Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

FIRST QUARTER.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Select Notes.)

Lesson IX. Feb. 28. Jer. 37: 11-21.

JEREMIAH PERSECUTED.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."—Jer. 1: 19.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE SECOND CAPTIVITY (B. C. 598).—The first captivity, when the 70 years foretold by Jeremiah began, took place in B. C. 606-605, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, just before our last lesson. It was at this time that Daniel and his friends were carried to Babylon (Dan. 1: 1-6). Toward the close of Jehoiakim's reign, so full of iniquity and rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar again came to Jerusalem, and bound King Jehoiakim in fetters to carry him to Babylon (2 Chron. 36: 6); but he seems to have died in Jerusalem before the plan was carried out (2 Kings 24: 6; Jer. 22: 18, 19). His son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) attempted to be king, but he had only a troubled reign of three months. He was but 18 years old and was as bad as his father. He seems to have immediately rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, who had retired a short distance; but he sent back his army to Jerusalem, and forced them to give him as tribute a great amount of treasures from the palace and the temple, which he sent to Babylon, with 10,000 of the more important of the people (2 Kings 24: 9-15). Among these were King *Jehoiachin*, who lay 37 years in prison at Babylon, and then was released (2 Kings 25: 27-30); the prophet *Ezekiel* (Ezek. 1: 1, 2); and the great-grandfather of *Mordecai*, Queen Esther's cousin (Esther 2: 5, 6).

II. THE THIRD SIEGE lasted a year and a half, beginning in the ninth year of Zedekiah. After nine years Nebuchadnezzar had returned with the determination to reduce the city that had caused him so much trouble by its alliance with Egypt.

III. THE RESPITE. Ver. 11. During the siege Pharaoh Hophra (the Apries of Herodotus) came up with his army from Egypt to attack Nebuchadnezzar's army. It seemed a good opportunity to strike a blow at his great enemy from Babylon.

11. *The army of the Chaldeans.* This was at that time the general name for the people of Babylonia. *Was broken up from Jerusalem.* They broke up their camp around the city, and marched to meet the Egyptian army where they could more advantageously join battle with them. *For fear of Pharaoh's army.* Not the fear of a panic, but for fear lest in their present situation they would be at a disadvantage (see ver. 5).

HOLLOW-HEARTED REPENTANCE. The utter worthlessness of the repentance which led the nobles to free their slaves in the hour of danger is shown by the fact that as soon as the danger seemed to be removed, they immediately compelled their slaves to return into their service (34: 11-22). For this Jeremiah declared from God that nothing could save them from captivity; that God would set free the sword and pestilence and famine to destroy them; that even if the whole army of the Chaldeans was destroyed, and only wounded men left, yet these men, "thrust through" with arrows and spears, would rise up and burn the city (ver. 8). There was no power could prevent the catastrophe unless they repented.

IV. JEREMIAH UNDERTAKES TO VISIT HIS ANATHOTH HOME. Ver. 12. *Then.* While the besieging army was away, and the road was clear. *Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin.* His home was at Anathoth in Benjamin, four miles north of the city. *To separate himself.* The Rev. Ver. is, *to receive his portion there.* So most later commentators. It was "apparently to secure his share of the tithes and produce of the Levitical glebe of the village, due to him as one of its priests, the distribution being made, it would seem, in public, at stated times. Knowing that the Chaldeans would return, it was imperative that he should obtain the means of subsistence to take back into the city, so soon to be beleaguered afresh." Others think it was to secure himself in the possession of an inheritance. *In the midst of the people; i. e.* accompanied by others, like himself, had a right to share in the produce of the priests' lands at Anathoth, started thither to see whether any stores still remained which might be available for their common use.

V. THE PROPHET ARRESTED AS A TRAITOR, AND PUT IN PRISON. 13. *The gate of Benjamin.* In the north wall, and not in the direction of the Chaldeans. *Captain of the ward,* or guard. Literally, *lord of the watch. Irijah.* The naming of the captain with his ancestry implies that he was one of the princes. *Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans.* You are trying to desert to the enemy. The fact was that he had advised the people to give up and yield to the Chaldeans as the only way of safety (21: 9); later he repeats the same advice to the king (38; 17, 18). It was his well-known opinion.

14. *Then said Jeremiah . . . false; I fall not away to the Chaldeans.* He made an open and square denial.

15. *The princes.* Not those friendly to him, in our last lesson, 15 years before (for they must, many of them, have been carried away captive with Jehoiakim), but the new princes or nobles, who had gained great influence in the government, so as even to make the king afraid of them. *Were wroth with Jeremiah.* He had compared them to rotten figs (Jer. 44). He was the strongest and most resolute opponent of their war policy. But for him they would have had all their own way. *In prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe.* The official residence of one of the secretaries of state. *They had made that the prison.* The house of Jonathan seems to have been specially adapted for a prison, as the next verse shows.

16. *Jeremiah was entered into the dungeon.* The underground excavation or pit. *And into the cabins.* The vaulted cells, like cisterns, arched overhead, which belonged to the pit, and opened into it. There would be "little light and less ventilation," a damp, sickening, chilly, uncomfortable place. Here Jeremiah *remained many days.*

VI. JEREMIAH AND ZEDEKIAH. 17. *Then Zedekiah the king sent, and took him out.* The Chaldeans had returned to the siege after defeating the Egyptians, during the "many days" Jeremiah was confined in prison (ver. 16). The danger was so pressing that Zedekiah felt impelled to ask Jeremiah, *Is there any word from the Lord?* He did this *secretly* because virtually "powerless in the hands of his court, the phantom ruler dared not consult him openly. Weak and irresolute, he could not brave its anger by acting, even in so small a matter, as became his office." *And Jeremiah said, There is: for, said he, thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.* Jeremiah was as courageous as ever; not even to save himself from dungeon and death would he change the word of the Lord. Zedekiah was a dull scholar in God's school. He would not learn the lesson that there was no door of escape except through repentance and obedience to God (38: 17, 18). He was too weak, and too wicked, and too faithless to take the right hand. He chose death when he might have had life.

18. *Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah.* The prophet was indignant at the injustice of his treatment, and applied to the king for redress.

19. *Where are now your prophets?* etc. The event had proved Jeremiah to be the Lord's prophet, and those on the other side to have been false.

20. *Commit Jeremiah into the court of the prison,* or of the guard, the quarters of the sentries who guarded the palace. This greatly improved Jeremiah's circumstances. While he would be under guard, he would be in a light and airy place, with company and food. *Bakers' street.* Persons in the same business commonly reside in the same street in cities in the East.

NOTE the further actions of Jeremiah and the persecution in chap. 38.

THE CONTRAST between Jeremiah and Zedekiah: (1) in character; (2) in conduct; (3) in sufferings; (4) in usefulness; (5) in the results of their course.

"Wanted—A Strong Boy."

So read a sign in a store window, as we passed by the other morning. At noon it was gone. The placard, however, had done more than to accomplish its direct purpose. It set us to thinking. "Wanted—a strong boy;" in how many places that legend might be truthfully displayed! The world wants boys that are strong, first of all, in the body. A stomach fed chiefly on cake and peanuts, and a system undermined by the deadly cigarette, make a poor basis for stout fleet limbs and sturdy arms. Other things being equal, a merchant or lawyer wants a boy who can pull a strong oar, make his home-run over the ball-field, and keep his wind in a half mile run. Other things being equal—what other things? Certain ones that are the real measures of strength, whether in boys or men. Has he grit? Can he stick to a thing? Is he quick to take in a situation, ready in an emergency, bright-witted where others blunder? Is he equal to responsibility? Can he be left with a given task with a certainty that he can be literally left with it, and his employer find it fully done in due season, without a second of intervening anxiety or oversight? These are some of the elements of strength that make up the model "strong boy" who is so universally wanted to-day.

But is this all? We think not. If we were gauging the real power of a boy for such a position as has been decided, we should wish to know something more than the size of his biceps and the tenacity of his grip on a given bit of work. We should want to know about the strength of his love for that father and mother who have sacrificed so much for his advancement. We should look for some indication of a tie binding him to the house of God as a regular, thoughtful attendant. We should inquire as to the connecting links in his life between his daily conduct and the Word of God. Has he come into an earnest, loyal relation to Jesus Christ as his Saviour and Master? Is he "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might?"

Yes, there is a great demand for strong boys. Satan wants them, that he may rob them of their present and prospective vigor. Christ wants them, that through their youthful robustness the weak places in His army may be reinforced. The Church of to-day, as well as commercial corporations, may well hang out the sign in unmistakable characters, and keep it displayed: "Wanted—strong boys!"—*Golden Rule.*

To Boys Commencing Business.

Be on hand promptly in the morning at your place of business, and make it a point never to be late, and perform cheerfully every duty. Be respectful to your employers and all in authority over you, and be polite to every one; politeness costs nothing, and it will help you wonderfully in getting along in the world. And above all, be honest and truthful. The boy who starts in life with a sound mind in a sound body, who falls into no bad habits, who is honest, truthful and industrious, who remembers with love his father and mother, and who does not grow away from church and Sunday-school, has qualities of mind and heart that will ensure him success to a remarkable degree, even though he is endowed with only ordinary mental capacity; for honor, truth and industry are more than genius.

Don't be foppish in your dress, and don't buy anything before you have the money to pay for it. Shun billiard saloons and be careful how you spend your evenings. Cultivate a taste for reading, and read only good books. With a love for reading, you will find in books friends ever true and full of cheer in times of gloom, and sweet companionship for lonely hours. Other friends may grow cold and forsake you, but books are always the same. And in closing, boys, I would say again, that with truth honesty and industry, and a living faith in God, you will succeed.

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He Stood the Test.

In a suburb of Boston there lives a certain German laborer. He has a wife and six children. They live in a little rented house, for he has never been able to save enough to purchase a home of his own. He leaves very early in the morning for his daily task in a large factory and returns to his home late each night. It is a *home* and not merely a stopping place, for our friend is an earnest Christian, and with his wife, who thoroughly sympathizes with him in his religious life, brings into it all that he can of comfort and cheer. His children are a bright, contented little flock, thoroughly enjoying the humble comforts they have and knowing little of those that wealth may bestow or rob them of.

Our friend has just passed through a trial and test of character which proves him honest and sterling. His employer at the factory came to him one day recently and the following conversation ensued.

The manufacturer said, "It is your turn to work next Sunday and I shall expect you to be here."

Our friend replied, "I cannot work on Sunday. I am a Christian and a member of the church."

"I can't help that," was the answer. "You must work on Sunday; all the men in my shops have to take their turn at it."

"I can't do it," was the quiet answer. "Then you must call at the office and get your pay Saturday night and consider yourself dismissed," said the manufacturer, turning on his heel and walking away.

It was a week of great anxiety to this Christian father. On the one hand, there was his family to be considered. How could he see them suffer! And yet they must suffer if he were dismissed from his position. He did not care much about himself. He could stand it, but how could he bring suffering on his wife and children. But on the other hand stood his Christian obligation, the public covenant with the church, and, more than that, the secret, soul covenant with his Redeemer. He determined to remain loyal to his Lord and trust Him for the result. Saturday afternoon came. His employer approached him again, urging him to reconsider his determination and take his turn at Sunday work. He still refused.

"Well, just take it for to-morrow and I will excuse you after that. You see I have said that you must do it or leave and it would break down the discipline of the factory if I did not keep my word. I will not compel you to do it again."

"No," said the sturdy Christian, "I cannot work even a single Sabbath, and so must leave to-night."

"What church are you a member of?" said the employer.

The workman told him.

"Have you many more of your sort of Christians in that church?"

"I hope so," was the modest reply.

"I wish I had a factory full of them," said the employer. "You just stay right on. I won't bother you any more with Sunday work."

He stood the test!—*Sel.*

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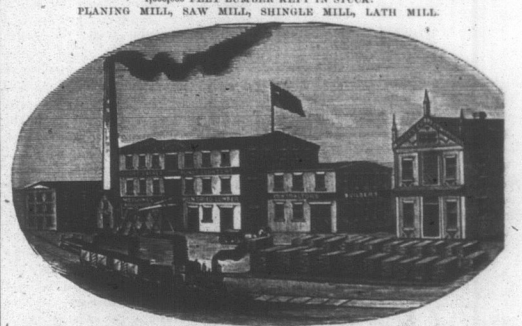

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