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The Sabbath-School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter, Lesson 12 Dec. 13 '98

THE CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

—JEREMIAH 52: 1-11.

Read 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 8.

Commit Verse 9-11.
Golden Text.—Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.—JER. 29: 13.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Jerusalem was destroyed B. C. 586 (or 587). The struggle against the Babylonians continued about 20 years (605-586).

Place.—(1) Jerusalem, a city of 20,000 inhabitants, according to Theodotus. (2) Riblah, 200 miles north of Jerusalem, at the base of Lebanon, at the junction where the great road from the East parts one southwestward to Tyre, along the coast, the other southward to Palestine and Egypt.

Rulers.—Zedekiah, the twenty-first and last king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon B. C. 604-559. Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt. The "seven wise men" flourish in Greece.

Three kings of Judah were now in captivity.—Jehoiachin in Egypt, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah in Babylon.

Prophets.—(1) Jeremiah in Judah, B. C. 627-582. (2) Ezekiel on the banks of the river Chebar, 35 miles north of Babylon, but prophesying to the Jews both in Judah and Babylonia, B. C. 598-573. (3) Daniel in Babylon; carried captive there B. C. 604.

THE FIRST CAPTIVITY.—This took place in the fourth year of Jehoiachin (605 B. C.) by Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army. Daniel and his friends were carried captive to Babylon, and from this date is to be counted the seventy years of captivity foretold by Jeremiah. The captivity began at different points and had various endings.

THE PERIOD OF REST.—For seven or eight years, during the remainder of Jehoiachin's reign, Jehoiachin was a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar during this time. It was an opportunity for repentance.

THE SECOND CAPTIVITY.—Jehoiachin was the son of Jehoiakim, and began to reign when 18 years old. He reigned only three months. He seems to have rebelled against Babylon, for Nebuchadnezzar again came with his army and besieged Jerusalem captured the city, and sent a great amount of treasures from the palace and the temple to Babylon, with 10,000 of the more important of the people. Among these were the prophet Ezekiel, and the great grandfather of Mordecai, Queen Esther's cousin, and King Jehoiakim himself, who lay in prison at Babylon for thirty-seven years before he was released.

ANOTHER PERIOD OF REST.—Vs. 13. Zedekiah was the uncle of Jehoiachin, and half brother of Jehoiakim. Zedekiah was weak in will. He was one of those unfortunate characters, at the head of affairs during a great crisis, without the strength of character to do what they know to be right. Mother's name was Hamutal. She was one of the wives of King Josiah. Daughter of Jeremiah. Spoken of in 2 Kings 23: 31; nothing further is known of him. He did that which was evil, etc. For what he did, see last lesson's account of Jehoiakim's sins. For through the anger of the LORD it, the evil courses of Zedekiah, came to pass. The sin was so deep seated, and the sinner so determined on his sin, that there was nothing to do but to let it work itself out and bring its own ruin and punishment. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. Sin is always weakness and blindness. God did everything he wisely could to prevent his people from rushing to their own destruction (2 Chron. 36: 15). He laid upon them several lesser evils as warnings to avoid the way to final destruction. Jerusalem was captured and part of its treasure removed, but the city was not destroyed, and the temple stood. Kings were made captive as a warning to coming kings; new kings were chosen, and the kingdom remained. Leaders of the people were carried captive to Babylon. These were warnings, not destruction. The doom came slowly, to give time for thought and repentance. Prophets were sent to warn and entreat. Jeremiah had been speaking God's Word to them for forty years. For nearly ten years Ezekiel, also, had been uttering earnest words to the Jews in Palestine.

THE THIRD CAPTIVITY. THE GREAT SIEGE, AND DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.—The siege lasted a year and a half. In the ninth year, tenth month. Last of December, B. C. 588. Nebuchadnezzar. This is correct spelling of Nebuchadnezzar. And all his army. This consisted of the fierce and cruel Chal-

deans (v. 10), with warriors from the surrounding nations, enemies of the Jews, and tributaries of Babylon, the Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites. Pached against it. Surrounded it with their armies. Built forts against it round about. These forts were probably movable wooden towers, provided with battering-rams. Fourth month, June-July, B. C. 586. The famine was sore. For the horrors of this siege see Lamentations. Mothers were driven to murder and eat their children. The richest citizens, even ladies in their magnificent crimson robes, wandered about searching for scraps in the dunghills. The city was broken up. Broken into. A breach was made in the walls at midnight, according to Josephus. The gate (on the north) between the two walls of Mounts Moriah and Zion. This path came out in the king's garden, which was laid out near Siloam, at the southeast corner of the city. Now the Chaldeans were by the city round about. This is mentioned so as to explain how escape was possible. The Jewish people fled southward by the way of the plain. The temple, the palace, the houses of the nobles, were deliberately set on fire. The very bones and framework of Jerusalem appeared to be wrapt in flames. Some of the princes were hung up by their hands on the temple walls; others were carried off to execution at Riblah. When the assailants were once masters of the place, an indiscriminate slaughter appears to have succeeded. The prisoners were either impaled and subjected to horrible tortures, or carried away as slaves.

THE FATE OF KING ZEDEKIAH.—Vs. 8-11. The Chaldeans... overtook Zedekiah, and all his soldiers and friends deserted him. Gave judgment upon him; i. e. brought him to trial as a common criminal. Slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. The punishment of Zedekiah was doubly cruel; first, his being made to witness the execution of his own sons, and then his being deprived of sight, so that the last scenes impressed upon him would be the death agonies of his children. Put out the eyes of Zedekiah. This blinding of captives was a common Assyrian practice.

REMARKABLE FULFILLMENT OF TWO PROPHECIES CONCERNING ZEDEKIAH.—(1) Ezekiel by the river Chebar in Babylonia declared that King Zedekiah should be led into Babylon a captive, should there live and there die, and yet he should never see the city (Ezek. 12: 10-13). (2) On the other hand, Jeremiah, confined in Jerusalem during the siege, said that Zedekiah should speak with Nebuchadnezzar mouth to mouth, and see his eyes. Find "the exact words (Jer. 32: 35). We have seen how exactly these seemingly contradictory prophecies were fulfilled.

THE LAMENTATIONS.—Jeremiah's book of Lamentations or Dirges consists of five poems or dirges written about this captivity. Four of them are alphabetical poems, the twenty-two stanzas commencing with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

THE ONE STAR OF BETHLEHEM GLIMMERS THROUGH THE GLOOM.—Through the darkness came gleams of comfort, and hope came to the people. Jeremiah promised a return after seventy years. Isaiah continually foretold that a remnant should be saved, and pictured out glorious times to come.

PRACTICAL HINTS.

The great lesson to be learned from this destruction of Jerusalem is God's persistent and constant effort to prevent it. God uses even bad men as instruments for disciplining his people. The punishment came slowly because of God's mercy. The punishment was a necessary part of God's discipline. We learn a good lesson from the forced repentance of some of the nobles. It proved useless, because it was not from the heart. There is a too late. There is an unpardonable sin. Not because God is unwilling to forgive, or not desirous to save, but because no moral influence can touch the hardened soul. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. There is always a remnant left. God's kingdom does not perish. He changes its form; he winnows out the chaff; he cuts off the branches of the tree; but there is ever a true seed, a living root, from which his kingdom will flourish forever.

The Stone of Destiny.

Whether it is the most precious relic in all England or no, there certainly is under the seat of the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey the stone called Lia Fail, the stone of destiny, not the stone wonderful. All the sovereigns of England since Edward the First have been crowned upon it. Edward carried it away from Soane, in Scotland, because he had respect to the ancient

prophecy which said that wherever the stone was there the Scotch or Celtic race should bear rule.

There is no need to manufacture history for an account of this stone, for there are authentic records of its movements since it first came to Ireland.

The Tuatha de Danans came to Erin, bringing the Lia Fail with them, about the time when Ruth was gleaning in the fields of Boaz. They were not the tribe of Dan, for the ten tribes were not carried away captive to Assyria until 572 years later.

Some ancient authorities call the Tuatha de Danans Phenicians, some say they were Chaldeans. If they were Chaldeans, or if even their priests, cast, or Druids, were Chaldeans, it might account for the Round Towers which were evidently built by men acquainted with the stars. It might also account for their reputation as magicians.

Whether these clever pagans went down to Bethel and cribbed Jacob's pillow stone, whether the worshippers of Crom Cruach and his twelve sun gods would prize the stone of El-Beth-el or not, there is no record of such an occurrence, but it is not very likely.

For two hundred years the Tuatha de Danans possessed and ruled Ireland. If the kings of Israel, Saul, David, Solomon and the rest were crowned upon a stone—there is no record of it—it was not on that stone which was in Ireland on the hill of Tara during that time. The Word only speaks of anointing—Saul on the highway, David at his father's house, Solomon at Gihon. If we are determined to be wise above what is written and to haul the Lia Fail into the Bible narrative vi et armis it might be well to remember that there are records which cannot be ignored.

The Milesians, according to O'Hart, no mean authority, came to Ireland a year after Solomon laid the foundation of the temple at Jerusalem. They conquered the Tuatha de Danans, reigned in their stead and kept the Lia Fail at Tara in royal Meath. All the Milesian kings were crowned upon it until Fergus took it to Scotland.

Fergus, the first king of Scotland, obtained the Lia Fail from his brother, the high king of all Ireland, and took it to Scotland that it might be used at his inauguration because of the ancient prophecy. That was in the beginning of the sixth century. It was carefully guarded by the Scots as the palladium of the kingdom, first at the monastery of St. Columba Kille in Iona, afterwards at Dunstaffnage. In the ninth century Kenneth McAlpine, king of Scotland, after having conquered the Picts, removed it to Soane where all the subsequent kings of Scotland were crowned. There it was kept till King Edward carried it off.

Heremon was a Milesian prince, not a Tuatha de Danan. He reigned over Erin and died five hundred years before Zedekiah was taken captive. Her Majesty Queen Victoria is undoubtedly descended from Heremon, without Zedekiah's daughter.

It is positively cruel to try to burden Jeremiah in his old age, when his heart was full of lamentation, mourning and woe, with the additional load of the Lia Fail.

If he ever came to Erin from Egypt he found the Lia Fail there before him.

The manufacture of ancient history to suit modern notions is largely carried on among our neighbors. We have seen a book that had great circulation, which stated that St. Patrick was really the prophet Jeremiah, Patrick being his Irish name. The Tuatha de Danans were the tribe of Dan and settled Ulster; that was the reason of Ulster being Protestant and progressive. They had never heard of the flight of the Eirils, or of the plantation of Ulster.

According to the same wonderful authority the remnant of the Canaanites, conquered and driven out of the Holy Land by Joshua, settled in the south and were of Ireland; therefore they were Catholics. Dublin and Tara they located in Ulster. The prophet Jeremiah not only brought the Lia Fail to Ireland but also the ark of the Covenant which he buried at Tara. In this wholesale manufacture of history it would not be well to take the advice of the poet—
"Lest men suspect your tale untrue.
Keep probability in view."

—MRS. ALEX. MACDOUGALL, in Can. Baptist.

Courtesy to Women and Girls.

This does not refer to such acts as taking off one's hat to every woman or girl one knows, nor to any of the ordinary acts of politeness. Such are understood in these days. It does refer, however, to slight matters that mark the man or boy who knows what good manners are, and who invariably bears himself well in the presence of others. Such a boy never speaks to a girl or woman, if she is standing, without rising himself. I saw

at a large restaurant, a short time ago, a man approach three women and three men who were eating supper. No one of the three men knew the fourth personally, but as he approached and spoke to a friend among the women all three arose and remained standing until the new comer was gone. It was not a mark of courtesy to the fourth man. It was a signification to the three ladies that for the time being the new arrival was allowed the privilege of speaking to any one of them if they chose to invite it. That is merely an example of a small point, which perhaps was not necessary, but the action not only pleased the women, but certainly stamped the men as gentlemen. Many a boy fails to rise from his chair when his mother enters the room, while he would get up at once if a stranger entered, and one would suppose that his mother, who is more to him than the rest of womankind put together, should, to say the least, have from him the same marks of courtesy as strangers. In fact, you can tell a boy's character pretty accurately by the way in which he treats his mother; for as a mother has probably done and will do more for her son than any other women—with perhaps one exception—will ever do, so he ought in return to treat her as his most valuable possession. His courtesy, his chivalrous and knightly bearing towards her are never thrown away.—Harper's Round Table.

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