

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER: STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

B. C. 590. LESSON IV. THE RECHABITES: or, Safety in Obedience. Jer. 35, 12-19. April 28th.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE 12. THEN CAME. This chapter is evidently misplaced in the record. Its events took place at least seventeen years before those of the last lesson, and it should be dated B. C. 607, instead of B. C. 590. Jerusalem was then suffering its first siege from the Chaldeans, and was crowded with refugees from all parts of the land. Soon after King Jehoiachin was slain, the city was captured and pillaged, the young king Jehoiachin, and many of the noble families [Daniel and his companions among them], were carried away to Babylon. From this date, B. C. 606, the seventy years of captivity began, though the final destruction of the city and extinction of the State did not take place until B. C. 586, under the last king, Zedekiah. See note on verse 1 of the last lesson.

13. LORD OF HOSTS. A title applied to Jehovah, as the ruler of the armies of the universe. God of Israel. The God of all the earth. He was the God of Israel in a peculiar sense since he had chosen this nation as the depository of divine truth, and the bearer of salvation to the world. Judah. The kingdom was now reduced within the narrowest boundaries; its cities destroyed and villages depopulated: the people huddled in dread of their Chaldean foes at the capital; and the State heaving with the throes of speedy dissolution. Will ye not receive instruction? When counsel has proved unavailing, a wise parent gives reproof. Here God shows his people their dissolution by a striking illustration. [Teacher, keep your class reminded that God is our father, instructing, rebuking, punishing, only as a loving parent must his obdurate child.]

14. JONADAB. More correctly, Jehonadab. The founder of the Rechabites, a clan of the Kenites, a family related to and allied with Israel, though not descended from Jacob. Jonadab was one of the puritans of his day, and took an active part in Jehu's bloody reformation of Israel. (2 Kings 10, 15-23.) He strongly enjoined upon his descendants the maintenance of their nomadic customs. They were forbidden 1. to build or inhabit houses. 2. To sow seed or plant vineyards. 3. To drink wine or strong drink; and were required to live in tents, apart from the temptation of cities. The purposes of these peculiar usages was, doubtless, to preserve their individuality in an ascetic life, of some-religious character. On the invasion of Judaea by the Chaldeans, they took refuge in Jerusalem where Jeremiah holds them up as an example to the people. After the captivity they appear to have settled at Jabez, in Judah. (1 Chron. 2, 55.) Not to drink wine. Wine was the symbol of a luxurious, flesh-pleasing life, besides being dangerous and tending to drunkenness. If the pure wines of that day were to be discontinued, the vile, drugged compounds now in use ought certainly to be cast aside and forbidden. Let every parent and teacher exert a strong influence, and set a wholesome example, of total abstinence from all intoxicants. Unto this day. Though two hundred and fifty years had intervened since the commandment was given, still it was sacredly obeyed. Among Oriental races great honour and respect are paid to the authority of parents; a trait in which our people may wisely copy them. Said a young man, "I thought that I was treating my mother with respect, while she was living, but now that she is dead, I recollect with sorrow many acts of neglect and disobedience: but it is now too late to atone for them!" I have spoken unto you. God had given commandment to his people, as well as Jonadab to his family. 1. One came from human authority, the other from divine. 2. One was from a man long since dead, the other from a God ever-living. 3. One was given once for all, the other had been repeated and urged again and again, by the lips of faithful messengers. 4. One was without sanction or penalty, the other carried with it the crown of abundant reward, and the sword of stern punishment. 5. One involved no moral obligation, but seemed in some respects harsh and unreasonable, the other required only what was just and right. God's honest due. 6. One, the human command, was obeyed to the letter: the other, the divine law, was scorned and despised. Rising early. Sending repeatedly, by the voices of prophets and religious teachers, by the open book of the law, and by the solemn monitions of conscience. Ye hearkened not. We would at Judah's rejection of God's word; what shall we say of those who, in the higher privileges of to-day, refuse to hear?

15. MY SERVANTS THE PROPHETS. In every generation of Jewish history, from the age of Samuel to that of Ezra, we find prophets standing as God's accredited representatives. The greatest prophets appeared in the darkest epochs, an Elijah in the days of Jezebel, an Isaiah while Manasseh reigned, a Jeremiah at the fall of Judah, and an Ezekiel during its captivity. When the canon of Scripture was completed, the order of prophets ended, for, since, men can find in the written word instruction in righteousness. Return. Three commands: 1. Return. 2. Reform. 3. Worship the Lord. Ye shall dwell. Every page of Judah's history has a divine lesson. Stability, strength and success were in God's way; weakness and ruin in the path of sin: principles as certain in their application at the present time, both to nations and to men.

16, 17. THE SONS OF JONADAB... THIS PEOPLE. The strong light cast upon the filial reverence of the Rechabites only makes the wickedness of the Jews the darker by contrast. I will bring upon Judah. Though the destruction came from the command of Nebuchadnezzar and the swords of the Chaldean legions, yet it was from the hand of God, who used their ambition and lust of power as the unconscious instruments of his will. All the evil that I have pronounced. The sword has been so long threatened, and so often sheathed, that the people had ceased to expect it. But eighteen years afterward it descended. The capital was burned, the State was blotted out, most of the population perished, and the remnant of Judah was carried afar to captivity beside the rivers of Babylon.

18, 19. BECAUSE YE HAVE OBEYED... YOUR FATHER. God always rewards honour and reverence to parents. [Teacher, do not fail to enforce this duty.] All they had not tried, as children often do, to evade compliance, but had faithfully and scrupulously kept their father's commandment. Shall not wear a man. Shall never be without a descendant. Other families were destined soon to become extinct, in those days of blood; but this line was promised perpetually. To stand before me. There are strong evidences that here is a reference to the worship in the temple: from which some have concluded that the Rechabites were adopted into the tribe of Levi, and assigned a part in the ritual of service. Forever. A traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, in the twelfth century, A. D., met a tribe numbering one hundred thousand, claiming descent from Rechab, and maintaining the ancient customs. In 1827, Dr. Wolff found them in Arabia, recognized as coming from the original stock, and still faithful to their laws. In 1862 Signor Pierotti read before the British Association an account of his own visit to them, near the Dead Sea. [See Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, Article, RECHABITES.]

GOLDEN TEXT: Will ye not receive instruction to hearken to my words? saith the Lord. Jer. 35, 13. DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: The authority of God. The next lesson is Jer. 52, 1-11.

HOW TO BE MISERABLE.—The best recipe we know, if you want to be miserable is to think about yourself, how much you have lost, how much you have not made, and the poor prospects for the future. A brave man with a soul in him gets out of such pitiful ruts and laughs at discouragement, rolls up his sleeves, whistles and sings, and makes the best of life. This earth was never intended for Paradise, and a man who rises above his discouragement, and keeps his manhood, will only be the stronger and better for his adversities. Many a noble ship has been saved by throwing overboard its most valuable cargo, and many a man is better and more humane after he has lost his gold.

A little girl went to church one Sabbath. She listened with all her might. Mr. Adams preached to grown up people, so she probably did not take much of the sermon for herself, but when she came home she said, "Mother, is Jesus a Saviour for a little girl nine years old?"

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