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Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

FIRST QUARTER.

(Condensed from Palenst's Select Notes.)

Lesson VII. Feb. 14. Jer. 31: 27-37.

THE NEW COVENANT.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."—Jer. 31: 34.

Jeremiah lived in the last years of the kingdom of Judah, when it was hastening on to its ruin.

He began to prophesy in c. 627, in the 13th year of King Josiah, five years before the finding of the Book of the Law, and continued for some time after the destruction of Jerusalem, B. C. 586, more than 40 years.

The date of this prophecy was probably during the reign of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah.

Jeremiah was contemporary with Zephaniah and Habakkuk, and Huldah the prophetess, in Judah; Daniel and Ezeiel, in Babylon. Isaiah had been dead 70 years when Jeremiah began to prophesy.

Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah and all his successors, to the end.

The monuments, both of Assyria and Egypt, confirm the Bible account of the times of Jeremiah. There is a rock with inscriptions on the Dog River, eight miles north of Beyrut, and clay documents discovered in Babylon.

But perhaps the most interesting one is the discovery very lately, by M. Perrot, of the border fortress of Talmeh-shar, the place of Pasmethichus, the Pharaoh of Egypt, in the north-east corner of the Delta. Here Jeremiah and the daughters of King Zedekiah were taken, after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 40: 5, 6), and it is still called by the natives "The Castle of the King's Daughter."

The ruins bear testimony to the fulfilment of the prophecy in Jer. 44: 30, and stones have been dug up, by the brick pavement, like those of Jeremiah, was commanded to bury there (Jer. 43: 8-11; see Rev. Ver.).

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE DOWNWARD TENDENCY OF THE NATION.—Isaiah lived and prophesied through the reign of Hezekiah, and died early in the reign of his ungodly son, Manasseh (697).

The outward prosperity, due to the righteousness of Hezekiah, continued for a long time. But Manasseh fell under bad influences. The idolatrous party again became triumphant.

"Every form of false religion and abominable vice that Israel ever learned from the heathen nations" was again introduced. A great persecution of God's servants followed. The streets were red with the blood of the saints.

But for this Manasseh was carried captive to Babylon. He repented; he was restored; he made some show of reform, but the effect was not decisive.

Abner, in his short reign, followed in his father's footsteps. Then Josiah, a boy of eight years, came to the throne. Jeremiah draws a terrible picture of the condition of the people, of the prevalence of dishonesty, of open licentiousness, of murder, adultery, false swearing, treachery, and slander.

"The land was full of idols, upon every high hill and under every green tree." Immorality was rampant everywhere. Crimes of violence, deeds of oppression, and unnumbered vices abounded everywhere.

27. Behold, the days come. After the 70 years' captivity (606-536) (29: 10), I will sow the house of Israel, etc. The country and city are like a desolate field; but God will bring a spring-time, and fill the region with a large and happy population, as a field is covered with grain after the seed is sown.

28. As I have watched over them to pluck up. He would have them understand that none of their troubles came without the Lord Himself. They were not accidents. They were not the work of wicked men, contrary to the will and power of Jehovah. Those who afflicted them were God's instruments. His rod of chastisement. So will I chastise them to build. He would be as zealous for their restoration, and make the nations the agencies for working out good to His people.

29. They shall say no more. What follows is a proverb, misused by the Israelites. The fathers have eaten a sour grape (rather, "sour grapes"). The word is a collective noun. The sour grapes were those which were unripe, and injured the teeth. The children's teeth are set on edge. They were suffering the consequences of a long course of sinning on the part of their ancestors, which culminated in the Captivity. But "the question will sometimes arise. How can it be just for the Lord to let national guilt accumulate age after age, and then send His retributive judgments for it upon some one generation? Briefly stated, the answer is, God never punishes the people of any nation more than their individual sins deserve. But, on the other hand, the Lord does not attempt to administer a perfect moral government over men in this world. It is imperfect in this, that retribution fails to come up to the measure of full and perfect justice."

30. But every one shall die for his own iniquity. This is the declaration of the prophet. You shall return. God will show His mercy to you. You shall no longer suffer for the sins of your fathers. But do not imagine that it is safe to sin. Even in the next land, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

IV. THE ONE CONDITION OF SALVATION.—A CHANGE OF HEART AND CHARACTER.—Vers. 31-34. 31. Behold, the days come. In small measure on the return. The prophet gazed down the centuries. He will make a new covenant. Every covenant which God concludes with men consists, on the side of God, in assurance of His favors and actual bestowal of them. These kind mercies, the keeping of the commands laid on them. House of Israel. . . house of Judah. The whole number of tribes would be included in the blessing. The people became one nation after the Exile.

THE OLD COVENANT. 32. Not according to the covenant, etc. The old covenant was the law given the children of Israel when they left Egypt, and the promise of a country and protection and prosperity, on condition that the law was obeyed. Which My covenant they broke. As illustrated in their whole history. They were then on the brink

of exile because they had broken their covenant with God. Although I was a husband unto them. Although I have been as faithful and loving to them as a husband can be to his wife. God had always kept His part of the covenant.

THE NEW COVENANT. 33. I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. God gives, not a new law, but a new power to the old law. In Christianity it becomes an inner force, shaping the man's character from within.

Thus the Sermon on the Mount is the old Mosaic law, but changed into principles of conduct which reach down to a man's heart and conscience; and similarly, instead of gross material sacrifices of oxen and sheep, "we offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto God."

34. They shall teach no more. There will be no more need of exhortation or mission work, for all will have God's law written in their hearts, an inward experience. For I will forgive their iniquity. Forgiveness comes before the new heart. The truly forgiven soul loves to obey God. It is safe to forgive when the law can be written in the heart. Love is kindled, and brings an obedience which fear or conscience cannot produce.

NEW HEARTS are necessary to the salvation of the world. No outward advantage or prosperity can save a nation from immorality and ruin.

Y. THE PROMISE IS SURE. Vers. 35 and 36 express the fact that God's promises are as sure as the laws of nature. As no one has power to prevent Him from making the sun to rise, or the stars to set, so no one has power to prevent the fulfilment of His promise.

35. Divided the sea. Rather as Rev. Ver., stireth up the sea; sends the storms and tides.

36. Then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation. The present existence and power of the Jews, as many in number to-day as at any time during their palmy days in Palestine, is a proof of this promise. It is doubly fulfilled in the Christian church, which is really but a branch of the old kingdom of God. The prophecy was fulfilled when those Jews who accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, expanded the Jewish into the Christian church.

37. If heaven above can be measured. Which never can be by man. The most far-seeing telescopes but reveal more to be seen and known. We find 9,000,000 worlds, instead of the 40,000 the naked eye can see. The foundations of the earth searched out. All researches, all investigations by the most powerful microscopes, but reveal more to be searched, a larger region of the unknown. I will also cast off. Therefore He will never do so; for His loving kindness is higher than the heavens, and more unsearchable than the foundations of the earth.

Excursions Among Words.

There are now, we think, 120,000 words in the English language; the possibilities in the use of synonyms are remarkable, and we should say that to the study of synonyms the young writer should apply himself diligently. To the newspaper writers we are looking with solicitude and hope, for the reason that outside the columns of the press our literature does not appear to be making any progress at all. Our literature of the press is, on the other hand, constantly improving, and in the last ten years that improvement has been marked.

Still there is a chance for improvement, and it occurs to us that the besetting sin of our newspaper writers at this time is a deviation to absurdisms—for example, the too common usage of that negroism "like" for "as if"; "it looks like-it was going to rain." This absolutely runs riot in print south of Mason's and Dixon's line, and has crept across the line here in the West to shock us with a sporadic appearance in our diurnal publications.

There is no such word as "wended"; the past of "wend" is "wended." A man "wends" his way, and has wended his way. He either went his way or he has wended his way.

"Likewise" is often erroneously used for "also"; likewise couples actions or states of being; also classes together things or qualities.

"Commence" should not be used where "begin" can be instead.

"Transpire" is never a synonym of "happen."

"Tarry" is a transitive verb only; it is, therefore, highly improper to say, "One tarrys of life."

Do not use "in our midst" when you mean "in the midst of."

Do not use "in anyhow" when you mean "in any way."

Be exceedingly careful in placing that small but potent word "only." Nine times out of ten it is misplaced.

Do not confound "evidence" with "testimony."

Never use "above" as an adjective.

"The above" is a barbarianism. Nor should you use "then" as an adjective—for example, "the then king"—awful!

Do not confound "try" with "make." You make—not try—an experiment.

A "propositional" and a "proposition" are different things.

Be careful not to confound "allude" with "refer" or "advert."

"So" is an adverb of degree and "such" is an adjective of kind.

Webster justifies the use of "than" as a preposition—"Than whom no better man lives." Webster means well enough.

There is no such word as "jeopardize"; the word is "jeopard."

"Lurid" means ghastly pale, gloomy, or dismal.

"Restive" must not be confounded with "restless."

"Indices" are algebraic signs; "indexes" are tables of contents.

Never say "in the connection" when you mean "in connection with."

That is complete which has all its parts; entire which has not been divided; whole from which nothing has been taken. Total refers to the aggregate of the parts.

"With" denotes an instrument and "by" a cause. "He killed with a sword, he died by an arrow."

Never separate parts of the infinite; example; "He promised to speedily comply."

Do not suffer Mr. Addison or anybody else to bluff you out of the use of that noble word "that."

Never use except in a humorous way, those hackneyed phrases and hoary words of which notorious specimens are: "Light fantastic toe," "mine host," "his good lady," "beautiful and accomplished," "wee sma' hours," "groaned with the delicacies of the season," "speckled beauties," "dull, sickening thud," and "recherche."—Eugene Field, in the Chicago News.

Passion and Poetry.

There's nothing in the world like rhyme to cool off a man's passion. You look at a blacksmith working on a bit of iron or steel. Bright enough it looked while it was on the hearth, in the midst of the sea-coal, the great bellows blowing away, and the red or horse-shoe as red or as white as the burning coals. How it fizzes as it goes into the trough of water, and how suddenly all the glow is gone! It looks black and cold enough now. Just so, with your passionate incoherence. It is well while it burns and scintillates in your emotional centres, without articulate and uncontrolled expression; but the minute you plunge it into the rhyme-trough it cools down, and becomes as dead and dull as the cold horse-shoe. It is true that if you lay it cold on the anvil and hammer away on it for a while it warms up somewhat. Just so with the rhyming-fellow,—he pounds away on his verses, and they warm up a little. But don't let him think that this afterglow of composition is the same thing as the original passion. That found expression in a few oh, oh's, ai, ai's, cheu, cheu, helas, helas! and when the passion had burned itself out you got the rhymed verses, which, as I have said, are its ashes.—Oliver Wendell Holmes, in Atlantic.

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