

The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter, Lesson 3, Oct. 16, '96

ESTHER PLEADING FOR HER PEOPLE.—Esther 8: 3, 8, 15-17.

Read Chapters 8-19.

Commit Verses 15-17.

Golden Text.—Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.—Psa. 37: 5.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

The time of the story, B. C. 473, May or June.

Place.—The Palace at Shushan. DANGER TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.—We saw in our last lesson how Haman had succeeded in obtaining a decree from the emperor for the destruction of the whole race of Jews. The whole people of God were to be wiped off from the face of the earth.

Why should God have a special care for the preservation of the Jews? (1) Because they were his people whom he had been training for centuries to be the repository of his truth and his message of redemption to the world. They were very imperfect; they were very far from being the ideal nation; but there was no nation at all fitted to take their place. (2) Because they were his missionaries to spread the knowledge of the true God over all the world, and thus prepare the way for Christ. More Jews were scattered among the heathen than lived in Judea.

QUEEN ESTHER TO THE RESCUE.

—Esther means a star. She was a daughter of one of the exiles, her grandfather being among those carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 588. She was the cousin of Mordecai, who was much older, and had adopted her as his daughter on the death of her father Abihail. The story of how she became queen is related in the second chapter. At the time of today's lesson she was probably under 20 years of age. She was very beautiful; and she seems to have preserved her purity and beauty of character even amid the baseness of an Oriental court. Esther had been queen for four or five years when notice was sent to her by Mordecai of the great danger which threatened her people, with the suggestion that she intercede with the king for their salvation.

The danger of Esther's Mission. The mission committed to Esther was one of great danger and difficulty. Apparently his love for her had cooled, to what degree she knew not. It was a rule of the palace that no one, unsummoned, should come into the inner court of the palace on pain of death, unless the monarch should hold out his golden scepter.

Reasons why Esther undertook the task. 1. It was to save her whole people.

2. She was apparently the only one who could do it.

3. She was providently endowed with beauty and raised to her position as queen for this very purpose.

4. She would doubtless have perished herself in the general massacre.

5. We must keep in mind the heroism in her girlish soul.

The queen, therefore, in attempting to save her people, must (1) risk everything,—her position, her husband, her wealth, her life. (2) She must do it on the mere chance that the king would look upon her with favor. (3) She must at once, by the mere weight of personal influence, to reverse the decrees of an empire that prides itself on inflexibility,—whose laws are unalterable. (4) And she must do this against the influence of the king's favorite, who was the most powerful subject in the kingdom, and the enemy of her people. (5) She belonged to a despised race, and must reveal that fact to the capricious king.

ESTHER'S PLAN.—Vs. 3-8. 1. She asked her friends to fast three days in her behalf. Fasting implies prayer, confession of sin, and a belief in God.

2. She was a practical woman, and used her beauty and charm of person and of dress to accomplish her object.

3. Her first aim was to secure the king's favor. Accordingly, she simply invited the king and Haman to a feast where she could watch her opportunity and present her case.

4. Esther presented her petition in wise words and pointed out Haman as the enemy who was seeking her life and the life of her people. The king was very angry and immediately deposed Haman, and had him hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Esther spoke yet again. The execution of Haman did not save her people, for the decree of Haman was still in force. The king held out the golden scepter. The

usual sign of his favor. Reverse the letters devised by Haman. The former decree must stand. The king could not reverse it as Esther proposed, but another decree was issued which practically annulled the former one. Write.... as it liketh you. The plan was to give the Jews permission to stand in self-defense and repel every attack, and take possession of the property of those who attacked them.

THE DELIVERANCE.—Vs. 15-17. The rest of the book relates the result of this decree. The Jews stood up in self-defense and large numbers of their enemies were slain.

The deliverance was a wonder of providential interference. The nation was saved. Mordecai was exalted to Haman's place. The feast of Purim was instituted with great feasting and joy, and has been celebrated annually ever since. At least their are records of its observance for more than two thousand years.

The morality of the book of Esther. The bloody ending of the book has been regarded by some as condemning the book and the character of Esther for their bad morality, and as unsafe guides in morals and religion.

Let us look at it just as we would any other book, and note the results. We should see it in the light of the times.

1. Esther's request for the hanging of Haman's ten sons was not the request that they be slain, for the king had already reported to her that they were dead, but that they might be publicly exposed on the gallows, as has been done thousands of times since, as a warning. It was a safeguard to the Jews.

2. The slaying of others by the Jews is plainly stated to be in self-defense. Even Esther's request for a second day was not for a slaughter of innocent Persians for there is reason to suppose that this day also the Jews were on the defensive.

3. It is noted that in every case the Jews refrained from spoiling the houses. This was to prove that they were not seeking their own advantage.

4. In judging of people in distant lands, under different circumstances, and with a different degree of light, we must ever look at the motive, the purpose, the moral qualities.

5. We rejoice in victories of the right over the wrong, while we deplore the evils and suffering and death through which they were gained.

LESSONS FROM ESTHER.

1. Esther the star. Her moral beauty was greater than her physical beauty. She was patriotic, brave, devotional, trustful, prudent, risking all for duty and country.

2. Patriotism. The religion note in the book of Esther does not sound so clearly as the patriotic note. But patriotism is a lesson we all need to learn, and its meaning should be clearly understood.

3. Great crises, great trials, great dangers, have a mission in the building up of every nation. They awaken from spiritual lethargy; they cultivate a spirit of prayer, they lead to trust in God, they arouse heroism and courage.

4. One of the most interesting studies in the story of Esther is to trace the ways of divine providence, and see how God makes all things work together for the good of his people.

Rules for Bible Reading.

1. Read consecutively: The Old Testament at one time of the day, the New at another; this will enable you to read the New twice, and more, to one reading of the Old.

2. Use the references. For this purpose I like to use two Bibles, one to lie open with the margin well filled with references, to which I turn in the smaller pocket Bible which I hold in my hand. All I know of the Bible is based on the use of marginal references.

3. Be more careful to read a few verses deeply than to skim two or three chapters. There are times, of course, when we pass rapidly over whole tracts of scripture to discover the outline of the landscape and the direction of the main thoroughfares. But, for devotional reading, a little, thoroughly masticated and digested, is to be preferred to a large amount belted. The artist who confines himself to one tiny bit of scenery probably enjoys himself best, and extracts the most thorough instruction and inspiration from what he sees.

4. Be thankful if the morning and evening study crystallizes about some theme. Often it will be so. As you quietly muse on some verse or paragraph beneath the teachings of the Holy Spirit you will find kindred passages suggested to your mind where the same thought occurs under slightly different forms; and as you close the book you will find your mind rewarded by one mastering theme. Be very thankful for this, although it may have led you

far away from the original chapter and interfered with your reading as much as usual.

5. Have your pen at hand, that you may note such references as occur to you, in the margin, and that you may be able to indicate any passage which has shone out like a star to your soul. I think I could tell the history of my life in a series of verses, selected from every part of the sacred book, which have been my beacon-light all along its course.

As we approach the study of the Bible there should be a reverent bowing down of the soul on the threshold of the temple of scripture; a putting-off of the shoes from our feet; a cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; a deep and hallowed consciousness of the presence of God; a simple, child-like, humble, and obedient spirit, which listens with hushed awe, like the child Samuel in the sanctuary of old, for the accents of the voice of God.

Souls that love most deeply, most truly understand love. Pure eyes carry with them the flames of fire by which they see. Spirit recognizes and reads spirit. Those who are most devout, most like the saintly souls through whom the voice of God spoke, will be best able to understand and interpret the yearnings of desire, the pangs of triumph, the wailings of disappointed hope, which fill the pages of scripture with their various and abundant expression.

Above all we must obey. We must not be satisfied with looking into the perfect law; we must continue therein. It is not the hearer that forgetteth, but the doer that worketh, who is blessed in his doing. God's spirit tests us by revealing truth. If we obey, he reveals more. If we refuse, he takes from us what we know. The accumulation of neglect commands gathers over our eyes as scales. From the morasses and swamps of our disobedience the mists arise that obscure the blue sky above and the everlasting hills.

We should never open our Bibles without first lifting up our hearts to the gracious Spirit by whose inspiration and movement holy men were led to write. Heartfelt ejaculatory prayer to him will unlock treasures which all the dictionaries and helps in creation could never reach. Beneath his touch rocks will yield water, blank pages become covered with lettering, fountains arise where before the whole track seemed sere and barren. The deep things of God are revealed to those only who have received the spirit which is of God.

Two good rules for each morning, to finish with: Never speak to man till you have spoken to God; never read a line of man's book till you have read God's Book.—F. B. Meyer in Christian Endeavor World.

He Got His Reward.

A young man was employed by a large commission firm in New York City during the late Civil War to negotiate with a certain party for a lot of damaged beans. The beans were purchased, delivered, and spread out upon the upper floor of the building occupied by the firm.

Men were employed to turn them over and over, and to sprinkle them with a solution of soda, so as to improve their appearance, and render them more salable. A large lot of the first quality of beans were then purchased; some of the good beans were first put into barrels, then the barrels were nearly filled with the poor ones; after this the good ones were again put on top, and the barrels headed up for sale.

The employer marked the barrels, Beans—A 1. The clerk, seeing this, said, Do you think, sir, that it is right to mark these beans A 1?

The employer retorted sharply, Are you head of the firm? The clerk said no more. The barreling and heading went on. When all was ready, the beans (many hundreds of barrels) were put on the market for sale. Specimens of the best quality were shown in the office to buyers.

At length a shrewd purchaser came in (no man is so sharp in business but he will often meet his equal), examined the sample in the office, inquired the price, and then wished to see the stock in bulk. The clerk was ordered to go with the buyer to the upper loft and show him the stock. An open barrel was shown apparently of the same quality of the sample. The buyer then said to the clerk:

Young man, the samples of beans shown me are of the first quality, and it is impossible to purchase beans anywhere in the market for the price for which you offer them; there is something wrong here. Tell me, are these beans the same quality throughout the entire barrel as they appear on the top?

The clerk now found himself in a strange position. He thought, Shall I lie for my employer, as he undoubtedly means I shall; or shall I tell the truth, come what will? He decided for the truth, and said:

No, sir, they are not. Then, said the customer, I do not want them; and he left.

The clerk entered the office. The employer said to him, Did you sell that man those beans?

He said, No, sir.

Why not?

Well, sir, the man asked me if those beans were of the same quality through the entire barrel as they appeared on the top. I told him they were not. He said I do not want them, and left.

Go to the cashier, said the employer, and get your wages; we want you no longer.

He received his pay and left the office, rejoicing that he had not lied for the purpose of abetting a sordid avariciousness, and benefiting an unprincipled employer.

Three weeks after this the firm sent after the young clerk, entreated him to come back again into their employ, and offered him three hundred dollars more salary per year than they had ever before given him.

And thus was his honesty and truthfulness rewarded. The firm knew and felt that the man was right, although apparently they had lost largely by his honesty. They wished to have him again in their employ, because they knew that they could trust him, and never suffer through fraud and deception. They knew that their financial interests would be safe in his custody. They respected and honored that young man.—D. L. Moody.

The Power of Influence.

It is a truism that influence cannot be measured. But it is also an awful truth, inspiring to the pure in heart and perturbing to the careless and vicious to whom the thought comes home. We touch humanity at a thousand points with almost every breath we draw.

It is related of a certain housekeeper that after she had complained several times to the grocer regarding baskets of unsound fruit sent to her address she was one day offered a basket of peaches and a basket of gem melons, accompanied with this assurance:

You will not find a single damaged peach or melon in either of these packages. If you do I will gladly refund the money you pay for them.

She found every peach and melon perfect. The housekeeper reported this on her next visit to the dealers store, and asked why he was so positive in warranting his goods. "Why?" exclaimed the man. "Why, because I have found that the farmer who furnished those baskets never sends dishonest packages to market."

The farmer's number among the commission dealer's consignments was '135.' After that the lady always bought No. 135, and the contents of the baskets never failed in measure, condition or in quality.

Admiration for the conscientious farmer grew upon the housekeeper, and literally made her more conscientious herself. She felt ashamed whenever she was tempted to slight her work. No. 135 seemed to be looking after her.

One particular that deepened this impression was the non-appearance in market on Mondays of any baskets bearing the favorite mark. Farmer 135 would not pack fruit on Sunday, the dealer said. The housekeeper felt her face flush when that was said. She had never been so scrupulous.

The summer and autumn passed, but the sermon of the faultless fruit continued to preach to its buyer when she could buy no more. Careless lapses of duty frequently brought up the thought: "No. 135 would not have done that." She remembered and thanked the unknown man whose integrity had strengthened and helped her. His rectitude represented to her the presence of the sinless Teacher.

The above instance is but one among thousands of the power of involuntary influence. A good man's life is one of the moral tonics of society. His silent example is in itself a blessing to the world.—Baptist Union.

The teaching of the Bible does not provide for an idle class either in Church or State. There is a part for each individual to play, and though it may be a seemingly unimportant one, it cannot be omitted without loss. Idleness, either from the possession of wealth or through indolence, has a disastrous result for the individual, while the ideal society is one in which every one shall contribute his share of assistance to the common good.

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