

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1878.

SUNDAY, March 17th, 1878.—Hezekiah and the Assyrians.—2 Chron. xxxii. 9-21.

RELATED SCRIPTURES.—2 Kings xviii. 19; Isaiah xxxvi. 37.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 19-21.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles.”—2 Chron. xxxii. 8.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 2 Kings xviii. 13-37. Tuesday, 2 Kings xix. Wednesday, Isaiah xxxvi. Thursday, Isaiah xxxvi. Friday, Isaiah xxxvii. Saturday, 2 Timothy iv. Sunday, Ps. xlv.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. The Assyrian messengers. Vs. 9. II. Their blasphemous message. Vs. 10-19. III. Its influence. Vs. 20. IV. The Assyrians destroyed. Vs. 21.

QUESTIONS.—Why was it now needful for Assyria to take Judah? On the first invasion of his kingdom what act of submission did Hezekiah show? 2 Kings xviii. 14-16. When did the second invasion take place.

Vs. 9. What messengers were now sent to Hezekiah? 2 Kings xviii. 17.

Vss. 10-19. In what tone did they speak? What do they accuse Hezekiah of doing? What gods had he removed? 2 Kings xviii. 4. To what does Sennacherib liken Jehovah?

Vs. 20. Whose prayer do we now hear? Who predicts the defeat of the enemy?

Vs. 21. How were the Assyrians destroyed? How many were slain? What became of Sennacherib?

Israel was carried into captivity by Shalmanezar and Sargon. (B. C. 721.) This left Judah unconquered. But Judah with its numerous fortresses in southern Palestine, was in the highway of the expedition of Assyria from the east against Egypt. Besides this, Hezekiah had thrown off the Assyrian yoke, to humble whom, as a first step to Egyptian conquest, Sennacherib, the successor of Sargon, appeared before Jerusalem. Whereupon Hezekiah—bought at a great price his departure. 2 Kings xviii. 14-16. Two years after this, however, he returned, on a resolve to conquer Egypt, and from necessity again invaded Judah, and laid siege to Libnah and Lachish. Insulting messages were sent to Hezekiah. He was thrown into great distress. He requested Isaiah to pray for him. He himself prayed. 2 Kings xix. 15-19. Then Isaiah prophesied a defeat of the enemy (2 Kings xix. 20-34.)

EXPOSITION.—Here again we have need to consult and compare the accounts in 2 Kings, and in Isaiah. We should also compare the context, and get well in mind the connection of those events of which our lesson forms a part, recorded in xxxi. xxxii. Hezekiah's sickness occurred fifteen years before his death; but the events of the present lesson come very near the close of his life. Between our last lesson and to-day's lesson, has intervened nearly the whole good reign of the good king Hezekiah. Sennacherib succeeded Sargon, his father, as king of Assyria, B. C. 702.

Verse 9.—Send his Servants.—In 2 Kings xviii. 17, their names are given as Tartan, Rabsharis, and Rabshakeh, though Assyrian scholars say these are official titles rather than proper names, signifying respectively Captain, the Chief Eunuch, and the Chief Cup-bearer. Lachish. This was some thirty-miles to the southwest of Jerusalem, near the border between Judah and the Philistines, and was thus near the way of passage to and from Egypt. “Libnah” was near it. We must bear in mind that Egypt was the chief power aimed at by Assyria. The contempt expressed for the little dependent kingdom of Judah was really felt, and the plan was to crush this kingdom by the way. See the spirited description of the army's entrance into Judah in Isaiah x. 28-34.

Verses 10-12. Whereon do ye trust.—They supposed that Judah was in alliance with Egypt (2 Kings xviii. 21), and for this reason had ventured to refuse to continue the payment of tribute, and to open Jerusalem to the entrance of the invading army. At Lachish, of course, Sennacherib was between Egypt and Jerusalem, and thus in a position to cut off help from thence. In the siege, the word so rendered may mean “in the stronghold.” Persuade. Rather, seduce,

having brought his people to cast off the yoke of subjection to Assyria. His high places. Jehovah's, evidently mistaking the nature of Hezekiah's reforms. Before one altar. This fact seems to have struck heathen nations strangely. It fitted monotheism, but not polytheism.

Verses 13-18.—The people of other lands.—See the enumeration in 2 Kings xviii. 33, 34. At this time Assyria had no rival save Egypt. Were the gods of those nations able, etc. Profane history confirms such representation of the highly religious character of the most ancient nations, and of the genuineness of their faith in divinities that were spurious. That your God. The greatness of the gods was measured by the greatness of the nation worshipping them. Hence the contempt expressed in this “your,”—your God, so insignificant in comparison with theirs. Persuade.—Rather, as above, seduce, and so fitly following “deceive.” How much less shall our God. More fully expressing the contempt for the comparative weakness of Judah's God. Spake yet more. A part, at least, of that which is here referred to is given in 2 Kings xviii, and in Isaiah xxxvi.

Verses 17-19.—He wrote letters.—Rather, a letter, written after the messengers had gone back to their chief (2 Kings xix. 14), and sent to Jerusalem by the same messengers. The letter contained the same proud and blasphemous threats as the messengers had spoken. Cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech. The intent was to create on the part of the people, through fear, a revolt against Hezekiah, and thus secure easy possession of city.

Verses 20, 21.—The king, the prophet. Prayers and prophecy. 2 Kings xix. 14-34. Sent an angel. This form of expression could be used if a pestilence smote the army. They that came forth of his own bowels. His sons.

We hear have an account (1), of messengers sent to Judah by the Assyrian king; (2), of the substance of the messages; (3), of the artifices to give effect to the message; (4), of results.

I. The Messengers.—Verse 9.—(1.) They were duly authorized. (2.) They, therefore, bore the full authority of Assyria. (3.) They were thus regarded at Jerusalem. In all this there was nothing not usual in the relations of nation to nation, organizations to organizations.

II. The Message.—Verses 10-16.—(1.) Its aim was to bring Judah to submit to Assyria. The kingdom of the world summoned the kingdom of Jehovah to surrender. Not only would it not have Jehovah reign over it, but it would not have him reign. (2.) The message scouted the faith on which the Jews stood (verses 10, 11.) It correctly intimated that if this faith rested upon the word of Egypt, the only rival world power, it was worthless. Then it sneered at the faith as founded only on the word of Judah's king. (3.) By egregious blundering it held up Hezekiah to ridicule and distrust for that which justly inspired in his people the utmost respect and confidence. (Vs. 12.) (4.) It boasted the superiority of the power of Assyria over the power of Jehovah, and appealed in proof to facts, solid facts (vs. 13-15.) It was the mistake of the message that it mistook the hiding of Jehovah's power for his lack of power. It mistook the permission of evil for the inability to match the power of evil. So does success beget pride, and quickly make a man think himself a god. (5.) It joined most fitly in one rebuke Jehovah and Hezekiah, God and his servant (vs. 16.) So now.

III. The Artifices.—Verses 16-19.—The bad message was conveyed in a bad way, and quite alien to the proprieties of national intercourse. Even the sending of the letter was, in the circumstances, as bad as the coarse harangue of Hezekiah's subjects.

IV. The Results.—Verses 20, 21.—(1.) The people were not driven or drawn from their loyalty. (2.) Their leaders were driven, not to submit themselves to Sennacherib, but to submit their cause to God. The attempt to kill faith strengthened it. (3.) The prayer moved God to interfere for his people. He first gave his special promise of help through his prophets, and then he gave the help promised. The slaughter of 185,000 (2 Kings xix. 35) of the host by the hand of God in one night turned pride to shame. Flight ended in the king's murder. Behold the severity of

God when he arises to defend his people and his cause.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, March 24th, 1878.—Manasseh brought to Repentance.—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 9-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.”—Revelation iii. 18.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

Hezekiah heard that Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was coming with a great army, and he got ready for him, and told his soldiers to be brave; for, said he, “With us is the Lord our God, to help us.” But afterwards he became afraid himself and sent Sennacherib a large sum of money to go away. He went away; but, two years after, came back, and sent three of his captains to Jerusalem, while he stayed twenty miles away. Hezekiah would not go to talk with the Assyrian captains, but sent three of his own chief men. Rabshakeh, the captain who spoke for the Assyrians, began to mock the people of Judah for trusting in God. The three Jews begged him not to talk so loud, and not to speak in the Jew's language, so the soldiers on the wall would not understand. But Rabshakeh spoke louder than ever, and told the people not to let Hezekiah make them trust in the Lord. Said he, “Have the gods of other countries delivered them out of the hands of the Assyrians? Why, then, should your God deliver you?” Sennacherib sent Hezekiah a letter, which was much like Rabshakeh's speech. Hezekiah took the letter to the house of God, and spread it out and asked help from the Lord. In the night an angel came silently, and killed 185,000 of the Assyrians.

Booth's Department.

The Infidel and the Young Lady.

At a fashionable party, a young physician present spoke of one of his patients whose case he considered a very critical one. He said he was “sorry to lose him,” for he was a noble young man, but very unnecessarily concerned about his soul; and Christians increased his agitation by talking with him and praying for him.” He wished “Christians would let his patients alone.” Death was “but an endless sleep, the religion of Christ a delusion, and its followers were not persons of the highest culture or intelligence.”

A young lady sitting near, and one of the gayest of that company, said: “Pardon me, doctor; but I cannot hear you talk thus, and remain silent. I am not a professor of religion. I never knew anything about it, experimentally, but my mother was a Christian. Times without number she has taken me with her to her room, and with her hand upon my head, she has prayed that God would give her grace to train me for the skies. Two years ago, my precious mother died, and the religion she loved through life sustained her in her dying hour. She called us to the bedside, and with her face shining with glory, asked us to meet her in heaven, and I promised to do so. And now,” said the young lady, displaying deep emotion, “can I believe that this is all a delusion? that my mother sleeps an eternal sleep? that she will never waken again in the morning of the resurrection, and that I shall see her no more? No; I cannot, I will not believe it.” Her brother tried to quiet her, for by this time she had the attention of all present. “No,” said she, “brother, let me alone; I must defend my mother's God.”

The physician made no reply, and soon left the room. He was found shortly afterwards pacing the floor of an adjoining room in great agitation and distress of spirit. “What is the matter?” a friend inquired. “Oh!” said he, “that young lady is right. I, too, must have the religion I have despised, or I am lost forever.” And the result of the convictions thus awakened was, that both the young lady and the physician were converted to Christ.

English is the court language of Germany. It is a proud moment when an American, visiting the palace, is saluted with “Dot was a pooty schplentit morain, don't he?”

Little Kitty's Questions.

“Mamma,” said a little girl to her mother one day, “won't you tell me how I can be good inside?”

“What do you mean?” asked her mother.

“Why, I mean that I don't have right feelings in my heart. Papa calls me a good girl, and so does Auntie, and almost every body; but I'm not good at all.”

“I'm very sorry,” said the mother.

“And so am I,” said Kitty. “But I know my heart is very wicked. Why, mother, when I was dressed to ride yesterday, and the carriage came to the door, you remember papa said there was no room for me. Well, I went into the house; and when you came back, Auntie told you I had been very good about it. But she didn't know. I didn't say anything to her, but I went upstairs, and though I didn't cry, I thought very wicked things. I kicked the cushion about, because I was so vexed; and I wished the carriage would upset, and the horses would run away!”

And Kitty ended as she had begun, by saying, “Oh, mamma, won't you tell me how I can be good inside?”

There are a great many children and grown people too, who are like Kitty. They keep their lips from saying bad things, but they can't keep their hearts from thinking and feeling what is bad. They can be good outside, but they can't be good inside. They can stop the stream from running on, but they can't stop the fountain from flowing out.

If we want to have the fountain stopped, if we want to be good inside, we must get our hearts changed. And Jesus only can do that. He says in the Bible, “A new heart will I give them, and a new spirit will I put within them.” When Jesus undertakes to make people good, he always begins with the heart. When that is made good, then we are good inside. If you make a fountain pure, then you may be very sure that the streams which flow out from it will be pure also.

Some time ago I went to see one of the big ships our government is building. The friend who was showing me about asked me if I knew where they first went to work in building a ship? I said “No.” “Well,” said he, “the first piece of timber that is laid is the middle of the keel; and all the rest is built upon that.” Now the centre of the keel is the very middle of the ship. “Ah!” I thought to myself, when I heard this—that is just what Jesus does, when he is going to build a Christian. He begins at the heart. He makes his people “good inside” first; then he makes them good outside afterwards.

Uncertain what to do.

Some one touched the writer as he was leaving a prayer-meeting. He turned as he saw the face of a well-known Christian brother; and close at hand stood a young lady, dressed in deep mourning, with whom he had been conversing—standing there, a child of sorrow. The big tears were slowly rolling down her cheeks, and then she would wipe them away, as if she had been half unconscious of their falling.

“Here is a lady,” said the gentleman, to whom I wish you to say a few words. She says she is ‘uncertain what to do.’”

I soon saw that she was in spiritual trouble.

“Why are you uncertain what to do?” we inquired.

“I do not understand the next step to be taken,” said she.

“Where are you now?” we asked.

“I have been coming daily to the meetings for four weeks, and all that time I have felt anxious about my soul, but all I do does not seem to make my case any better.”

“And what do you try to do?”

“I have striven to convince myself that I am a sinner—as I know I am. But though I know it, as a truth, I do not feel about it as I should.”

“How would you feel about it, if you could?”

“I would have deep conviction.”

“What is your present impression about yourself?”

“That I am a great sinner—that is all.”

“And what would you have more?”

“That is what I do not understand. My next step should be for deeper conviction. But what further can I do?”

“Your mistake is very common one.”

Your next step, and your only step, is to go to Christ, just as you are. Go to him at once. You can do nothing. Hitherto you have been relying upon yourself. Renounce all that is a dishonour done to Christ, as a Saviour, and go to him for all the help you need, hope for, or desire.”

“Is that all?”

“That is all. You must stop trying to do anything, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Go to him who says to you, ‘Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out.’”

“Oh,” said she, as if a new light had dawned upon her mind, “is that my next step?”

“Not your next step, as if you had already taken one or more right steps. Going to Christ is your first step, and only step. He does not say, Come to conviction—come to a deeper sense of sin. But he says, ‘Come unto me.’”

“Oh! what a self-righteous creature I am. I see it all now. I have been refusing Christ, while all this time I thought I was preparing to come to him,” she said, evidently disappointed in herself.

“Will you go to Jesus now?” was hastily asked.

She looked up with a smile, and great resolution depicted in her intelligent face, as she answered:

“I WILL.”

The Beauty of Nature.

I am never more convinced of the progress of mankind than when I think of the sentiment developed in us by our intercourse with nature, and mark how it augments and refines with our moral culture, and also (although this is not so generally admitted) with our scientific knowledge. We learn from age to age to see the beauty of the world; or, what comes to the same thing, this beautiful creation of the sentiment of beauty is developing itself in us. Only reflect what regions lovely as paradise there are over all Asia and Europe, and in every quarter of the globe, waiting to receive their counterparts in the conscious creature. The men who are now living there do not see the Eden that surrounds them. They lack the moral and intellectual vision. It is not too bold a thing to say that the mind of man once cultivated, he will see around him the Paradise he laments that he has lost. For one “Paradise Lost,” he will sing of a thousand he has gained. How every tender as well as every grand sentiment comes reflected back to us from the beautiful objects of nature! Therein lies their very power to enchant us. Nature is full of our own human heart. That rose—has not gentle woman leant over it, and left the reflection of her own blush upon the leaves of the flower? To the old man there is childhood in every bud. No hand so rude but that it gathers with the flower more and other beauty than what the dews of Heaven have nourished in it.—William Smith.

A Troublesome Little Word.

“As”—That little word has cost me more trouble than the whole vocabulary of the English language. It often makes me tremble from head to foot, and not unfrequently brings tears to my eyes. It is not the two letters of which it is formed, or just the word itself, but the place which it occupies in one of the petitions of that inimitable prayer which Jesus Christ taught to his disciples: “Forgive me my debts as I forgive my debtors.” There it stands as the deciding index on the beam of the balance; while in one scale is placed my prayer for forgiveness, and in the other the exact weight of my pardon. As I forgive, so, Lord, forgive me.

We repeat the Lord's Prayer from earliest infancy to our dying day; yet if we indulge in an unforgiving spirit we unconsciously plead for punishment, instead of mercy. The question is: Can I conscientiously use the argument, “for I also forgive every one?” And, if not, can I expect my sin-darkened soul to be washed and made whiter than snow?—Observer.

The power of duly appreciating little things belongs to a great mind; a narrow-minded man has it not, for to him they are great things.—Whately.