

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER: STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH.

B. C. 590. LESSON III. JEREMIAH IN PRISON: or, Comfort in Trouble. Jer. 33, 1-9 April 21st.

EXPLANATORY.

VERSE I. THE WORD OF THE LORD. A message by direct inspiration from on high. The king in the palace must send to the prophet in prison, to learn the will of the Lord. Jeremiah. The prophet of the decline and fall of the Jewish kingdom. He was born at the priestly city of Anathoth, three miles north-east of Jerusalem, and arose to prominence towards the close of the reign of Josiah, whose death he commemorated in an ode of sorrow. It was his lot to live in the darkest period of Judah's history, to foresee and to witness the wave of Chaldean conquest; to behold Jerusalem twice besieged, captured and pillaged, and finally utterly destroyed. He delivered God's message to kings who would not hear, and people who would not heed; and suffered persecution from the nobility, the priesthood, and even from his own order, the prophets. After the destruction of Jerusalem he remained in the land until the murder of Gedaliah, the governor under Nebuchadnezzar, caused the flight of the Jewish remnant to Egypt, into which country Jeremiah was taken. It is generally believed, though not certainly known, that he was put to death in advanced age, in Egypt, by his own countrymen. The second time. This was about a year before the final destruction of the city, during the reign of Zedekiah. Shut up. Faithful testimony for God had brought Jeremiah to a prison. So have God's servants suffered, from the age of John the Baptist to that of John Bunyan, who wrote, after his trial, "So was I had home to my prison." Court of the prison. An open inclosure, in the center of the prison building, where Jeremiah was kept in confinement, though suffered to receive the visits of his friends. One may be happy, though even in a prison, if there he can hear the voice of the Lord. Samuel Rutherford, in Aberdeen jail, dated his letters, "Christ's palace, Aberdeen."

2, 3. THE LORD, THE MAKER. More correctly, "the doer." That is, he who will himself perform that which he promises. The Lord is his name. "Jehovah," the solemn and unutterable name of the Lord, held so sacred among the ancient Israelites that it was never written correctly, other vowels being substituted for the right ones, and spoken so seldom that its true pronunciation has been entirely lost for two thousand years. Call unto me. Summoned by such an invitation, who should hesitate to approach the throne? 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 thee. "Promises are given not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage prayer." -Henry. Mighty things. Or, "hidden things," future events, unknown and almost incredible, concerning the restoration and prosperity of Judah.

4, 5. 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. 34, 6, is translated, "mattock," or hammers used in demolition of buildings. They come. This verse seems parenthetical, to indicate the hopeless condition of Jerusalem. Chaldeans. A people from the region around Babylon, who under Nebuchadnezzar, subverted the old Assyrian empire, and conquered all the territory from Egypt to the Euphrates. They appeared first in the history of Judah sending an embassy of friendship to Hezekiah, but afterward became enemies, besieged and plundered Jerusalem during the reign of Jehoiakim, B. C. 706, and finally destroyed it B. C. 589. Their empire was overthrown by Cyrus and the Persians B. C. 536. I have slain. The sword of Nebuchadnezzar was the sword of God, for unconsciously he was executing the divine sentence against Judah. Whose wickedness. Those who were slain in the siege or afterward put to death by the conquerors, were, for the most part, the opposers of righteousness. Those who were carried into captivity were the purer portion of the people, in whom rested the hopes for the future regeneration of Israel.

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 arising 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 at peace.

7. CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH. The land had been often overthrown 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.

8. 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 for ever eradicated, and all its energies were turned toward the law of God. 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. All. "What God does is well done;" if he forgives at all, he will forgive and cleanse all, and leave not a trace of sin."

9. A NAME OF JOY. A city and a people in which God should take delight. An honor before all the nations. As in the past Judah had disgraced the name of its God, so in the future it should be an honor to him; and as its judgment had taken place before all the nations, so its glory should be equally public. Fear and tremble. By the special blessing enjoyed by the Jews, the Gentile nations around should realize that they were God's peculiar people, under his protection, and should fear to do them wrong. So are God's true children honored and respected by the world in every age.

GOLDEN TEXT: Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not Jer. 33, 3.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: Forgiveness of sins. The next lesson is Jer. 35, 12-19.

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