jeremiah tells us; and now their oppressors are ruined captives, and the poor have full opportunity in the country. Among those who remained was the prophet Jeremiah, whose experience follows after the record in the lesson.

NOTE that gleams of comfort and hope came to the people. Jeremiah promised a return after 70 years. Isaiah continually foretold that a remnant should be saved, and pictured glorious times to come.

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—Little girl: "What makes Jane so bad-tempered to-day?" Mother: "It's her day in."

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—Rev. H. N. Parry, New Glasgow, says: "For years I was troubled with indigestion and had to abstain from many articles of food altogether. Having been induced to try K. D. C. I found it gave almost immediate relief. I would recommend others suffering from indigestion to give it a trial."

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—Mr. James Shand, the well-known auctioneer, says: "Had considerable expectation and disagreeable cough. Physician recommended Putnam's Emulsion. Took six bottles—cough vanished. Am convinced your preparation brought about my speedy convalescence."

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Bert and the Bees. Bert had three buckets of water to bring from the spring. They were pretty big buckets and the spring was at the foot of the hill. The weather was getting warm, too. He tugged away at one bucket and got it up; then he lay down on the back porch to rest. "Hello, Bert, soon's not down yet!" said his father, coming in from dinner from corn-planting. "I wish I were a big man," said lazy Bert, "and didn't have to carry water." But you would have to plant corn and sow wheat, and cut and reap, and thresh and grind," laughed his father. "I don't mean to work when I'm big," grumbled Bert. "Then you'll be a drone, said his father. "What is a drone?" asked the little boy. "A bee that won't work; and don't you know that the bee always sting their drones to death and push their bodies out of the hive?" The farmer went off to wash for dinner, and Bert dropped asleep on the steps, and dreamed that the bees were stinging his hands and face. He started up and found that the sun was shining hotly on him, stinging his face and hands sure enough. He hurried down to the spring and finished the job by the time the horn blew for dinner. "Father," he asked, while he cooled his soup, "what makes the bees kill their drones?" "God taught them," answered his father; "and one way or another God makes all lazy people uncomfortable. Doing with our might what our hands find to do is the best rule for little boys and big men, and I wouldn't be surprised if the angels live by it, too."

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