

The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter, Lesson 2, Oct. 8, '99

HAMAN'S PLOT AGAINST THE JEWS.—Esther 3: 1-11.

Read Chapters 1-3

Commit Verses 5-6.

Golden Text.—If God be for us, who can be against us.—Rom. 8: 31.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—The time of the story was somewhere about the middle of Xerxes' reign, 485-465, sixty-two years after the first return, forty-two after the completion of the temple, and sixteen before Ezra went up to Jerusalem.

Xerxes' Third Year.—The great feast (2: 3), B. C. 483.

His Seventh Year.—Esther made queen (2: 16), B. C. 479.

His Thirteenth Year.—Haman's plot and Esther's heroism, B. C. 473.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.—The author is unknown, but must have been some one intimately acquainted with the scenery he describes.

The date of writing is also unknown. Professor Sayce places it at B. C. 425. Some place it later.

There are two principal theories concerning the historical nature of this book; one, that it is a veritable history; the other, that it is a romance founded on fact.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION.—The story belongs to the times of the return. It opens about half a century after the first caravan left Babylon amid great rejoicing, and entered Jerusalem nearly fifty thousand strong. But the hopes were realized slowly. It was twenty years before the temple was built. The walls were not yet restored and much of the ancient city still lay in ruins. The slow progress was very discouraging.

At the same time large numbers still remained in the lands of their captivity, were engaged in business, had founded homes, and some of them must have attained considerable property.

XERXES AND THE PERSIAN EMPIRE.—This empire was larger than any previous one known in history, and surrounded its chief with almost unimaginable splendor. It began B. C. 558, with Cyrus who conquered Babylon in 538, and existed till it collapsed under the attack of Alexander the Great, B. C. 331. It extended from Ethiopia to India. Its ambition was to conquer Greece, and extend its sway over the known world.

The Ahasuerus of Esther has been identified almost beyond doubt with Xerxes, the son of Darius Hystaspes. The martial deeds of Xerxes are fully told by Grecian historians. He was remarkable for his beauty, but he was proud, self-willed, amorous, reckless of human life, impetuous, changeable.

THE GREAT FEAST AT SUSHAN. B. C. 483.—Esther 1: 19. Xerxes held an assembly to arrange for the Grecian war in the third year of his reign, and it is probably this feast which is described in the first chapter of the book of Esther. It lasted one hundred and eighty days. Everything was done to impress upon them the greatness and power of the king, and the unlimited resources at his command. Everything was luxurious and expensive. Ostentation was the order of the day. The queen also made a feast.

QUEEN VASHTI DEPOSED. According to Herodotus, the Persians were addicted to drunkenness. The immediate consequence of the disgusting degradation of drunkenness, in the case of Ahasuerus, is that the monarch grossly insults his queen. He outrages the most sacred rules of Oriental etiquette. Vashti refuses the indelicate summons of her drunken husband. On this account Vashti was deposed from being queen.

THE WAR WITH GREECE.—An interval of four years occurs before a new queen is found in place of Vashti. It was during this interval that his great invasion of Greece took place. It is said that the army with which he invaded Greece numbered 5,283,220, exclusive of women and other attendants. This multitude was met at Thermopylae by Leonidas and his 300 Spartans, at whose hands 20,000 Persians fell, August 7, 480 B. C. Two months later the Persians were terribly defeated in the great naval battle at Salamis. Themistocles, with 380 Greek vessels, defeated Xerxes with 2,000 sail. This disaster was closely followed by others, which compelled Xerxes to abandon the field and return home, with scarcely 5,000 soldiers left of all the multitude with which he set out.

QUEEN ESTHER.—Chap. 2. After the return of Xerxes from this disaster, Esther was chosen queen. (see next lesson.)

HAMAN'S PLOT AGAINST THE JEWS.—Vs. 1-11. Four or five years later, Haman. Nothing further is known of him. The

Agagite. Probably a term of reproach. **Bowed.** Prostrated him self, for such was the ordinary eastern practice. **Mordecai.** A Jew, and an elder cousin of Esther (2: 7), whom he had adopted as his daughter (2: 15). **Bowed not.** Because in so doing he would have been untrue to his God and his religion. The Persians not only from motives of piety, but from prudence also, worship their kings as gods. So that the act of prostration before Haman would be understood to imply religious homage. He had the courage of his convictions. The difference between right and wrong may be shown in a litter matter, but it is not, therefore, a little matter. **The king's gate.** An open space before the gate of his palace, used as a place of assembly, for the administration of justice, and for audience, for kings, rulers, and ambassadors.

Whether Mordecai's matters would stand, i. e., whether his excuse would be allowed. He had told them that he was a Jew. So that they would understand why he could not worship Haman. **He thought scorn to lay his hands on Mordecai alone.** The revengeful temper of the man was such that this seemed to him insufficient. Mordecai had insulted him as a Jew, and the Jews should pay the penalty. Mordecai should be punished not only in prison, but in his kindred, if he had any, and in his nation. **Sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.** Massacres on a large scale are of frequent occurrence in the East, where human life is not held in much regard. In the first month of the Jewish religious year, Nisan. Corresponding to our March-April. They cast Pur. The word from which Purim, the name of the feast commemorating this deliverance, was derived.

Cast....the lot....from month to month to find the favorable day for asking his favor of Xerxes. They were not eleven months casting the lots, but the twelfth month, eleven months ahead. This was favorable for the Jews, as it gave time for Esther to defeat the scheme, and Jews to do their part. **A certain people scattered abroad.** Who, by their ceremonies and by their religion, were kept from intermingling with the other people, and being absorbed by them. **Let it be written that they may be destroyed.** See under v. 6. **Ten thousand talents of silver.** Various estimates at \$10,000,000 to \$20,000,000. Haman may have been a man of extensive wealth, or he may have hoped to draw the money from the spoils of the Jews. **King took his ring.** His signet. **Gave it unto Haman.** So that he could sign in the king's name and with the king's authority any decree he wished. **The silver is given to thee.** Xerxes refused the offered money. It may refer to the silver he might take from the Jews.

Thus the great plot was laid and seemed sure of success. A crisis of Jewish history was at hand. Letters were despatched all over the empire for the destruction of the whole nation of the Jews, on the thirteenth day of Adar, about the first of March, B. C. 474.

LESSONS FROM HAMAN AND HIS CAREER.

Note the disastrous effects upon the character and life of unlimited, unbridled power, especially where the idea holds that it means unlimited pleasure. It fosters selfishness, cruelty, lust, ambition, and passion.

We often fret under the restraints in which we are placed,—poverty, narrow circumstances, laws, parents, teachers, and long to be "free as the wind wherever it blows." But it is these restraints that save us.

From the feast of Ahasuerus we learn the degradation of drunkenness. It robs its victims of self-respect and manliness, and sends them to wallow in the mire with swinish obscenity. What they would not dream of stooping to in their sober moments, they revel in with shameless ostentation when their brains are clouded with intoxicating drink. **Husbands, who are gentle and considerate at other times, are transformed into brutes, who can take pleasure in trampling on their wives.** It is no excuse to plead that the drunkard is a madman unaccountable for his actions; he is accountable for having put himself in his degraded condition.

Without the influence of strong drink it would have been hard even for Xerxes to commit the folly recorded in this lesson.

Haman was hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. "Curses are like young chickens, and still come home to roost."

"Who diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."

"Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

"Even as I have seen, they that plough iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same."

Haman's efforts to injure others became a moral boomerang, and destroyed himself.

Haman's permission to kill all the Jews has been well compared to the license to sell intoxicating liquors. (1) It is granted by a sovereign country. (2) It is a privilege given to a few. (3) To injure and destroy the people. (4) It is given for money. The license is paid for. (5) But all this, and much more, is to be taken from the spoils of the people injured. (6) It is a great injury to the country that grants it. (7) It brings ruin to the Hamans who use the license. (8) The Mordecais and Esthers are laboring against it at great cost and self-denial. (9) They will be successful in the end.

Going Without Breakfast.

GEORGE F. PENTECOST.

Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. —3 Jno. 2.

Spiritual prosperity and health is the highest earthly blessing, but John, writing to his well-beloved Gaius, prays that it may be matched by the prosperity and health of the body.

Bodily health is desired by the worldly for the sake of earthly gain and prosperity.

The Christian ought to desire health for the higher reason so that he can serve God more efficiently.

The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. 1 Cor. 6: 19. To defile the body with sin, to neglect it, to cause it to suffer in health or strength, is an offence against our salvation and the honor of God.

To deliberately undermine health and strength by persisting in a false way of living, is a sin of great enormity.

Drunkenness or gluttony are offences against soul and body, which no self-respecting person ought for a moment to allow. Yet thousands of good men and women are guilty of excess and bad methods in eating and drinking that border upon these two disgusting and harmful sins.

The life of the flesh is in the blood. Lev. 17: 11. If pure, rich blood not only preserves the health of the body, and prolongs life, but contributes to moral intellectual and spiritual health, we should hail with gladness any discovery that will enable us to purify and enrich our blood.

Dr. E. H. Dawsey declares that digestion is best promoted and food so assimilated as to afford the largest amount of nourishment and the greatest quantity of rich blood, by giving the stomach a long rest, during each twenty-four hours, from evening until the noon of the next day, by going without breakfast, and by so doing improve health, if well; prevent the incoming of disease; assist nature to recover from any avoidable attack of sickness; strengthen the whole body, and build up the soul and spirit. I have tried this way of living and it works well.

For forty years I had been the victim of sick headaches. I tried every possible remedy and expedient recommended by physicians and friends; dieting, not eating heartily, going without coffee, various kinds of exercise, sodas, bromides, Turkish baths, massage, and not eating certain foods, but these only gave me temporary relief.

The bilious sick headache with its excruciating pain, would return and collapse my power of work for from one to four days.

At last I learned that a friend and every member of his family, an invalid wife, a delicate daughter, two splendid young collegians, and a boy of twelve had all given up their breakfast, were all greatly improved mentally and physically.

Afterward meeting others who had not been ill but were a hundred per cent better for going without breakfast, I resolved to go without mine. For a day or two I suffered from slight headaches from what seemed the want of food, but I soon found that they were the dying pains of a bad habit.

After a week I never thought of wanting breakfast and though in the breakfast rooms of friends where every tempting luxury was spread before me, I did not desire food at all. The results are:

1. I have not had the slightest suggestion of sick headache since I gave up my breakfast.

2. I have lost a large portion of surplus fat.

3. My skin is improving in texture. My complexion has cleared. The tendency to flushness in the head has disappeared.

4. I experience no more tendency to fullness and unpleasantness after eating.

5. I do not eat as much as I used to but have better digestion. My food does not lie so long in my stomach and that useful organ has gone out of the gas producing business.

6. I am conscious of a lighter and more elastic spring. I can walk

with quickness and for longer distances without any tired feeling.

7. I go to my study and my pulpit without any sense of loss of strength mentally or physically, but with freshness of vigor which is delightful.

One by one of their own accord, every member of my family have given up their breakfast and all are better for it.

I could fill pages of interesting detail resulting from the adopting of this rule, growing out of my simple expositions.

Restful sleep is not hunger producing.

The breakfast does not furnish strength for the same morning's work.

In no case does food give strength until converted into blood.

We all do our work on the blood extruded from the food of other days.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. It will not do anyone any harm to go without breakfast for three months, and it is almost certain that any one so doing will need no further argument.

Five Miles Above the Earth.

A most interesting balloon ascent was made in September last by Mr. Stanley Spencer and Dr. Berson, when they succeeded in reaching an altitude of 27,500 feet.

When released, the balloon shot upward at a great rate, and the two men quickly found themselves at an altitude of two miles above the earth. At that height they could plainly hear the barking of a dog.

Up went the balloon, and the air became colder and rarer. At a height of three miles the thermometer registered seventeen. At four miles the temperature was two degrees below zero.

They could see the English channel, and towns on the English and French coasts, with great distinction with the naked eye.

Up to 25,000 feet there was no difficulty in breathing, but above that height dizziness was felt and suffocation seemed to be near, and they were obliged to put the tubes of the oxygen inhalers into their mouths. Then they felt so buoyant that they could have gone anywhere.

At 27,000 feet they were miles above the flights of the highest birds. The few thin cirrus clouds which they had sighted at a height of four miles were now below them, and there was nothing above and around them but an immense expanse of the deepest indigo blue, and a setting sun so dazzling in its unnatural brilliancy that they could not bear to look at it.

They now felt the effects of the terrible cold; their beards were crusted with frost; their faces were pale and bloodless. At 27,500 feet the temperature was twenty-nine degrees below zero. If they hoped to bring the balloon safely to earth, now was the time to start on the return journey.

The descent was begun. In order to avoid the sea, Mr. Spencer pulled the valve, which so accelerated the descent that it was necessary to discharge ballast.

When they had dropped another mile and reached a denser layer of air, so that the rate of descent was decreased, the sand thus thrown out came pattering on the balloon. It had just caught up with them.

They reached the earth in safety, after an aerial trip lasting one hour and fifty minutes.—Saturday Evening Post.

SAM JONES, the evangelist, asks the following pertinent question: Do you know that boys are more particular who they go with than girls? You may think it a strange statement, but it is so. A girl will go on the streets in open day with a boy that gets drunk, but the minute a boy finds out that a girl drinks he drops her. I wish our girls would be as particular with whom they go as the boys are.

God is being slandered in the home where the children do not want to see Sunday come.

It is not God's will that any religious meeting should be held without results.

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