

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XVI.

April 21, 1878. } JEREMIAH IN PRISON. { Jer. xxxiii. 1-9.

GOLDEN TEXT:—"Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not."—Verse 3.

HOME STUDIES.

M. 2 Kings. xxiii. 31-37. Jehoahaz—Jehoiakim
T. Jer. xxvi. 1-24. The prophet's warning.
W. 2 Kings xxiv. 1-17. Jerusalem taken.
Th. Jer. xxvii. 1-22. The captivity foretold.
F. Jer. xxviii. 1-17. The false prophet rebuked.
S. Jer. xxx. 1-32. Jeremiah's letter.
S. Jer. xxxiii. 1-17. Jeremiah in prison.

HELPS TO STUDY.

I. THE MARTYR: Verse 1.

At the outset of our lesson the enquiry suggests itself, who was Jeremiah? and how came he in prison? We can only condense into a few brief leading points the interesting story of Jeremiah's life. Look at the period, the prophet, the prisoner.

1. *The period.*—Two great powers were then contending for the empire of the East, the ancient kingdom of Egypt, and the new, or, rather, revived, kingdom of Babylon, which had lately risen upon the ruins of Assyria. We find the two spoken of together in the eighty-seventh Psalm, written (it is believed) in Hezekiah's day, "I will make mention of Rahab, (that is, Egypt,) and Babylon." Two famous conquerors ruled these rival States, Pharaoh Necho and Nebuchadnezzar; and it was in the middle of Jeremiah's ministry that the former was finally defeated by the latter at Carchemish. (Jer. xli. 2, 13; 2 Kings xxiv. 7.)

Between these two contending powers lay the little kingdom of Judah, no longer independent, but tributary first to one and then to the other. Josiah, as a vassal of Babylon, resisted Necho's advancing army, and fell in battle. Necho deposed Jehoahaz, whom the people chose out of the late king's sons to succeed him, and set Jehoiakim on the throne. Jehoiakim was overcome by Nebuchadnezzar, who twice (if not three times) entered Jerusalem as a conqueror in his and his son's reigns, and who gave the kingdom to Zedekiah. Zedekiah revolted, hoping for succor from Egypt, and this led to the third (or fourth?) capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and its destruction.

We are accustomed to regard both Egypt and Babylon as the enemies of God's people; but throughout this period, while Egypt is constantly denounced, Nebuchadnezzar is again and again described as a divinely appointed agent (Jer. xxv. 9; xxvii. 6) for the punishment of the nations, Judah included. In Jerusalem, however, there were two parties, and the party that favored submission to Egypt and war with Babylon was the stronger, and was at last, in a sense, the cause of Judah's downfall.

2. *The prophet.*—In the midst of these troublous scenes stands the impressive figure of Jeremiah, firm, faithful, tender-hearted—the "weeping prophet." Called to his sacred office young, and shrinking at first from its responsibilities, (Jer. 1,) he nevertheless was enabled to rejoice in his mission, (Jer. xv. 16;) but from the day of Josiah's death, over which he bitterly mourned, (2 Chron. xxxv. 25,) opposition and persecution were his lot; and close after the joyful words just quoted occurs one of his saddest complaints to God, (Jer. xv. 18.) "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" and one of Jehovah's richest promises of unfailing succor and deliverance. (Verse 20.)

The main burden of Jeremiah's prophecies during the twenty-two years from Josiah's death to the destruction of Jerusalem was threefold: chiefly, denunciations of the sins of kings, priests, and people, in the plainest and most fearless language; but secondarily, exhortations to submit to Babylon, whose supremacy for the time God had ordained, as the only way of present safety; and further, promises of future restoration after the captivity, which he saw must be the end of the people's obstinacy. Most vivid are some of the scenes in which he utters these messages. For instance, when he stands in the temple and proclaims them at the risk of his life, (chap. 26;) when he solemnly breaks the potter's vessel in the valley of Hinnom in token of the impending doom of the nation, and is put in the stocks by Pashur, (chaps. xix. and xx. ;) when he writes the roll which Jehoiakim cuts up and throws into the fire, (chap. xxxvi. ;) when he appears in public with chains and yokes upon his neck, representing the coming bondage. (Chaps. xxvii. and xxviii.)

3. *The prisoner.*—The imprisonment to which this lesson refers us was just before the final overthrow of the kingdom, and is fully related in chaps. xxxii., xxxvii. and xxxviii. Jeremiah was regarded by the party that sided with Egypt as a traitor, and false prophets pretended to appeal from him to Jehovah, who (they said) would deliver the nation from Babylon. (See chap. xxviii.) His real faith was shown in his buying his kinsman's field at Anathoth, (chap. xxxii.,) at the very time that Nebuchadnezzar was investing Jerusalem. But his steady counsels to submit to Babylon made all his words and acts suspicious, and caused his arrest. The whole story of his life in prison, particularly his being cast into a miry dungeon, is most interesting, and throws into striking contrast his own faithfulness and Zedekiah's vacillation.

II. THE MESSAGE: Verses 2-9.

God remembers his suffering, and for the second time (Jer. xxxii. 1, 2,) sends him a message of comfort and hope.

1. *The pledge: Verses 1, 3.*—Thus saith the Lord, the maker, literally, the doer thereof; that is of what He says. The prophet is reminded that He who speaks is one who does what He says. He is the Lord who forms, who establishes. For these verbs are impersonals. Jehovah is His name, His covenant name and the pledge of His faithfulness. Ex. iii. 14, 15. Call unto me.

Most blessed invitation addressed to all troubled and perplexed ones. There were in ancient Rome officers called *Ediles*, appointed to hear the petitions of the people; in token of which they kept their doors always open. So God's portal of prayer is ever swung wide for his children. I will answer. Isa. lxv. 24. God is more importunate in urging us to pray, than we are when we come to Him in prayer: Matt. vii. 7-11; xxi. 22; Luke xviii. 1-7; Col. iv. 2. Great and mighty, *lit.* difficult things, (Isa. xlviii.) future events unknown and almost incredible concerning the restoration and prosperity of Judah. And what great things are revealed to Christians concerning the "city." John xiv. 26; xvi. 13; 1 Cor. ii. 14.

2. *The judgment: Verses 4, 5.*—There is now set forth the fearful ruin of Jewish homes and families, the desolation about to fall on the entire city. Houses. The houses without the walls were destroyed by the besiegers to furnish materials and make room for their engines of war: those within the wall and near it were employed by the defenders as fortifications. Mount. Inclined planes leading up the walls, and on which the besiegers placed towers. Sword. The same word in 2 Chron. xxiv. 6, is translated "mattocks," or hammers used in demolition of buildings.

They, the Jews, come to fight, but in vain, with no other result, but to see the houses filled with the dead bodies of the slain; whom God has slain for their wickedness. The sword of Nebuchadnezzar was the sword of God.

3. *The Restoration: Verses 6-9.*—Light breaks from behind the cloud.—I will bring it health and cure: Nothing is too hard for God. Judah, diseased, and in the throes of dissolution, is promised restoration and vigor. Out of the ashes of Jerusalem the prophet saw rising a new nation; God-fearing and holy, who should replenish the devastated land and repair the shattered fortunes of Israel.—Peace: Where the human eye saw the thronging tents and the frowning forts and the embattled hosts of the foe, the prophet beheld flocks feeding on the hillsides, and people dwelling in peace.—Captivity of Judah: The land had been often overswept by invaders, and already, eighteen years before, had witnessed the best of its citizens carried captive to Chaldea; and in less than a year afterward the remnant of Judah was removed, leaving the country waste and almost uninhabited. The prophet sees, as already at hand, the events fifty years in the distance, when, by the decree of Cyrus, the exile came to an end.—Captivity of Israel: The ten tribes had been conquered, and transported afar into Assyria, by Shalmaneser, over a hundred years before. In the return Israel lost its separate nationality, and became merged with the tribe of Judah.—Build them: As a people, though not as an independent power. Yet the spiritual honors of the new Israel were far higher than of the old.—I will cleanse them: A promise, not only of prosperity, but also of purification. The fires of captivity so effectually burned out Judah's sins that its old tendency to idol-worship was forever eradicated, and all its energies were turned toward the law of God.—I will pardon: Present purity does not atone for the guilt of past sins. We need pardon; and God, who is rich in mercy, promises to bestow it upon all who will sue humbly for His grace. Judah shall be for me *as* is, to my glory, a name of joy, etc., before all the nations. This was but partially fulfilled in the Restoration, more fully in the coming of Jesus, for which the Return was the necessary preparation; and a still more glorious fulfilment awaits it. They shall fear and tremble, with the fear of reverence. Ps. ii. 11; Phil. ii. 12. No case of degradation is hopeless. Jehovah the Healer can cure the most hopeless.

Our lesson is full of comfort for all who are standing up for Truth and Right against the tide, as Jeremiah was. There is ever a tide of public opinion concerning religious and moral questions. It can be felt in the school-room, the market, the place of business; and in the church. It does not always set in one direction; it ebbs and flows. The weak and wavering go with it, as did the king of Judah. The strong in faith keep a steadfast course, like Jeremiah. When the tide is running against you, do not fear or falter. "Quit you like men; be strong." "The Truth shall prevail." The message to the prophet is a message to you; and bids you hold out, for God is with you.

MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY.

WHITBY. At Duffin's Creek, on Tuesday, 16th April, at 11 a.m.

STRATFORD.—In Knox Church, Stratford, on Tuesday, 9th April, at 9.30 a.m.

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.

STRATFORD.—In Knox Church, Stratford, on Tuesday, 9th April, at 9.30 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.

Births, Marriages and Deaths.

NOT EXCEEDING FOUR LINES 25 CENTS.

BIRTH.

At the manse, Spencerville, on Monday, the 8th April, the wife of Rev. W. J. Dey, M.A., of a daughter.

WORDS OF THE WISE.

WALKING BY FAITH.—Faith is a light which shines only upon duties, and not upon results or events. It tells us what is now to be done, but it does not tell us what is to follow; and accordingly it guides us but a single step at a time. And when we take that step under the guidance of faith we advance directly into a land of shadows and darkness. Like the Patriarch Abraham, we go, not knowing whither we go, but only that God is with us—a way of living which may well be styled blessed and glorious, however mysterious it may be to human vision. Indeed, it is the only life worth possessing, the true life.—*C. Pham.*

THE spirit of covetousness which leads to an over-value and over-love of money is independent of amount. A poor man may make an idol of his little, just as much as the rich man makes of his much. We know our blessed LORD's own declaration how the poorest person may exceed in charity and liberality the richest; and that is by giving more than the wealthy in proportion to the whole that is in his possession. So in like manner, a poor man may be more covetous than a wealthy man, because he may keep back from the treasury of God more in proportion to his all than the rich man keeps back from his all.—*E. B. Ramsay.*

WANTS SUPPLIED.—A good man shall have what he needs, not always what he thinks he needs. Providence intends the supply of our necessities, but not of our desires. He will satisfy our wants, but not our wantonness. When a thing is not needful, a man cannot properly be said to want it; when it is needful, a good man shall not be without it. What is not bestowed upon us may not be so beautiful at that time wherein we desire it, for everything is beautiful in its season. He that did not want God's kindness to renew him shall never want God's kindness to supply him; his hand shall not be wanting to give where his heart has been so large in working.—*Charnock.*

BE JOYFUL IN GOD.—That is the great point, to be joyful in God. There is no help for us in any creature. We are shut up as prisoners in the cells of these bodies, which debar us in the present from much real intercourse with human beings, even though they are our nearest friends; but if we have a mind to, we can get ever so near God, and our hearts filled with Him. I used to think of heaven as far away, but now I think that we are in the very midst of it, only we are shut up by our bodies till death lets us out. Sometimes a verse in the Bible or Daily Food opens up to me a world of meaning and clears away all my anxieties. I begin each morning in doubt and fear, and rise from my knees bold and confident.—*W. Craig.*

THE CHRISTIAN'S JOY.—His is a modest, humble exultation, a serious, severe joy; suitable to his solid, stable hope. His spirit is not puffed up and swollen with air, it is not big by an inflation or a light and windy tumor; but it is really filled with effectual pre-apprehensions of a weighty glory. His joy accordingly exerts itself with a steady, lively vigor, equally removed from vain lightness and stupidity, from conceitedness and insensibleness of his blessed state. He forgets not that he is less than the least of God's mercies, but disowns not his title to the greatest of them. He abases himself to the dust in the sense of his own vileness; but in the admiration of Divine grace, he rises as high as heaven. In his humiliation he affects to equal himself with worms; in his joy and praise, with angels.

A REDEEMED SINNER.—I had rather, as a forgiven child, with all the prospects of the future opened up unto me, wear the crown purchased by the redeeming love of Christ, than that which is worn by the unfallen angels, because the blessings of a Divine atonement, through a Divine incarnation secured to the soul in harmony with the conditions of the Gospel, reveals the character of God in a way impossible to be made known to those who had complied with all that the law demands; and this places the sinner, penitent and forgiven, upon a platform of experience and personal relationship to God, of a nature so peculiar and so extraordinary as to throw all other stars glittering never so brightly in the heavenly firmament, into comparative obscurity, contrasted with the exceptional brilliancy of that state which involves the strange anomaly of justice and mercy together, the law sustained and the sinner saved.—*Rev. Phillips Brooks.*

EVILS OF BIGOTRY.—Of all the detestable evils that disgrace the Christian world, sectarian bigotry is certainly the most pernicious—the most to be dreaded. It is fashionable to declaim against the evils of enthusiasm and fanaticism, and, perhaps, with some reason, where they exist they are deeply to be deplored; we do not defend or palliate them. But what are these compared with the dark, malignant spirit of bigotry? Enthusiasm has the glory of the sun to kindle up its mists and clouds with beauty. Fanaticism has thunder and lightning and meteors in its gloom, and the tempest which it threatens may soon be dispersed; but bigotry is the palpable obscure, the solid temperament of darkness, mixed with drivelling rain; its pestilential vapors blast the lovely fruits of piety and goodness, while all noxious, all prodigious things crawl forth, and increase the horror of the night.—*Anon.*

IN GOD.—Above all things, and in all things, O my soul, thou shalt rest in the Lord always, for he Himself is the everlasting rest of the saints. Grant me, O most sweet and loving Jesus, to rest in Thee above all creatures, above all health and beauty, above all glory and honour, above all power and dignity, above all knowledge and subtilty, above all riches and aise, above all joy and gladness, above all fame and praise, above all sweetness and comfort, above all hope and promise, above all desert and desire: above all gifts and presents that thou canst give and impart unto us, above all mirth and jubilee that the mind of man can receive and feel: finally, above angels and archangels, and above all the heavenly host, above all visible and invisible things, and above all that thou art not, Oh my God.—*Thomas A. Kempis.*