

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1878.

SUNDAY, May 12th, 1878.—The Captives in Babylon.—Dan. i. 8-17.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 12, 15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“A good understanding have all they that do his commandments.”—Ps. cxi. 10.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Daniel i. 1-21. Tuesday, Genesis ix 18-29. Wednesday, Isaiah xxviii. 1-13. Thursday, Proverbs xx. Friday, Proverbs iv. Saturday, Ecclesiastes iv. Sunday, Proverbs xxiii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Daniel's purpose. Vs. 8. II. Fear expressed. Vs. 9, 10. III. The test. Vs. 11-14. IV. The result. Vs. 15, 16. V. Daniel honored. Vs. 17.

QUESTIONS.—For what special purpose were some of the Jewish captives chosen. How long did he live at Babylon? What things did God permit him to see? What kind of a statesman was he? What did he enjoy as a servant of God? What prophesy have we that his prophecy was inspired?

I. Vs. 8. Who were the four youths chosen to stand in the king's palace? What names were given to them? Why did Daniel refuse the king's meat and wine?

II. Vs. 9, 10. What fear was expressed at Daniel's course?

III. Vs. 11-14. To what test did Daniel submit himself?

IV. Vs. 15, 16. Who had the fairest faces after the trial? Was it temperate habits wholly, and not at all God's added blessing, that made these faces fair? Why are virtuous men measure of good health than vicious?

V. Vs. 17. What did God give these four children? What in particular to Daniel? Was not this good return for self-denial?

QUESTIONS FOR ALL.—Why ought all in our land to practice total abstinence? Why should all parents practice it? Why all ministers and Sunday-school workers? Who will form to-day the resolution of Daniel?

DANIEL.—In the earlier Judean captivity (B. C. 606), certain children of Judah were selected with special regard to their fitness for the Babylonian court. Daniel was one of this class, a youth of great personal beauty and worth. From youth to manhood and old age he lived at court at Babylon, ever adhering to his God. He was permitted to see visions of trouble and of comfort. He witnessed one of the world's greatest revolutions in the destruction of the Babylonian monarchy, and the rise of the Persian power, under both of which he held posts of honor. Dan. v. 29; vi. 28. As a statesman he was incorruptible. As a servant of God “he held singular and bounteous spiritual communion” with his Maker. As a man he was greatly beloved. There can be no question of his prophecy as a part of the canon of inspiration. Though there are difficulties in its interpretation not yet solved by the learned of the earth, the Lord of Daniel has borne emphatic testimony to his words, as have also the apostles. Compare Matthew xxiv. 27 with Daniel vii. 13; 2 Thessalonians ii. 3 with Daniel vii. 27; 1 Corinthians vi. 2 with Daniel vii. 22; Hebrews xi. 34 with Daniel vi. 16-20. In the “chorus of the prophets” this “friend of God,” the “holy one,” as Chrysostom calls him, will ever be found. The most painstaking study, therefore, of the following lessons will be richly paid.

“From the time when Nebuchadnezzar first took the field at the head of an army, he adopted the Assyrian system of forcibly removing almost the whole population of a conquered country, and planting it in a distant part of his dominions. Crowds of captives—the produce of his various wars—Jews, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Syrians, Ammonites, Moabites were settled in various parts of Mesopotamia, more especially about Babylon.”—Rawlinson.

EXPOSITION.—The word translated “came” can as well mean went, and as Daniel wrote in the land from which the army proceeded, this use is here more natural. Jerusalem was not taken till after the defeat of the Egyptian army at Carchemish on the Euphrates in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah xlvi. 2), and the pursuit of the defeated army furnished the occasion of the conquest of Judah then in alliance with Egypt. Daniel, and his three friends, were of the tribe of Judah (vs. 6), and it would seem, of the royal family (vs. 3). The four were doubtless each from 14 to 18

years old, as we infer from the Hebrew word, and from the customs of the Eastern monarchs. Vs. 21 shows that Daniel lived at least seventy years after being taken to Babylon.

Verse 8.—Daniel purposed in his heart, etc.—It was laid upon him by the Divine Spirit to make known just the position which God had qualified and called him to fill. Men may show as much egotism in refusing, as in hasting to speak well of themselves. Would not defile himself, etc. This word “defile” is the key to the right interpretation of our lesson. Whether the defilement was from the nature of any part of the food as forbidden by the Mosaic law, or, as is more probable, from its having been first offered to the heathen gods according to custom, his refusal had a moral religious ground, and was not simply from regard to health. Prince of the eunuchs. Chief of the officers of the king's household.

Verse 9.—God had brought Daniel, etc. Not that the favor was any the less truly the result of a natural cause.

Verse 10.—I fear my Lord the King, etc.—That is, Nebuchadnezzar. The last clause of the verse indicates the despotic power of an Eastern sovereign. Your sort. Rather, “your age,” that is, the other youths in training.

Verse 11.—Melzar.—The margin has “the steward,” an official title. Set over Daniel, etc. He was to be their tutor.

Verse 12.—Ten days.—A round number. Daniel seems to have had a prophetic assurance of the upshot. Pulse. The original signifies seed plants, that is, any kind of vegetables growing from seed, in opposition to flesh. Water to drink. A capital exchange on grounds of health, as well as of the moral and ceremonial law.

Verse 13.—The children that are of the portion, etc.—The word translated “children” designates young men from 14 to 20 years old. They were of “the king's portion” as living on his diet. As thou seest deal, etc. If we look less full and fair, put us also on the king's diet, if not, let us continue our simple vegetable diet.

Verse 14.—So he consented, etc.—Showing that Daniel had his favor also. See verse 9.

Verses 15, 16.—Fairer and fatter.—I know not why we may not here suppose that God specially wrought for this result, though the result may have been purely natural. It ought in fairness to be said that this passage is no more an argument for total abstinence from wine than for total abstinence from flesh.—Besides, it is fairly implied in Daniel x. 3, that in later years Daniel was accustomed, save on special fast days, to drink wine; and the Levitical law prescribed wine as a drink-offering. Lev. xxiii. 13, etc.

Verse 17.—God gave them knowledge, etc.—He first endowed them with extraordinary natural powers, then gave them this rare opportunity, which he moved them to use diligently, and finally he crowned all with his supernatural gift. As the preceding verses suggest the comparison of Daniel with Joseph in Egypt, so does this with Moses in Egypt. Grace can transmute heathen learning into a Christian treasure.

We have here Daniel's request and the officer's answer, Daniel's proposed test and its result, and honor from God. I. The Request.—Verse 8.—(1) It was born of a virtuous purpose. He had set his heart upon that object. Here was decision of character, earnestness for the right, readiness for self-denial. (2) The request was the wise step towards accomplishing his purpose. There is a right and a wrong way, a wise and a foolish way to a chosen end. It is never wisdom to provoke hostility without cause, and choose martyrdom for its own sake.

II. The Answer.—Verses 9, 10.—(1) There was the disposition to comply.—Not always is there thus much in favor of the virtuous purpose. When a youth is thus befriended it is cause of thankfulness to God. (2) The denial was due to the supposed peril of compliance. It could not be expected that the officer would risk his head to please the captive lad, or even to save that lad's life.

III. The Test.—Verses 11-13.—(1) This was an honorable and obvious method of removing objections to his request. True, not always can the way be thus cleared, and then one must meet the consequences; but where there are hon-

orable methods of securing the co-operation even of bad men in a good work we do well to use them. (2.) Right living fears not to be fairly tested by results. Not always, however, is it practicable to test it. But whenever it is, there can be no ground of fear.

IV. The Result.—Verses 15, 16.—(1.) It was a vindication of the right. Not always can the right be so easily tested in its working. There is much of good in principle which seems to work badly. Where we cannot see we must believe. (2.) Sight convinces even skeptics. The time hastens when every eye shall see, that sin is loss, and holiness gain.

V. The Honor.—Verse 17.—(1.) It was from God. (2.) It was partly the fruit of the virtuous life. (3.) It was not only from God, but also for him. He gives freely to us that we may freely give for him.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, May 19th, 1878.—Nebuchadnezzar's Dream.—Daniel ii. 36-45.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets.”—Daniel ii. 28.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered Ash-penaz, who had charge of his servants, to take great care of the young captives, the princes of Judah, to have them taught the language and learning of Babylon for three years; then they should come before the king. All this time their food was to be sent from the king's table. But there were many things sent to them which a Jew was forbidden, by his own laws, to eat; also some that had been set before idols. Daniel and his three friends felt in their hearts that this food was unholly. They could not eat it, and asked Ash-pe-naz to let them have other food. God had made this prince love Daniel very much. So he was not angry, but said the king had appointed the food; and if they did not look as well as the other youths, his own head would be in danger for disobeying. But Daniel would not give it up. He next went to Melzar, the servant in whose charge these four were, and asked him to try them for ten days with a common kind of food called pulse—much like our hominy—and water to drink. At the end of ten days they looked fairer and fatter than any of those who ate of the king's food. So Melzar gave them nothing but pulse and water after this. And God gave these four children knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.

Booth's Department.

Number Seventy-Seven.

“What is that you say, Robert?”

“Little things don't count.”

“Don't they? Now my belief is, that there never was a little duty done, or a kind word spoken, which did not bring a long train of blessings. You may not see them, but somewhere and somehow they are there; just as you plant a seed and go away, and the roots spread, and the tree grows, and goes on growing, and the birds come and sing in the branches—long after you are dead. I'll tell you a story about that,” said the old man, settling himself on the heap of warm hay, while the boys gathered about him.

“Two boys went out to fish one day. ‘If you clear out the barn,’ their father told them in the morning, ‘you can have the afternoon for play.’

“‘Let's make a quick job of it,’ said Charley.

“So they worked steadily and actively, and earned their holiday. As they started, they halted by the gate, their rods over their shoulders.

“‘The pond or the creek?’ asked Bill.

“Charley was a good-hearted fellow. ‘The creek; and then we can take a basket of apples to old Aunty Stannix,’ he said.

“So they brought the apples, gave them to the old negro, and went down to the creek. Under a big walnut was a dark pool, the very place for perch.

“They hardly spoke for an hour. Just as Bill had a nibble, a step was heard on the dry grass above, and a man appeared and looked down at them. His clothes were shabby, his face strangely bloodless and pinched.

“‘It's too bad!’ muttered Bill. ‘He's

driven that fellow away, and he was a two pounder. The sneaking old tramp! I'll shy a stone at him if he comes any closer!’

“‘You'll do nothing of the sort, Bill Pardee,’ said Charley. ‘The man looks hungry, poor fellow!’

“‘I believe he's escaped from the lock-up,’ persisted Bill. ‘If he comes down, I'll tell him to go back to jail, where he belongs, see if I don't.’

“The man was slowly and unsteadily making his way towards them. He watched the boys with a strangely-eager, imploring glance. A few feet from them he stopped, twirling his hat in his hand.

“‘Been a-fishing, boys?’ he said. ‘Can I come down?’

“Before I tell you what they said, I must go back a little.

“Fifteen years before, a dead man was found in the woods, a mile from this creek. He was a son of one of the neighboring farmers. There was a bullet-hole through his heart, but his watch and money were untouched. The object of the murderer had been revenge, not plunder.

“Suspicion fell on a companion of the victim, with whom he had had a quarrel. They had been seen on the road together a week before, and the murdered man was never seen alive again. This friend was arrested and tried. The circumstantial evidence was strong against him. He was found guilty, and sentenced to imprisonment for life. Fifteen years of his confinement had passed when he received a pardon, and was released.

“On the morning, and just at the hour when our boys went to clear the barn, he came out of the prison gates, and stood looking up and down the busy streets, as though he were half-blinded.

“The gate-keeper followed him kindly. ‘Where are ye goin', Seventy-seven?’ he asked, calling the man by his prison number; for he had never heard his name.

“‘I don't know.’

“‘Got no kin?’

“The man did not answer. He sat down on the curbstone, his eyes blinking, his mouth twitching nervously. He looked wistfully at the gate, as if he would ask to be taken in again. In that fifteen years his cell had grown to be a home to him. He had no other home. The keeper turned to go in.

“‘Don't leave me Jackson,’ he said, feebly putting out his hand.

“Jackson stood beside him. ‘Take a cigar,’ he said, in token of their new equality.

“‘I have never smoked.’

“‘Where are ye goin', anyhow?’

“Seventy-seven stared vacantly up and down the street. When he had gone in at that gate he was a young and handsome man. He had been a lawyer in fair practice, with a mother who made an idol of him, and hosts of friends.

“Now he was bent and white-haired. There was not a man whom he could call friend, or a house where he had a right to shelter, in all the world.

“‘I'd like to go back,’ he said, with a miserable smile.

“‘Can't do that my boy. You were in for—

“‘Murder!’

“‘Yes!’

“‘I was innocent,’ muttered Seventy-seven. And then, suddenly, as if the fire-air and sun accused him afresh of his crime, he rose and stretched out his arms.

“‘Before God, I was innocent!’ he cried.

“‘Yes, of course, of course,’ said Jackson. ‘You all say so. But I believe you, Seventy-seven. Got no kin?’

“‘My mother died eight years ago. My brother lives in the old homestead. I don't know whether to go to him, or—what would you do?’ turning in his bitter solitude to Jackson as a friend.

“‘Got the money to go?’

“‘Yes. The Prison Society gave me these clothes, and money to pay my way home. But’

“‘How's yer brother treated ye? Has he gin ye the cold shoulder?’

“‘No. After he married, ten years ago, I never would see him when he came to the prison. I wanted him to feel clear of me; I was a cursed black spot in his life. He does not know I'm out. I thought I'd keep clear of him; but—oh, I can't! I can't!’

house—to lay his head on his mother's grave!

“‘I don't know what to advise,’ said Jackson. ‘Kinsfolk don't generally kill the fatted calf for returned jail-birds. But you might try it. I don't see what else you kin do, in fact.’

“About noon the prisoner got off the train at the station next his old home. He walked down the road. Old Aunty Stannix was smoking in the door of her cabin.

“‘John Pardee lives in the old place?’ he said, inquiringly, stopping in front of her.

“‘Yeh. Dem's his boys a-fishin' in de branch yunder. Stranger in dis country, sah?’

“The man shook his head and walked on. A stranger! Why, there was not a stone or a tree which he did not remember and love!

“He came to his brother's gate and opened it, and then, ghastly as death, turned away. He could not risk it.

“‘If John should speak roughly to me, it would kill me!’ he said. ‘Where are his boys? I'll go to them. Whatever they say to me, I'll take it for a sign.’

“He climbed down the bank. If the boys spoke harshly to him, he would turn his back on the old home—forever.

“He stood irresolute on the bank above them. Bill saw him, and made up his mind to fling a stone at him. The man caught the boy's scowling glance, and stopped. What was the use? His life was a wretched wreck—why should he intrude it into his brother's happy home?

“There seemed no place for him in all the world—but the prison-cell which he had just left. He looked at the dark deep water rushing by, and made a step towards it. Then he looked again at the boys. His heart was very sore. They were John's sons—dear, dear brother John! One of them had a look of his mother in his eyes.

“He would try once more, and he went towards them—with a prayer to God in his heart.

“‘Been fishing, boys?’ trying to speak in an off-hand way. ‘Can I come down?’

“‘Jail-bird!’ muttered Bill.

“Charley gripped his leg like a vise, and whispered, ‘Hold your tongue!—Yes, sir,’ he said aloud, touching his cap, ‘we're after perch. Will you take a seat?’ moving the basket aside.

“Seventy-seven sat down. He could not speak. The boys dropped their lines in the water.

“Presently he laid his hand on Charley's arm. It seemed as if he must caress the boy, if but by a touch.

“‘What is your name?’

“‘Charley, sir; Charley Pardee.’

“It was his own name! The blood rushed violently to his heart.

“‘Who—who were you named for, Charley?’

“‘My uncle, sir. You've heard of him, may-be?’ coloring hotly. ‘I never saw him, but my father says he was the best man he ever knew, and the most ill-used. Oh, here comes papa!’

“The man staggered to his feet, and stood trembling, not looking up.

“‘Well, boys, what luck?’ came in Jack's old hearty voice. Then there was a terrible silence.

“‘Charley!’

“Jack had his arms about him. ‘Oh Charley, is it you? Thank God, thank God!’ and he sobbed like a child.

“The winter passed quietly. Charles Pardee found his brother's house a happy home, but he feared to go outside of it. Public opinion held him as a murderer. A few old friends came to see him, but he shrank from every strange face.

“Now little Charley had a habit of taking some trifling gift to old Aunty Stannix on his way to school. The old woman was crabbed and sour beyond her wont, being ill that winter, but the boy persevered.

“One night he was roused out of bed by his father.

“‘Stannix is dying, and has sent for you, my boy.’

“‘It's snowing,’ muttered Bill. ‘She'll live till morning. It's one of her impish tricks, anyhow. I wouldn't go a step, Charley.’

“Charley thrust out one foot into the nipping air, and hesitated.

“‘I'd better go,’ he said.

“When he reached the cabin with his father, the old woman was very low.