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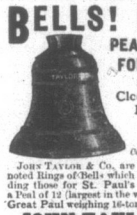

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BIBLE LESSONS.

SECOND QUARTER.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Notes.)

Lesson V. May 3. Amos 4: 4-13.

ISRAEL OFTEN REPROVED.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"He that, being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.—Prov. 29: 1.

EXPLANATORY.

THE STATE OF THE COUNTRY. This may be learned from 2 Kings 14: 21; 15: 7; 2 Chron. 26, and the prophecies of Hosea and Amos. (1) *Its prosperity.* The period of Amos's ministry was one of great external prosperity for the kingdom of Israel. Under Jeroboam II. it stood at the zenith of its power. Its borders were extended on the north to Hamath, north of Damascus and Lebanon, to the Dead Sea on the south (2 Kings 14: 25–28), while Judah under Uzziah had subdued the Edomites and Philistines. Thus the extent of the two kingdoms almost equalled the united kingdom in the golden age of David and Solomon.

(2) *Its wickedness* (as learned from Hosea and Amos). The wealth of the few accumulated, and the mass of the population had grown poorer. Intercourse with the heathen communities round; the loose morality of armies; the unscrupulous self indulgence of the rich, prompting equally unworthy means to indulge it; and the widening gulf between the upper and lower classes, were ruining the country. Above all, the old religiousness of Israel was well nigh gone.

(3) *The danger ahead.* For these sins Amos foretold the ruin of the nation. Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land (7: 11, 17). "I will command the sword, and it shall slay them, and I will set Mine eyes upon them for evil, and not for good (9: 4). I will cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus (5: 27).

(4) *The only way of salvation* was in repentance. Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye Me, and ye shall live (5: 4, 6). Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish justice. . . . It may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious (5: 15).

Vers. 4. "Come to Bethel." One chief centre of the idolatrous calf worship. Make pilgrimages here from all parts of the nation. "And transgress" by worshipping the golden calf, contrary to God's express command. That these verses are sarcasm is seen by the contrary command in 5: 4–5. "At Gilgal." Another centre of their idolatrous worship. (See Hos. 4: 15.) "Multiply transgression." Increase your sins as rapidly as possible by increasing the number of places where your idolatries are carried on. Do your utmost. "Bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes (the required tenth) after three years." Literally, three of days, which means, according to Pusey, three of a circle of days; *i. e.,* three years. But most take it to be three days, as Revised Version.

5. "And offer (Hebrew by burning) a sacrifice of thanksgiving." Praise your false gods to the utmost. "With leaven." Instead of being content with unleavened cakes, to offer also upon the same altar even the leavened loaves which were not required by law to be consumed. (Lev. 7: 13–14) "Proclaim and publish the free offerings." This may be taken as an invitation, a summons to all to offer freely; but it is better to regard it as expressive of ostentation. Give so freely that you want every one to know how large your gifts are. Be proud of your gifts. "For this liketh you." For so you love to do. Do as you please. But for all these things God will bring you into judgment. Ephraim is joined to his idols: let him alone.

Vers. 6–8. Now follow a series of lesser punishments God sent upon Israel to hold the nation back from final destruction. 6. "And I also." The pronoun is emphatic. *And I, I too, have given you.* The idolaters of Israel had not been allowed to go on without warning. So then God had but one gift which He could bestow, one only out of the rich storehouse of His mercies, since all besides were abused, and that was the gift of chastisement. Yet this, too, is a great gift of God, a pledge of His love, who willed not that they should perish; an earnest of greater favors had they used it. It is a great gift of God, that He should care for us so as to chasten us. "Cleanness of teeth." For want of something to eat.

7. "Also I have withholden the rain." And the idols you worshipped could not bring it for you, pray you never so earnestly to them. The term employed for rain is not the common one, but one that signifies *heavy, abundant rain.* The reference is to the *latter rain* that usually falls in the latter part of February and, more or less, through March (Robinson's *Palestine,* vol. ii., p. 97), "when there were yet three months to the harvest," to refresh the ground, and swell the corn. Want of rain at this critical season, says Dr. Thomson, is utterly ruinous to the hopes of the farmer. A little earlier or a little later would not be so fatal, but drought *three months before harvest* is entirely destructive. The drought meant is that recorded in 1 Kings 17: 1. "I caused it to rain upon one city, . . . not to rain upon another." To show clearly that it was God's hand that sent or withheld the rain. Still more clearly was this shown by its raining on one piece of ground, and not on another.

8. "Two or three cities wandered unto one city." Those, then, who were punished were more than those who were reprieved. The word *wandered,* literally *trembled,* expresses the unsteady, reeling gait of those exhausted, in quest of food. They staggered through weakness, and uncertain, amid the general drought, whither to betake themselves. "Yet have ye not returned." All was in vain. The end sought was not yet accomplished.

9. "I have smitten you with blasting (literally, *an exceeding scorching,* such as the hot east wind produced) and (*an exceeding*) mildew." A blight, in which the ears turn untimely a pale yellow, and have no grain. Both words are doubly intensive. They stand together in the prophecy of Moses (Deut. 28: 22) among the other scourges of disobedience. "When your gardens." The garden of the East united the orchard, herb, and flower garden. Being mostly watered artificially, it was beyond the reach of ordinary drought. But even this was not safe, for it was devoured by the "palmer-worm," a kind of locust.

Ver. 10. "The pestilence (a plague) after the manner of Egypt." Egypt is the birthplace of the plague or black death, and the circumstances augmenting its horror are here terribly portrayed. Compare Deut. 28: 60. Pestilence was rare in Palestine. "Your young men (who should be your defence) have I slain with the sword," because they were so weak that they could not stand against the enemy. The worst scourge was through man. "And have taken away your horses." By the incursions of enemies. This had taken place, among other times, in the reign of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, and grandfather of Jeroboam II., who reigned at the time of this prophecy. "And I have made the stink of your camps." The stench of the unburied dead soldiers, which, instead of being a defence, was a fresh source of pestilence. "Unto your nostrils." Showing that this happened in their own land. The warning came home to them. "Yet have ye not returned." Even this did not lead them to repentance.

Ver. 11. "I have overthrown" (*overthrew*). The prophet uses the very word employed (in Gen. 19: 24, 25), to describe the destruction of the cities of the plain, and a derived form. Its exact meaning is *turning upside down.* "And ye (who escaped) were as a fire brand plucked out of the burning." Once it had been green, fresh, fragrant, with leaf or flower; now, scorched, charred, blackened, all but consumed. In itself, it was fit for nothing but to be cast back into the fire whence it had been rescued. Man would so deal with it. A re creation alone could restore it. Slight emblem of a soul whose freshness sin had withered, then God's severe judgment had half consumed; in itself, meet only for the everlasting fire, from which yet God withdraws it.

Ver. 12. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee." What He will do is not expressed. He is silent as to what He will do, in order that, whilst Israel is left in uncertainty as to the particular kind of punishment, (which is all the more terrible because all kinds of things are imagined), it may repent of its sins and so avert the things which God threatens here. "Prepare to meet thy God" at the judgment seat, where all must give an account of the deeds done in the body. Not prepare for thy doom, but to avert it. Prepare by repentance, by returning to God, by making friends with Him. For meet Him you must, and if you are not prepared the irrevocable doom must come.

13. "For, lo, He that formeth the mountains." This description is given that Israel might see the majesty and power of the God they must meet, and thus realize both how useless it was to try to escape from Him, and how powerful He would be as a friend if they would turn to Him. "And declareth unto man what is His thought." To man, a sinner, far more impressive than all majesty of creative power, is the thought that God knows his inmost soul. "Treadeth upon the high places." The highest of earth are beneath His feet. "The God of hosts." Hosts are all God's creatures, the angels of heaven, the forces of earth, every power of every kind, all organized into an army to do the will of God.

Jerry's Chocolate Cake.

"When I am a man," said Jerry Whitamore, searching his plate earnestly for crumbs of his vanished cake, "when I am a man, I am going to have a whole chocolate cake to myself—a whole, big round chocolate cake, mother. I am, indeed, and nobody shall have a bit of it. I would like to see how it feels to eat a whole cake by myself."

"You need not wait till you are a man," said his mother, "I will make you one to-morrow."

"Will you, really, mother? All to myself?"

"Yes—on one condition; that you will not give anybody a bit of it while it lasts."

"Ho! I can easily promise you that; for I don't want anybody to help me eat it, I can tell you."

Mrs. Whitamore sighed a little, and wondered if Jerry was as selfish a little boy as he thought he was; but she made him the cake. As soon as the icing was firm, Jerry cut a big slice for himself, and sat down on the kitchen step to eat it. His little brother, Rob, came and stood in front of him, with his hands behind his back. "Wis' I had some piece," said Bob, looking at Jerry.

"Mother," called Jerry, "can't I give Rob a piece?"

"Certainly not," answered his mother.

"Go away, then, Rob, and don't watch me eat it," begged Jerry. But no; there stood the little man, eying the cake until it was gone, while two big tears rolled down his cheeks.

"That piece didn't taste good one bit," said Jerry to himself. "I won't eat any more when Rob is around."

The next time Jerry took a piece he slipped out of the door to hide himself in the woodshed. Bounce, the little black-and-tan terrier, thinking he was going out to play, slipped after him; but, just before the couple got out of sight, the mother called, "Jerry, remember not to give Bounce any cake."

"O, ain't that a pity?" said Jerry to Bounce; and then he had to eat his cake with Bounce begging for every bite. It was worse than Rob, because he could not explain anything to doggie.

"There that's two pieces of cake spoiled for me," grumbled Jerry. "Eating a whole cake ain't half as much fun as it's cracked up to be."

When the tea-bell rang, Jerry was as ready for bread and butter and milk as if he had not tasted anything for twelve hours; and there, on his upturned plate, was a half of what the Whitamore children called a "snow ball." It was a white cake, white inside with white crumbs and citron, and round and white outside with particularly sugary icing. Nobody made just those cakes except Aunt Martha Mason.

"That cake was sent to Rob, Jerry," said his mother; "and of his own accord he asked me to save you a piece," when, lo! to everybody's suprise, big, boyish Jerry burst out crying.

"I hate chocolate cake, mother," he said. "I never want to see another piece as long as I live."

So Mother Whitamore knew that Jerry had learned his lesson. She did not believe he would ever again think anything sweeter that he kept to himself.

"Suppose we bring out your cake and eat it for supper," she said to her little boy.

Jerry's face cleared up all in a minute.

"O, mother," he said, "that would be so nice!"

And I think that, if Rob and Bounce had been allowed to eat all that Jerry wanted them to have, they would both have dreamed of their great-grandfathers that night.—*Sunday-school Visitor.*

"Grace and peace"—these two go fitly together, because we must seek our peace in the free grace and favor of God. The ark and mercy-seat were never sundered.—*Trapp.*

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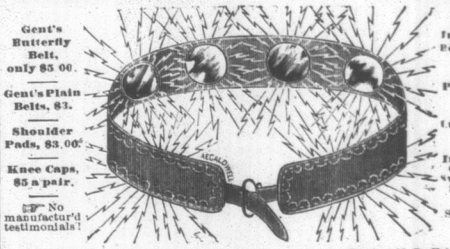

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