

The Sunday-School

FOURTH QUARTER,
LESSON X.—Dec. 4.

HEZEKIAH REOPENS THE TEMPLE.

2 Chronicles 29: 18-31.

The lesson includes the chapters which describe the reform of Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29-31; 2 Kings 18: 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Them that honor me I will honor.* — 2 Sam. 2: 30.

Learn by heart Acts 2: 46, 47; Ps. 95: 1-3; 107: 31.

Time.— Hezekiah began to reign B. C. 726 or 727, in the sixth year before the destruction of Samaria, B. C. 721, 722. The reformation was in the early years of his reign.

Place.— Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah, but extending into the northern kingdom.

Kings.— Hezekiah, king of Judah; Hoshea, the last king of Israel.

Prophets.—Isaiah and Micah.

Assyria was then the most powerful kingdom of the world, under Shalmaneser IV.

After the great prosperity under Uzziah for more than a third of a century, B. C. 789-750, there came a great decline in prosperity and in morals, continuing through the last part of his reign, and the reigns of his son Jotham and his grandson Ahaz, both of them bad men. Then Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, came to the throne. Two things were a help to him in his training: (1) His mother seems to have been a woman of piety and of strong character. Her name was Abijah. She was the daughter of Zechariah. It is uncertain from which of the twenty-eight Zechariahs mentioned in the Bible Hezekiah's mother descended. Hezekiah was reckoned one of the three perfect kings (2 Kings 18:5), the other two being David and Josiah. He took for his counselor Isaiah, the prophet.

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was selfish, irreligious, and wicked. Isaiah was a prophet during his reign, but the king refused to listen to his words. Ahaz introduced the worst of idolatry. Soothsayers, spirits, ghosts were consulted. He shut up the great doors of the temple, discontinued the offering of incense and the morning and evening sacrifice, and left the whole interior to neglect and decay. Political and national deterioration necessarily followed. Sixteen years of licensed idolatry fostered all that was vile in the country.

THE TEMPLE CLEANSED AND RENEWED.— 2 Chron. 29: 3-19. The first New Year's day (April) in Hezekiah's reign the king entered upon his reforms. The long-neglected temple was repaired for worship. The closed doors were thrown open.

When all was completed they went in to Hezekiah, into the palace, and reported. *We have cleansed all the house of the Lord.* This required sixteen days. *And the altar of burnt offering.* Thirty feet square and fifteen feet high. *Shewbread table.* A golden table on which twelve loaves of shewbread were placed every week. Shewbread was "bread of the presence," representing the constant communion of his people with him in those things which his bounty provided and they enjoyed in his presence and used in his service.

The vessels which King Ahaz . . . did cast away, probably the brazen altar,

the brazen sea, and the lavers on the stands.

Gathered the rulers. They were the leaders in the sin and irreligion, and now were to be the leaders in the reformation. *They brought seven bullocks . . . for a sin offering.* The ritual of the sin offering is described in Lev. 4. The sin offering was a symbol, to teach the people the deadly nature of sin; the fact that only with atonement could men be delivered and forgiven; the need of public confession of sin and renunciation. *Sprinkled it on the altar.* The blood was regarded as the life, the most precious thing one could offer. The placing of it upon the altar was the ratification of their covenant with God. *Laid their hands upon them.* The persons offering the sacrifice laid their hands on the animal sacrificed. *With cymbals, much like ours, and psalteries,* a stringed instrument something like a harp. *According to . . . David,* who had arranged a great orchestra for public worship. *Offer the burnt offering.* That is, offerings wholly consumed by fire on the altar. The main idea of the burnt offering was consecration to God's service. *The song of the Lord began.* Perfect consecration to God fills the heart with heavenly joy. *Bowed themselves, and worshipped, i. e.,* first bowed down (on their knees) and then completely prostrated themselves.

One natural expression of true religious feeling is to give. Hence, Hezekiah said, *Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord, come near and bring sacrifices and burnt offerings.* The gifts were so abundant that the king and people rejoiced together.

EXTENDING THE INVITATION.—2 Chron. 30: 1-12. Hezekiah wrote letters, and sent messengers from city to city throughout the northern kingdom, inviting the people to forsake their idols and return to the true God, and to come to a great religious festival at Jerusalem. Some came and others laughed and mocked them to scorn.

A SERIES OF GREAT RELIGIOUS MEETINGS.— 2 Chron. 30: 13-27. The next month a great Passover feast was held for fourteen days, with an immense number of sacrifices, and with great gladness. "Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord" (2 Chron. 30: 22). Hezekiah took measures to make religious instruction more permanent by adopting measures for collecting and arranging the sacred books. The people supported the priests that they might give themselves to the law of the Lord. (2 Chron. 31: 4).

Immediately after the great Passover the people went through the country destroying idols and idolatry in every form. The destroying of all idols of the heart is one of the surest marks of a true revival. They extended their work far into the kingdom of Israel.

Hezekiah set the people the example of giving a portion of his wealth for the support of the priests and the temple sacrifices, and then commanded the people to do the same, and they brought in abundance of the first fruits. The Levites were thus "encouraged in the law of the Lord." One-twelfth of the people, the tribe of Levi, had been set apart for the work of the Lord, and one-tenth of the income of the nation was to be devoted to their support. A revival of interest in God's servants

always accompanies a revival of true religion.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

There is a real need of a revival of true religion now, as in the time of Hezekiah. So long as every morning paper is full of reports of crime, so long as oppression of the poor, corruption in cities, murders, licentiousness, drunkenness, selfishness in business abound, there is but one cure,—more religion, more consecration to God and inspiration of new life from God.

Christ's first work in converting the soul, in reviving the church, is to cleanse away sin. There must be the destruction of the evil, the repenting of sin, putting away bad habits, bad business, casting out the idols of the heart.

A revival of religion naturally begins with the church, cleansing it, purifying it, imparting new life, earnestness, longing for holiness.

The principles underlying Hezekiah's revival are the same as those needed now.

It was through human instrumentality

It was by personal consecration and confession of sin.

By renewed services, instruction, great meetings, free giving, prayer and worship.

It was accompanied by invitations to others, and by activity in reforming the evils that were destroying the country.

The results were first a great improvement in morals. We sometimes hear it said that we do not need so much a revival of religion as a revival of honesty, of truth telling, of kindly deeds. There was never a revival of religion that was not a revival of morality.

There also followed a large outward prosperity. The character developed by new religious life naturally leads to better outward circumstances.

A MAKE-BELIEVE BEE.

Lady Henry Somerset relates that her sympathies were first enlisted in philanthropic work for poor children by the following incident:

"It was in this way," she said. "I was moved in that direction by the rare patience and imagination of one little boy. His example convinced me that patience was one of the qualities I needed most, and in seeking it I grew into that work. I was in a hospital on visiting day, while the doctors were changing the plaster cast which held a cripple boy's limb. The operation was exceedingly painful, I was told, yet to my surprise the little sufferer neither stirred nor winced, but made a curious buzzing sound with his mouth. After the doctors left him I said to him:

"How could you possibly stand it?"

"That's nuthin'," he answered; "why, I just made believe that a bee was stingin' me. Bees don't hurt very much, you know. And I kept buzzin' because I was afraid I'd forget about it's being a bee if I didn't."—*Northern Advocate.*

If Women only Knew

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Among the "washing animals" is the racoon. It is not only devoted to bathing and sunning itself, but has an odd habit of taking its food to the water and giving it a thorough washing before eating it. It will dabble anything which it takes a fancy to in the water. One which had a family at a zoological garden washed its unlucky kittens so often that they died.

That heroism in daily life of which nobody knows but God; the heroism of the home, the shop, the office, and street, where men for Christ, put self and all temptations under, and yoke themselves with the things which are from above, is with God an achievement worthy of the highest praise.

After Work or Exercise

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