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The Sabbath-School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter, Lesson: Nov. 29 '98

MANASSEH'S SIN AND REPENTANCE.—2 CHRONICLES 33: 9-16.

Commit Verses 12, 13.

Golden Text.—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.—1 JOHN 1: 9.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Manasseh reigned fifty-five years, from B. C. 697 to 642.

Place.—The kingdom of Judah, especially Jerusalem.

Kings.—Manasseh, king of Judah; Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, 681-668; succeeded by his son Assurbanipal, 668-626.

Prophets.—Micah's later prophecies belong to the first part of Manasseh's reign; Nahum, in his later years; and Jeremiah and Zephaniah were born during his reign.

Israel was extinct as a kingdom, but the country was being peopled by a forced levy from Assyrian tributaries, mingled with the few old inhabitants, forming the Samaritan race.

Manasseh, the fourteenth ruler of Judah, was the son of the good Hezekiah and Hephzibah. He began to reign at 12 years of age, and he was not prepared to resist the influence of the idolatrous companions and leaders around him. He was one of the worst of kings in the first part of his reign, suffered captivity, repented, and tried to undo the evil he had done. His kingdom was not entirely independent of Assyria; although it was a distinct kingdom, it was a tributary.

"The first twenty years of his reign were spent in comparative peace with Assyria."

MANASSEH'S CRIMES AGAINST GOD AND HIS NATIVE LAND.—Made Judah... to err. He led them in the evils they delighted to commit, and drew many into sin who under good influences would have been at least outwardly moral. To do worse than the heathen.

First. All forms of idolatry were introduced and made popular, and images of Baal, Ashtoreth (Venus), and Molech were set up. The king made his son pass through the fire to Molech. He dealt with wizards and necromancers, and, in short, seduced the people to do more wickedness than the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before them. The sacred furnace of Tophet was built upon an enlarged scale. He himself undertook the sacrifice of his own children. The worship of the heavenly bodies, begun by Ahaz, was restored. In the garden and on the flat roofs of the houses were built brick altars (Zeph. 1: 5; Jer. 19: 13; Isa. 65: 3), and the little clouds of incense were perpetually ascending. Even the practise of human sacrifice became general.

SECOND. The temple itself was defiled, and the services of the true religion were displaced by those of idolatry. The king built altars to the stars of the Zodiac (Mazraoth), both in the outer court of the temple and in the court of the priests, and on these altars incense or victims were continually burned.

THIRD. Manasseh began a great persecution against those who adhered to the true religion (2 Kings 21: 16).

The Lord spoke. The prophets denounced Manasseh, and declared that, in consequence of his crimes, God would bring upon Jerusalem such evil as would cause both the ears of him that heard it to tingle, that he would wipe out Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish (2 Kings 21: 12, 13). The finest oracles of Micah (6: 17) were probably uttered in the reign of Manasseh. The apostasies of the king and the denunciation of the prophets thus came into fierce collision, and led naturally to persecution and bloodshed.

Thus it came to pass "that Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (2 Kings 21: 16). Josephus says "He barbarously slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews, nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them." "Theables who took their part were thrown headlong from the rocky cliffs of Jerusalem" (Psa. 141: 7).

THE NATURAL RESULT of this idolatry was a deluge of crime,—murder, persecution, licentiousness, which was one of the great attractions of idol worship, violence, lying, and all forms of corruption.

THE REACTION. This flood of corruption was a natural reaction from Hezekiah's reformation on the part of those who had been compelled to show outward reformation while their hearts and desires were unchanged.

ILLUSTRATION. There is a remarkable similarity in some respects between the work of Savonarola

and the rulers under his influence, at Florence (1495), and that of Isaiah and Hezekiah. For a time the whole city was dominated in a marvellous way by the spiritual reformation. So long as it lasted (two years) immorality and luxury were out of fashion in Florence. The streets were safe, the populace quiet. The carnival under the Medici had been a very Saturnalia of license, but Savonarola so controlled the passions of the street gamins, whom all other kinds of authority had been tried in vain to curb in their frolic, especially the dangerous war with stones, that he organized them into bands, set them to collecting money for the poor, and to collect the dresses and masks of the carnival, and they made in the square a great bonfire of Vanities; they gave up their vile songs for hymns of praise. The millennium itself must have arrived in Florence in the end of the fifteenth century, had that great voice continued dominant, as it was for a time.

In two years all this was changed. Savonarola was burned. Florence, preternaturally tranquilized for a moment by one great influence, had returned to her old use and wont, breathing flames and slaughter more easily than blessings.

NOTE that there are always two reactions after a great revival or reformation. One is the reaction of high and noble feelings into actions that correspond, into ordinary daily life with a higher ideal and a purer motive. The other is the reaction of those whose hearts are unchanged, but whose outward life was constrained into morality against inclinations and passions unsubdued. To these, and these only, do the words of Christ apply, concerning the unclean spirit gone out of a man, and returning with seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and abiding in him (Matt. 12: 43-45). No holy spirit, no angel of love, had taken up his abode there to keep out the evil.

THE PUNISHMENT.—THE LORD brought upon them... Assyria. Doubtless through some natural result of his impiety. The king of Assyria was Esarhaddon or his son, Assurbanipal. Took Manasseh among the thorns. Some regard this as meaning took him from among the thorns, where he had hidden. But most critics regard the word thorns as meaning hooks or rings. An instrument was used by the ancients for taming their prisoner, as appears from Amos 4: 2. They were in the habit of passing a ring through the flesh of their more distinguished prisoners, of attaching a thong or a rope to it, and of thus leading them about as with a bridle. Bound him with fetters. Probably manacles for the hands, and fetters for the feet. Carried him to Babylon. It is a curious confirmation of the history that just at this time the captive was taken to Babylon instead of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. For Esarhaddon was the only king of Assyria who, from time to time, held his court at Babylon.

REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION.—V. 12, 13. When he was in affliction, he besought the LORD. That he should do this was one purpose of his affliction.

Compare the parable of the Prodigal Son.

And humbled himself greatly. His after conduct shows that he was truly penitent in his inmost heart. He was estranged of him. God loves to hear and answer prayer. He does it always in the best way for the one who prays; sometimes by making the sorrow complete its good work, sometimes by delivering from the sorrow. And brought him again to Jerusalem.

FRUITS OF REPENTANCE.—Vs. 14-16. First. He made a patriotic defense of his country. He built a wall. Rather, he built the outer wall of the city of David on the west of Gihon in the valley. The captains who took Manasse prisoner (v. 11) had probably destroyed or greatly damaged this part of the fortifications. And compassed about Ophel, the southern part of the temple hill. Fenced cities. Defending the surrounding country.

Second. He took away the strange gods... and cast them out of the city. He destroyed the means of idolatry, which he had introduced in former years.

Third. He repaired the altar of the LORD, etc. He restored the services of true religion.

Fourth. He enforced the reforms by command as well as example.

PRACTICAL HINTS.

The early manhood of Manasseh illustrates that, when the children of the good sometimes become vicious, they become worse than the average of wicked men.

Sin is a leaven, a disease that is catching. No one can sin to himself alone. The higher the sinner's position, the more evil his influence.

A common lamp may go out and do little harm, but if the light on a lighthouse goes out or is misplaced, it leads great ships on to the rocks.

Punishment has several objects. One of them is that it should be a school for training men. It opens the eyes to see the horrible nature of sin, and the greatness of the need for repentance.

The divine mercy far exceeds the divine vengeance.

The salvation of this penitent prince should be both an encouragement and a warning to those sons of Christian parents who have lost the paths of virtue. Often is it said of the penitent thief on the cross, that one such case is recorded in the Scriptures, that none may despair of repentance on a death-bed, and but one, that none may presume.

Manasseh is unique alike in extreme wickedness, sincere repentance, and thorough reformation. Such a repentance gives us hope for the most abandoned.

It is almost impossible to undo the evil we have done.

A drunkard is a good example. He may repent and become a good man, but he cannot undo all that he has done in leading the young astray, he cannot take the bad seed out of their hearts, nor the Cain mark from their foreheads. The misleading light may be re-tor-d and shine brightly henceforth, but it cannot restore the ships that have been wrecked in the past.

The Teacher's Point of View.

BY MARGARET E. SANGSTER, IN S. S. TIMES.

Broadly stated, the teacher's point of view is the salvation of souls. At least, this is what it ought to be; for, whatever else Sunday school teaching stands for, it does stand for the bringing of the young to Christ.

But if we who are teachers should sometimes, in the hush of the quiet hour, take ourselves seriously to task, question ourselves as to the reason why we teach, the work we are doing, the influence we hope to exert, we might, being candid, be surprised at the result of our introspection.

The point of view of some teachers is the social one,—the bringing together of young people from different families, and fusing them into an agreeable weekly circle, like an informal and quite intimate club. This point of view is an excellent one from which to start, but it is valuable more for the opportunities it makes possible for any lasting good which it accomplishes.

Other teachers are scholarly and diligent, make very thorough preparation, and to the lesson of the hour are able to bring much that is strong and suggestive by way of collateral reading and testimony. To be with such teachers is to a certain extent a liberal education, and their knowledge of literature and disciplined powers of intellect enable them to make Bible study very interesting. Sometimes, even, it is too interesting for real profit, as the effluence of poetry and the charm of science lead away from the Word. The teachers do not intend this, but they have looked at the matter from the intellectual point of view, to the detriment of spirituality.

More and more it grows on me, after a happy life of service, that the only safe aim for us is to strive to be co-workers with God. In our classes there is given to us, in perhaps a closer degree, perhaps at closer range, the privilege of coming heart to heart with our scholars. The little group gathers with a beautiful loyalty around the teacher. All unconsciously the teacher is the scholars' model. There is absent something of the restraint of the secular school. There is present the very winsomeness of love, its potency, its abounding charm.

Shall we not, for ourselves, in these brilliant weeks of our winter work, seek a larger endowment of the Spirit? Shall we be contented with less than our Lord is willing and waiting to give us: shall we not go to our classes seeing Jesus only, our point of view being his, our desire to bring all the resources of personality, prayer, and consecration, to the conversion of our scholars? And then, shall we not try to lead them, as our Master and Friend would have us, into a way of self-denial, of loving devotedness, of rich outpouring for him, in his name?

Foreign Missions.

Idolatry is doomed. We cannot afford not to support foreign missions.

He who does not enjoy giving, never gives enough.

To pray without paying is not faith but presumption.

We love hat trimmings more than we love the heathen.

Shall the heathen receive all of our vices and none of our virtues? Helping others up will strengthen the muscles of your own back.

We love candy and gum several

times as much as we love the heathen.

The root of unbelief in foreign missions is want of faith in the Gospel.

It is time to do more than Hold the Fort. We ought to storm the breastworks.

Not to believe in or work for foreign missions is to belittle Christ's love and efficiency.

The Christianity that is not broad enough to care for the other sheep will not seek for the perishing at home.

If a tithe of the money that is used to ruin Africa were spent in mission work, it would be evangelized in one generation.

For any one who indulges in any form of useless ornamentation or luxury to talk of not affording to give for missions is to make a farce of his religion.—The Free Baptist.

A Good Retort.

Before the days of the Forbes Mackenzie act, a douce and Scotch wife, on one occasion, had neglected to lay in her usual supply of oil on the Saturday night, and was reminded of her neglect on the evening of the ensuing Sabbath, as she was about to look for the passage which her minister had taken for his text. The cruse was dry, and Janet thought rather than break the custom she had followed from her youth, she would try if she could purchase some. Na, na, said the grocer she usually bought it of, we sell nae oil on the Sabbath day. Janet, who made no other application, when she reached her darksome dwelling, recollected that the grocer was in the habit of occasionally selling whiskey on that day, and she conceived the idea of giving the religious man a practical rebuke. Away she went with a little square bottle, and presenting it asked him to give her a gill of his best aqua. The consistent Christian filled his imperial measure, and asked for the bottle she held in her hand to pour it into. Na, na, said Janet, if ye wanna sell oil to let me see, I'll hae nane o' your whisky to mak me blind!

Lies of Children.

There is a difference between a lie to deceive or mislead, and the imaginings of a child having a dramatic temperament. Sometimes parents are largely responsible for the lies told by children, because the truth when told is made to appear as bad as a lie, or even worse, and brings severe punishment. Often the habit of lying in a child is due to imitation. The home has an atmosphere of falsehood. The world is a constant revelation to a child. It is often misled because it does not understand, and misstatements follow. Inaccuracy in statement is a common fault, and is sometimes due to inattention.—Outlook.

He only is good who shows himself grateful for all benefits that he receives even for the least.

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