

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, June 24th, 1877.—Review Lesson (with Nahum i. 1-13.)

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 3-7.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.” Nahum i. 3.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Nahum i. Tuesday, Nahum ii. Wednesday, Nahum iii. Thursday, Zephaniah ii. Friday, vs. 9; Psalm ii. Saturday, vs. 2; 2 Kings xix. 20-37. Sunday, Psalm ciii.

ANALYSIS.—I. The doom of Nineveh proclaimed. Vs. 1. II. Formal preface to the prophecy. Vss. 1-8. III. A striking contrast. Vss. 7, 8. IV. Assyrian plots are vain. Vss. 9-12. V. God's people comforted. Vss. 12, 13.

QUESTIONS.—Who was Nahum? Before what event must it have been written? In what condition of prosperity was Nineveh at the time Nahum pronounced its doom? How did Nahum know it so long beforehand? 2 Peter i. 21. For what was the doom of Nineveh in the time of Jonah delayed? Why did its irrevocable doom come at last? What is the limit of sinning between God's patience and his wrath? How many centuries before Christ was Nineveh destroyed? How thorough was its destruction? Nahum i. 8, 14; ii. 8, 10; iii. 6, 7, 13; Zephaniah ii. 13-15. For what literary merits is the book of Nahum unsurpassed? What does Nahum's prophecy signally illustrate?

Vs. 1. What is the meaning of “burden” in this verse?

Vs. 2. Why is God jealous of his people? Why is God's reserved wrath to be dreaded? Why, then, should we not elicit God's patience? Rom. ii. 4, 5.

Vs. 3. In some men's opinions God is all love; what was Nahum's opinion?

Vs. 7, 8. What striking contrasts have we in these verses? To what does this “overrunning flood” possibly allude? Ans. To the entrance of the invaders through Nineveh's river-gates, or to an inundation of the river Tigris and its tributaries. How long has absolute darkness rested upon Nineveh? How was its overthrow brought on?

Vs. 9. What Psalm do these words suggest? See and read Psalm ii. 1-4. Against whom will not affliction rise up a second time?

Vs. 11. What Assyrian king greatly troubled God's people? When did he make war with Judah? (B. C. 710). With what result? 2 Kings xix. 35.

Vs. 12. How could God use the Assyrians in accomplishing the captivity of his people, and afterwards punish them for so doing? Psalm lxxvi. 10. Can any man or nation sin against God with impunity? What example should keep them from pride? Ans. Zephaniah ii. 15.

THE PROPHECY OF NAHUM.—Nahum is the last of the great series of Israelitish prophets. His personal history is quite unknown. It is probable that his prophecy was written in the reign of Hezekiah, a century before the downfall of Nineveh. The burden of his prophecy is the destruction of the city of Nineveh—a city at the very time of the prophecy of vast extent and population, and the centre of the principal commerce of the world. The doom which Jonah had pronounced was delayed by the penitence of the people. But their repeated and aggravated sins brought upon them at last an irrevocable sentence, and so totally was the city destroyed that, in the second century after Christ not a vestige remained of it, and its very site was a matter of doubt and uncertainty until it was discovered several years ago by Butta and Layard. The date of the fall of Nineveh is about B. C. 610.

The book of Nahum is surpassed by none in the Old Testament in elegance of language or sublimity of description. “It is one sustained shout of wild exultation that the oppressor has fallen at last.”—Stanley. It illustrates so signally the law of retribution according to which God deals with nations, and the fidelity with which he fulfills his promises and threatenings to the righteous and the wicked.”

EXPOSITION.—Verse 1.—The word “burden” in such connection implies something of the nature of a sentence or doom concerning the object of prophecy, which here is Nineveh. The book of the vision. The word “book” designates the prophecy itself as written and not spoken. *Elkoshite*. Of the town or city of Elkosh.

Verse 2.—Jealous. So in the second commandment. Exodus xx. 5. The

tenderness, depth and intensity of his love to his people implies the same depth, intensity and power of antagonism to that and those which and who are and continue to be against his people. *The Lord [Jehovah] revengeth*, or more strictly “*ayengeth*,” which results from the jealousy. *Furious*. Intended to describe the nature of the retribution rather than the inward spirit. *Reserveth wrath for his enemies*. He may delay punishment, but since God's wrath is not a momentary passion, but is righteous indignation, and as its springs in his immutable nature, he cannot lay it aside, and treat wrong as if it were right, or as though it had no existence for those repenting; there is forgiveness because Christ's atonement has been made and satisfaction realized.

Verse 3.—*The Lord [Jehovah] is slow to anger*. By no means that God takes no note of sin unless after it has gone to great lengths, and become very aggravated, so encouraging the beginnings of iniquity by the promise of impunity. Nay, the reverse. These sins, one and all, are known and noted, and sometime will come into judgment, every one of them. The day of wrath must come. Great in power, because God's power is infinite, he can choose his own time, and is not in need of haste. And will not at all acquit. He will not pass unnoticed any sin of any man, and he does not even where he forgives, since forgiveness itself implies the recognition of sin, while forgiveness through Christ's blood implies that the sin, even of the forgiven man, has been borne. His way in the whirlwind and the storm. Resistless and destructive forces, symbols of that retribution with which God in “the day of wrath” visits the objects of his wrath. *Clouds are the dust of his feet*. Completing the figure. God marching in the awful storms and tempests with power, and as he moves on over the face of the land and sea, sweeping down and away houses and forests, and wrecking vessels, stirs up the dust which appears as a cloud.

Verse 4.—*He rebuketh the sea*, etc. A change of the illustration. The passage of the Red Sea is in mind, and the passage of the Jordan as the supplement to that. *Bashan languisheth*, etc. Another change of illustration, by which is introduced famine which God brought upon Israel, especially in Ahab's time, in answer to Elijah's prayer. These places—Bashan, Carmel and Lebanon—were all noted for their luxuriant vegetation.

Verse 5.—*The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt*. Not the surface of the earth only owns his presence, but even within the very heart of the rock-formed hills and mountains—symbols of steadfastness and security. Apparently Sinai and the events connected with the communication of the law to Moses, are in mind and shape the language. And how fit is the reference when the discourse is of God as the vindicator of the holy majesty of his law. *The earth is burnt at his presence*, etc. Or rises, the sudden starting up in terror and trembling as for flight.

Verse 6.—*Who can stand*, etc. Who can stand his ground and contend with such forces as those enumerated in verses 2-5—before such a God, wielding such forces?

Verse 7.—*The Lord [Jehovah] is good, a stronghold*, etc. The vindication of his law is the protection of those holding to it, and the love of his law shown in the punishment of sin is the love of all his elect.

Verse 8.—*Overrunning flood*. Representing a mighty army sweeping through a country or city; and here overwhelming Nineveh—the very city that had sent forth those terrible armies which had overwhelmed the kingdom of Israel, swept away its inhabitants to the far east, and rolled in upon Judah. *Utter end of the place thereof*. The very site of Nineveh has been unknown until recently, such utter desolation came to the “place thereof.” *Darkness shall pursue*, etc. Poetic representation of their being swept out of the sight and knowledge of mankind.

Verse 9.—*What do ye imagine against the Lord [Jehovah]*. This is addressed to Assyria. See Isaiah xxxvii. 21-38. *Affliction shall not rise up the second time*. Assyria shall be destroyed so as never to bring another “affliction” upon Judah, such as that suffered at Sennacherib's hands.

Verse 10.—Or though they are closely

interwoven as thorns and thoroughly soaked with their wine, they shall be consumed like stubble fully dry. As at Babylon, on the night of its overthrow, there was festivity in the assurance of perfect safety. *Like stubble*, etc. Fire on the prairies.

Verse 11.—*From thee*, etc. Sennacherib is clearly in mind. See the citation from Isaiah on verse 9. Compare 2 Kings xviii. 13-37; xix.

Verses 12, 13.—A repetition in new form of the thought given in verse 10. Ezekiel wrote in the time of Judah's captivity, and hence after the fall of Nineveh, which event he has described in the thirty-first chapter of his prophecy. The Medo-Babylonian forces made thorough work in their conquest, and the king of Assyria, Saracus, probably the grandson of Ezarhaddon, after “a stout and prolonged defence,” finding resistance vain, collected his wives and his treasures in his palace, and with his own hand, setting fire to the building, perished in the flames.” Compare the death of Zimri, fifth king of Israel, as described in 1 Kings xvi. 18, 19.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, July 1st, 1877.—Paul in Cyprus.—Acts xiii. 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”—Acts xiii. 12.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

How patient the Lord had been with wicked Israel! He bore with them for many years; he sent many prophets to warn them of their sins, to tell them of their punishment, and to beg them to obey God. How true are the words of Nahum, one of these prophets—“*The Lord is slow to anger*.” But “*he is great in power*.” He rules the wind and the storm; he speaks to the sea and the rivers, and they dry up. You know how Mount Sinai shook when God was there; and the time will come when the sky shall pass away, and the whole earth be burned up, at his word. Shall such a great God let men disobey him? No; for he “*will not at all acquit the wicked*”—that is, he will certainly punish them. But we need not be afraid of him; for we have seen also his great love, his wonderful kindness, his full forgiveness; and all that he asks is that we love, trust, and obey him. No matter how small or weak you are; he will know if you are trying to please him, just as he knew that seven thousand were left in Israel. This same prophet says, “*He knoweth them who trust him*.”

Six things which Nahum tells us of God: THE LORD is slow to anger. Great in power. Will not acquit the wicked. Good. Strong in the day of trouble. Knoweth them that trust him.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XXII.—AN UNNATURAL GRANDMOTHER.

“Good mornin’, Mrs. Dorothy Sharpe,” said Matthew, rather more graciously than usual; and he was not sure that his voice was quite steady, so excited and nervous did he feel in approaching the subject which he had to bring before her.

“Cold mornin’,” said Dorothy, as she stood a moment and untied her bonnet-strings.

“Yes, it's cool,” assented Matthew, and seeing her about to pass on into the kitchen, he said in a little fluster, “Oh, will ye please to stop a minute afore ye begin work, Mrs. Sharp? I just want to speak to ye about a bit of extrys as ye'll find to wash out to-day—a thing or two of a little chap's as I've got stayin' with me.”

Matthew paused a minute. He had a heightened colour, and Dorothy furtively glanced at him with an enquiring and supercilious expression.

“It's a little orphan boy as I've took in,” said Matthew, dashing into the heart of his subject with a wretchedly desperate feeling that brought perspiration to his forehead. “He was brought up to London only a few weeks since, you must know by his poor dying mother; and

last Saturday night as ever was, I set eyes on 'em both for the first time, ay, and on her for the last time, too, for she died that very same Saturday night.”

Matthew here ventured to look at Dorothy, and found her listening with a not very sympathizing expression. She made no response, so he went on nervously, “The little chap come to me next day to tell me she was dead, and he hadn't no where to go to, so I took him in intendin' to keep him and bring him up decent; and on Thursday I buried his mother for him, neat and tidy, and he've bin with me since, and seems ever so content, and I'm content to have him cos I ha'n't got kith nor kin. His name he tells me—Matthew paused here, gazing intently down on his counter upon which his hand heavily rested, then giving a short cough he went on—“He tells me as how his name is Hugh Haldane, and his mother's name was Dora Haldane: she was a widow, poor soul! and she came all the way from Scotland down to Kent a-lookin' for her mother; and then she was directeried on to London after her, and to London she comes and goes and dies afore ever she finds her mother. So she tells this little lad, seemingly, as he've got to look out for his grandmother, and I s'pose when he finds her she'll be wantin' to hook him off away from old Matthew Pedder.”

He paused now, expecting to hear a cry of delight, and the glad confession of her relationship to him. But there was a dead silence; and when at length Matthew ventured to look into her face, he saw that it was deadly pale, and there was a hard angry expression in her dark eyes. She was quickly resolving in her mind what course to pursue, and to give herself time she said, “Ah, it's a bad case, but I s'pose there are plenty such.” Then there was a silence again, which Matthew did not attempt to break; he looked up at her—he could do so easily now—and watched her closely while she was absorbed in thought for a minute. Suddenly assuming an indifferent air she said, “Yes, I s'pose, it's a common case is that. Well, you've done a good thing to take the poor boy in. If fathers and mothers will leave their children destitute, they must expect as there's nothing but the workhouse for 'em, unless kind folks as have got the means shall happen to take 'em in. Their relations can't be expected to slave for 'em, especially old grandfathers and grandmothers. ‘Course not; it ain't to be expected.”

“They've gen'ly got enough to do to look after themselves,” observed Matthew with a grim smile, which Dorothy did not see. He felt so relieved by her unwillingness to claim the boy, that he could scarcely contain himself. He wanted to burst out laughing, or hug Dorothy, or do something desperate. But he did control himself, and now took an amused interest in watching what Dorothy was going to do.

“‘Course they have,” responded Dorothy; and now it was her turn to be anxious and nervous, and make a strong effort to keep outwardly calm. “How old is the boy?” she added.

“Eight,” said Matthew. “Eight. Ah, well, his bits o' things won't be much extra to wash with yours,” she said, graciously. “And his mother died, did she?” There was a slight gasp as Dorothy asked this, but Matthew did not appear to observe it. “Was she comfortable and happy, I wonder?”

“Well, I don't know as she was comfortable, accordin' as folks gen'ly counts comfort,” said Matthew; but she was happy in her mind, I'm certain sure. She was, I s'pose, just what ye might call a right-down good 'oman, no sham about her, ye know; and if there's a heaven, I should say she's there and no mistake.”

“Ah, that's all right then,” said Dorothy, with a sigh of relief. She was glad to think that her soul was safe; but she was not at all concerned to know what her daughter had gone through in this life; what ever it was, she considered that she had brought it upon herself by her wilfulness, and she could not but expect that she would be punished for her rebellion against maternal authority.

Dorothy pondered for a few moments, and then glancing anxiously at Matthew, she managed to say, “I s'pose she told you some of her history then, or else the boy?”

“Oh, dear, no!” answered Matthew, without looking at her. “I hadn't many

words with the poor soul, and she didn't tell me nothin' about herself, ‘cept that she'd lost a husband and child, and that was trouble enough for her young lifetime, thinks I.”

Dorothy breathed more freely. “Very likely the boy don't know anything about her,” she remarked, for her own comfort; “I mean about her relations, you know.”

“But don't you go for to question him now,” said Matthew, quickly. “I don't want him axed no questions; and I've gev him warnin' to keep hisself to hisself amongst these gossiping folks about these parts, and not to let none of 'em get any of his bisness out of him.”

“That's very good advice,” said Dorothy, with an attempt to smile; “and I wish for the boy's sake that you were a decenter sort of man, Mr. Pedder, so as you could give him good advice in religious things. It's to be hoped that you won't let him grow up a heathen, and keep him from church Sunday after Sunday, because his father being a Scotchman he'd have liked his boy, I dare say, to keep Sunday, though I can't abear the Scotch, and don't want to put in many good words for 'em.”

“Who said his father was Scotch?” asked Matthew, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. He felt rather inclined to tease Dorothy, and stir up her anxious fears for herself, now he saw that she wanted to disown her grandson.

She coloured as she replied in a flustered manner, “Oh, didn't you say they came from Scotland? And isn't Haldane a Scotch name?”

“Not that I knows of—it haven't got Mac before it, ye see, as I s'pose a proper Scotch name ought to have; leastways so it seems to me, Mrs. Dorothy Sharpe. But I dessay I won't make the boy no more of a heathen than I are myself, and he shall go to church if he likes, surely. And all this jest reminds me to warn ye, Mrs. Dorothy, not to give any o' yer pious lectures afore this little chap, else he'll come to think by-and-by as I deserves 'em, and at this present he thinks rather better of me than you do. If he was to come to think bad of me and misdoubt me, I might p'raps turn against him and want to get rid of him, ye know, and do my very first best to find his grandmother for him to go and live with her. If you've got anything to say to me about my sins, jest please to wait till his back's turned, and then fire away at me. I should be mighty sorry to turn against the poor lad, seein' as I've got opportunity to set him up in life. But if he come to scorn old Matthew, I won't say how I might feel towards him—human natur' bein' a queer critter.”

Dorothy took in that hint and duly digested it. “Well, if he comes in my way, Mr. Pedder, you won't have no objections, I hope, to me speaking to him now and then about his soul, and asking him a Catechism question or two, or any little word in season of that sort. I'd like to be sure as he knows his Commandments and all that, you know, which is nothing but my duty, being a Christian woman, and coming in contact with a young boy like that as won't have any Christian privileges with you, Mr. Pedder.”

“Christian fiddlesticks, Mrs. Dorothy Sharpe! if you'll excuse me makin' that onpious observation. I guess I'll be able to learn that boy as much religion as you gets yerself at your church, so I begs that you will please to draw it fine. When you see him a complete heathen, why, then you shall have the job gev ye to convert him—I'll promise ye that, Mrs. Dorothy.”

She did not look pleased at this, and was just moving away to her work, when she remarked with a forced laugh, “How you do Dorothy me, Mr. Pedder! You make me quite sick of my own name: it's always Mrs. Dorothy this, Mrs. Sharpe that! I do wish you'd oblige me by dropping it from this time forth, and call me by my second name—just Sarah, or Mrs. Sarah. It would be such a relief to me.”

“I guess it would now!” said Matthew with a double meaning. And his eyes danced with delight at the way in which she had carried him over the chief difficulty which now remained, in the way of preventing the boy's recognition of his grandmother. “Yes, surely, I'll call ye Sarah, or anything else you may please to mention. So I'll bid goodbye to Mrs. Dorothy Sharpe for ever, now you're goin' to yer work.”

And as she turned away with a smile of relief he said to himself, “Eh! but she's a deep old sinner, and a hard un, too!”

(To be continued.)