

* The Sunday School *

BIBLE LESSON

Abridged from Peloubets' Notes.

Fourth Quarter.

FRUITS OF RIGHT AND WRONG DOING.

Lesson XII.—December 17. Malachi 3: 13 to 4: 6.

Compare Mal. 3: 1-6; Matt. 11: 7-15. Commit Verses 16-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.—Gal. 6: 7.

EXPLANATORY.

I. GOOD MEN IN A BAD WORLD.—Vs. 13-18. We saw in our last lesson how disappointed the Jews were that they had not received all that had been promised, and the reality fell so far short of their expectations and their ideals. The prophet showed them that they could find the reason for this not in God, but in their own character and actions. A change in these would quickly bring the realization of their hopes.

Now we have the same complaint more definitely expressed.

13. YOUR WORDS HAVE BEEN STOUT. That is, hard, presumptuous, impudent. (See Jude 15). WHAT HAVE YE SPOKEN SO MUCH. Omit so much. The Hebrew conjugation expresses reciprocal action, "spoken together," "one with another."

V. 14. The prophet replies, YE HAVE SAID, IT IS VAIN TO SERVE GOD. Note their bargaining spirit here and in WHAT PROFIT IS IT THAT WE HAVE KEPT HIS ORDINANCE? The services God required for his temple and worship. They had so little conception of true religion, that they imagined that God asked so many prayers and so many sacrifices, and so many tithes, and would pay for them in a certain amount of prosperity. They had tried to cheat God by offering the cheapest things they could find, polluted bread, blind and sick and useless animals for sacrifice; and then thought that God had not fulfilled his promises made to sincere and loving service. WALKED MOURNFULLY. With outward signs of sorrow and repentance for their sins, in sackcloth and ashes, and frequent national fasts. (See Zech 7: 3, 5; 8: 19).

15. WE CALL THE PROUD HAPPY. "The word 'we' is emphatic, and suggests a reference on the part of the speakers to v. 12, 'Thou sayest that all nations shall call them that obey thee happy; we, on the contrary, call the proud rebels against thee happy.'" THEY THAT WORK WICKEDNESS ARE SET UP. Rather, "built up," prosperous, successful. THEY THAT TEMPT, etc. Rather, "yea, they tempt God, and are delivered," as R. V. The persons are the same as in the preceding clause, "they that work wickedness."

These Jews looked around and saw the great Persian empire prosperous and growing, and the nearer Samaritans were stronger and richer than themselves, who looked upon their half-built city, and poor and devastated harvest fields, as described in Joel 1: 1-12 (which is thought to belong to about this time). They did not understand the reason. They were puzzled over the problem. They did not see that their condition was part of a loving discipline because they were God's people and he loved them. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." (See Heb. 12: 6-11). A parent lets other boys go, but he disciplines his own son.

16. THEY THAT FEARED THE LORD. With reverential awe that led them to trust and obey him. SPEAK OFTEN ("often" is not in the Hebrew) ONE TO ANOTHER. Thus encouraging and strengthening one another. "A large part of our wisdom and strength and hope comes from conferring with others. It gives sympathy, broader views, new suggestions, correction of errors."

THE LORD HARKENED, AND HEARD. Compare Matt. 18: 19, 20. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name." A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN. "An expression after the manner of men, intimating that their pious affections and performances are kept in remembrance as punctually and particularly as if written in a book."

THAT THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME. Which expresses his character, his power, his glory. Thinking upon God (1) helps to keep us from sin. We do not wish to have his eye upon us when we do wrong. Either we will stop thinking of his name, or we will stop sinning. (2) It helps to change us into his likeness.

17. AND THEY SHALL BE MINE, etc. Rather, "And they shall be to me, saith Jehovah of Hosts, in the day that I am preparing a peculiar treasure." compare the expression "a peculiar people" in Tit. 2: 14; and in 1 Pet. 2: 9. See also Ex. 19: 5; Deut. 7: 6; Ps. 135: 4. They shall be my jewels, my peculiar treasure.

(1) They cost a great deal. (2) As jewels are taken out of the sand or common rock, because they are so precious, so God has taken his children out of the world. I WILL SPARE THEM. Keep them from harm, preserve them, treat them tenderly and carefully, let only those trials come upon them which are for their good. AS A MAN SPARETH HIS OWN SON THAT SERVETH HIM. That is, an obedient and dutiful son, for whom it is possible and safe to do much more than for the disobedient son, no matter how much he loves him.

18. THEN SHALL YE RETURN AND DISCERN. Look again, and then ye shall see a broad distinction, nay, more, a real contrast, between the destiny of the righteous and the destiny of the wicked. The problems that troubled them (vs. 13-15) shall all be solved.

We are like the tapestry weavers who stand on the reverse side of their web, and see the ends and thrums, but not the beautiful picture they are making.

II. THE CONTRASTS OF THE JUDGMENT DAY.—Vs. 1-3. First The Wicked. 1. FOR connects this verse with the previous one. They should see the contrast between the righteous and the wicked, because the scenes of the judgment day would be before them. THE DAY COMETH, THAT SHALL BURN AS AN OVEN, or furnace. A fire burns more fiercely in a furnace than in the open air. The wicked are said, in the Old Testament as well as the New, to be destroyed by fire.

THE PROUD. Who are unwilling to repent and forsake their sins and accept of God's law, but are self-willed and defiant. BE STUBBLE. The dry stalks of grain left in the field after reaping. It catches fire easily and burns quickly and entirely.

Compare Christ's description of the judgment day in Matt. 25.

Second. The Righteous. 2. SHALL THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARISE. Righteousness has here the not uncommon sense of deliverance, salvation, blessedness. The sun which God in his righteousness—his love of right, his goodness—sends, and sends to produce in his people righteousness, and the blessedness which comes only with righteousness. WITH HEALING. Healing from trouble and from sin, and all the miseries with which they were surrounded. IN HIS WINGS. His swift rays flying from the sun to us. This doubtless refers to the Messiah.

Christ is to the moral world what the sun is to the natural world. (1) He is the source of light. (2) He is the source of power. Nearly all the power in the world comes directly or indirectly from the sun. (3) He is the source of life. (4) He is the source of comfort and cheer. (5) He is the source of the beauty of holiness; all the glories of color come from the sun.

AND YE SHALL GO FORTH, from your difficulties, from your prison-house of trouble and misfortune. AND GROW UP AS CALVES OF THE STALL. Rather, "leap or gambol as stall-fed calves," which, when let out to the fields, caper and frolic in the exuberance of healthy life.

3. AND YE SHALL TREAD DOWN THE WICKED. All those who are willing shall be overcome by being transformed into good, while the incorrigible shall no longer live to oppose and destroy the good. IN THE DAY THAT I SHALL DO THIS. At the time when Messiah shall come and shall have perfected his reign. This was already begun. It is going on till Jesus shall be King of kings, and his kingdom rule over all.

III. THERE SHALL BE PREPARATION FOR THIS JUDGMENT.—Vs. 4-6.

4. REMEMBER, so as to obey, THE LAW OF MOSES. The Ten Commandments, and all the other laws, which were the constitution and laws of the Jews. ("even" the statutes and judgments. WHICH I COMMAND UNTO HIM: i. e., which I entrusted to him to deliver, which I gave in charge to him).

5. BEHOLD, I WILL SEND YOU ELIJAH THE PROPHET. Viz., one who should be a second Elijah, who should come with a spirit and power like his, sternly rebuking sin, and earnestly calling all men to repentance. Our Lord on two occasions (Matt. 17: 12; Mark 9: 11, 12) interpreted this of John the Baptist. BEFORE THE COMING OF THE GREAT AND DREADFUL DAY OF THE LORD. In the original, this is taken verbatim from Joel 2: 31. It must refer to "the day that shall burn as an oven" (Malachi 4: 1). The day of the Lord is the time when he appears on earth. To warn in mercy before he smites in judgment is evermore the order of God's throne. Hence the second Elijah should come before the Jewish people and the polity should be smitten down by the terrible Roman arms.

6. AND HE SHALL TURN THE HEART OF THE FATHERS TO THE CHILDREN. The family is the foundation of religion. Religion has there its greatest power of propagation and growth. In the beginning of a revival of religion there is almost universally a revival of deep, all-absorbing "love for others," especially within the

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circle of the domestic relations. How often do we see the hearts of parents borne down with almost crushing solicitude in the tenderness of their love for the souls of their children. LEST I COME AND SMITE THE EARTH WITH A CURSE. Unless there should be a new development of religion, and the people began to turn to the Lord, the world would soon be ruined by its own wickedness,—there must be a turn in the disease, or death would sweep come.

NORMAL STUDY.

Lesson No. 4.

THE BOOK WE STUDY.

The Sunday School should be most truly a Bible school. Those who teach in it should be men and women of one Book. Helps may be used but should not be abused. The Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. (1 Cor. 2: 13).

1. ITS TITLE. Usually called the Bible or the Book. It is such pre-eminently. It has been called not only the Book of God, but the god of books. These, however, are but human appellations, though most true. It is self-termed the Scripture (Rom. 4: 31); the Scriptures, (Luke 24: 27); the Word of God, (Eph. 6: 17); the Oracles of God, (Rom. 3: 2).

2. ITS AUTHOR. God. It is his Word, (Heb. 4: 12). Inspired of him, (2 Tim. 3: 16). Given through human instrumentality, (2 Peter 1: 21).

3. ITS AUTHORITY. Its authorship constitutes its authority. (Isaiah 8: 20; 1 Thes. 2: 13).

4. ITS SUBJECTS. — The most transcendent and the sublimest. "Great things," (Hosea 8: 12). A revelation of God, (Heb. 1: 1, 2); the declaration of his nature, mind and will. Also a revelation of man (1) His origin, Gen. 1: 26, 27; (2) His fall, Gen. 3; (3) His redemption, John 3: 16. Christ is all and in all in the Bible, Luke 24: 27; John 5: 39.

5. ITS COMPLETENESS. It is perfect, Psa. 19: 5, 7. Contains the whole character of God, the whole will of God, the whole scheme of redemption. Nothing must be added, nor ought taken away, Deut. 4: 2; 12: 32; Rev. 22: 18, 19.

6. ITS UNITY. Though containing many books, yet essentially one. It has been well put thus: "The Bible is a volume composed of 63 parts, written by 40 or more authors, at different places and different times, during a space of 1,600 years, yet marked by no essential difference." One part is complementary to another, but there is no contradiction. There is development, but no disparity. There is a gradual revelation, but not a different revelation. Whether we take the Bible in its entirety or examine it in its component parts we have to say it is "true and righteous altogether," Psa. 19: 9.

7. ITS EFFECTS. Enlightening, Psalm 119: 130; regenerating, James 1: 18; 1 Peter 1: 23; sanctifying, John 17: 17; cleansing, Eph. 5: 26; edifying, Acts 22: 32; seeking, 2 Tim. 3: 15; comforting, Rom. 15: 4; nourishing, 1 Peter 2: 2.

For numerous other effects and also excellencies of the Word of God let the student read carefully Psalms 19 and 119.

In some succeeding lessons I hope to deal with the books of the Bible individually. I shall treat them as briefly as is consistent with clearness and accuracy. In our next we begin the Old Testament.

C. W. TOWNSEND.

Hale Old Age.



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