

Sabbath School Department.

[From the Christian Helper.]

International Bible Lessons.

Lesson XVII. April 27.

THE COMING SAVIOUR.

Isaiah 42: 1-10.

The Book of Isaiah.

Isaiah was the son of Amoz; but who Amoz was, what his tribe, occupation, social position, we do not know. Hence we know nothing of Isaiah apart from his prophetic work. He prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Azariah, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah." The ordinary chronology gives 758 B. C. for the date of Jotham's accession, and 698 for that of Hezekiah's death. This gives us a period of 60 years. And since Isaiah's ministry commenced before Uzziah's death (how long we know not), appearing him to have been no more than 20 years old when he began to prophesy, he would have been 80 or 90 at Manasseh's accession. We know not how long Isaiah lived after Manasseh began to reign. Some think it may have been ten or fifteen years, and some think that he was put to death in the first year of Manasseh. So we know not the exact date of his birth or death. It is generally thought that he was put to death by being sawn asunder, and that the reference is to him in Heb. 11: 37. Manasseh was a wicked man; in 2 Kings 21: 16, it is said that he "shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." Isaiah, being a good man and perhaps reproving the wicked king, probably suffers along with other innocent ones.

To fix the date of Isaiah in the minds of the scholars, remind them of the dates of the captivity, and return of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Isaiah lived at Jerusalem in the early part of his prophetic life and probably he never lived far from that city.

The prophets Jonah, Hosea, and Micah lived in his time.

In the days of Isaiah "public morals were corrupted, and the fear of the Lord was forgotten. Luxury and vice prevailed, and idolatry took the place of the worship of the true God. Hezekiah sought to reform abuses, and to bring the people back to God; but it seemed to be only a temporary reformation."—Peloubet. The kingdom of Israel was broken up and its people carried into captivity by the Assyrians B. C. 721. The kingdom of Judah was rapidly ripening for the Babylonish captivity.

Isaiah's character stands before us as one of almost superhuman elevation. When we think of him during those 60 years, discharging so many varied offices, expostulating, reproving, expounding, comforting, doing all with deepest resignation and unflinching faith towards God, and with serene dignity towards men, we seem to be contemplating one, who, while retaining all purely human sympathies, has a portion of seraphic nature communicated to him.—Cook.

The natural and obvious division of Isaiah is into two parts, the first of which closes with the 39th chapter, and the latter of which comprises the remainder of the book. The main drift and scope of the latter part is to portray events to come—the certain deliverance of the Jews from the bondage in Babylon, and the higher deliverance of the world under the Messiah, of which the former was the suggester and emblem.—Barnes.

The writings of Isaiah are full of the sublimest figures and the most beautiful ornaments of poetry. Jerome says that Isaiah is more evangelical than prophet. It seems sometimes as if he were writing a history of the past rather than a prophecy. The beauty of the style is partly lost in the translation. There are in the New Testament many quotations from Isaiah, some of them literal. Teachers that like to give exercises for the following Sunday to their classes might ask them to find some of these quotations.

Exposition.

V. 1. Behold my servant. Of the whole passage, Bishop Lowth says: "St. Matthew has applied it directly to Christ; nor can it, with any justice, or any propriety, be applied to any other person or character whatever." See Matt. 12: 18. Christ, though "being in the form of God, yet took upon Him the form of a servant." "Being upheld by the Divine power in His human nature, He finished the work which was given Him to do."—Scott. Mine elect. The one I have chosen to fulfill my great purposes. Selected because of His fitness, His peculiar excellence. Delighteth. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." I have put my Spirit upon Him. "For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him." Christ was divine, yet when He became flesh and dwelt among men, He was the recipient of the Holy Spirit without measure. "No more human intelligence could be thus receptive of the Holy Spirit of God."—Alford. Judgment to the Gentiles, or "make known to them the truths, precepts, and ordinances of God, that they may become accepted believers."—Scott.

V. 2. He shall not cry nor lift up His voice. This refers to the quiet and unostentatious ministry of our Lord.

V. 3. A bruised reed etc. "The word 'reed' means the cane or calamus which grows up in marshy or wet places."—Barnes. A reed is a very frail thing, easily bent, easily broken, yet in the bruised reed, there is some feeble life still, and that will not be extinguished. And though such a reed be the emblem of our spiritual condition, yet there is hope for us in God. Barnes quotes from Luther: "He doth not cast away, nor crush, nor condemn the wounded in conscience, those who are terrified in view of their sins, the weak in faith and practice, but watches over and cherishes them, makes them whole, and affectionately embraces them." Smoking flax, or the wick made from flax. "The word rendered 'smoking' means that which is weak. Small, thin, feeble; then, that which is

just ready to go out, or to be extinguished; and the phrase refers literally to the expiring wick of a lamp." The least spark of true religion in the heart, will not be extinguished; but will be nursed into a glowing flame. This is not written to encourage a low state of piety, or to teach us that we may remain in passive indifference without censure. But it is written to encourage all who, conscious of the feebleness and dimness of their faith, long for a stronger and clearer light. "The word 'smoking' shows that he maintains and cherishes, not darkness but sparks, though feeble and hardly perceptible."—Calvin. Judgment—the true religion. Unto truth. Unto victory, Matt. 12: 29.

V. 4. We shall not fail nor be discouraged. Barnes says of the word translated "fail," "There may be an allusion here to that which is applied to the flax." We may be disheartened and feeble; He never fails nor is discouraged, and He will carry on His glorious work unfalteringly to a triumphant completion. The Isles shall wait. Missionaries have sometimes found the heathen dissatisfied with their own religions, and vaguely expecting some new system. This is said to have been the case in the Sandwich Islands. His law. "Law" in Scripture sometimes stands for the whole revelation of God in His word.

V. 5. This verse introduces an address to the Messiah. God has been speaking of Him, He now speaks to Him. The introduction is a description of God's creative and sustaining power. The heavens, the earth, everything on the face of the earth, the people dwelling upon it, and the breath and life of all, have come from God in the first place, and continue to exist only through His power. The sustaining power of God is but a continual repetition of the creative act.

V. 6. It is this great God that has called Christ to His peculiar work for men, and He is able to sustain Him in it. A covenant—that is, as the mediator of the new covenant. A light. He is the light of the world, bringing light for all Jews and Gentiles. We know that, until He came, the Gentiles sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death.

V. 7. He hath called His people "out of darkness into His marvellous light," and released those who were "bound in affliction and iron," who were in the snare of the devil, and "taken captive by him at his will."

V. 8. I am Jehovah. An address now to the people. This solemn name denotes essential eternal being. This name distinguishes Him from all false gods. See Ps. 83: 18; Ps. 96: 5. In the latter passage, it will be seen that the word translated Lord is Jehovah. My glory will I not give, etc. See Ex. 20: 3, 4, 5.

V. 9. Former predictions by the mouths of the prophets had been fulfilled. That was a guarantee that the "new things" also would come to pass. See Is. 37: 7; Is. 38: 5.

V. 10. A new song. The great deliverances wrought for Israel by the Lord were often celebrated by new songs made for the occasion, as the Song of Moses, and Song of Deborah. All the inhabitants of the earth are here called upon to sing a new song, for the deliverance Christ should accomplish, not for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles.

Remarks.

1. How kind, how gentle, is the hand of Christ. The bruised reed is not broken by its touch. The wounded spirit can bear that healing hand to be laid upon it. Let us not fear to approach Christ with our complaints. There is none other will deal so tenderly with us. We need not hope for better comfort anywhere.

2. Those who will not take God for their master, are not free for all that. They are slaves of sin, captives of Satan. And he may give his servants a loose rein now, yet they are every day more firmly bound, and in the end Satan and sin will have unhindered control of them.

3. The name Jehovah was and is regarded by the Jews with peculiar reverence. Fear of taking it in vain caused them to refrain from all use of it. At last its pronunciation was forgotten, and it was referred to as "The Name." It was thought that the utterance of it would shake heaven and earth, and, as it could not be denied that miracles were really wrought by Christ, it was thought that He performed them by using this name. The writing of the name was done with the utmost care, and a Jew would not tread on a fragment of paper on the floor, lest it might have the sacred name upon it.

There is an old synagogue in the City of Prague, whose inside walls are black with the accumulations of many years. It has remained for generations unvisited, because it is said the name Jehovah was somewhere written upon it, and as the spot is unknown, no one would wash the wall for fear of erasing the holy name. We may think this undue reverence, let us be careful not to err in the opposite and more dangerous extreme.

Dying Words.

The late Rev. Dr. Putnam wrote, on his last birthday, to a friend, the following touchingly beautiful description of the state of feeling in which he saw his end approaching.

"There are two kinds of happiness for man. The first and best is work—useful, unimpeded work. This is highest. It gives a sense of life and growth. With reasonable success it is God's best boon. The second is rest. When the powers flag, and the work cannot be done, to sit still and think and remember and hope. This last kind I am trying, and I succeed in it. I enjoy life about as well as ever I did. I get reconciled to doing nothing. I miss the bounding delight of exertion, but I escape the partial sense of failure, the haunting feeling that I do not quite come up to the mark, and the anxious uncertainty about further efforts. I sit waiting. Friends are kind, children good, and the world goes fairly well with me. I think on the whole, I never liked living better. The summer is beautiful. I wait for the winter, and for summer again. If it comes, with placid expectation, but shall not be disappointed if it

does not come. Then I shall have the great beyond instead. My cup is full; Providence is kind. If I am dying, it is euthanasia."

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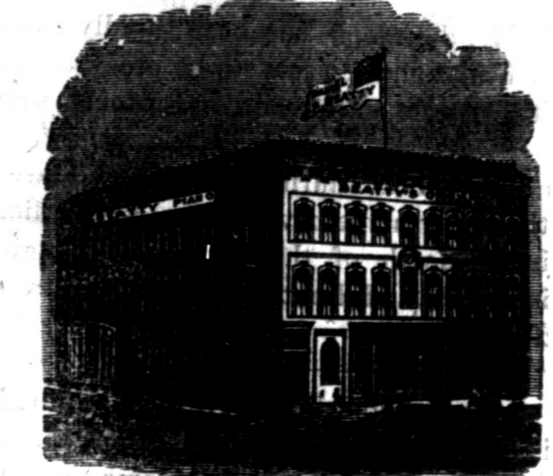
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