

YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

The Chosen People: A Compendium
of Sacred and Church History for
School-Children

Charlotte Yonge

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LESSON I

THE PROMISE

"The creature was made subject unto vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope."—*Rom.* viii. 20.

When the earth first came from the hand of God, it was "very good," and man, the best of all the beings it contained, was subjected to a trial of obedience. The fallen angel gained the ear of the woman, and led her to disobey, and to persuade her husband to do the same; and that failure gave Satan power over the world, and over all Adam's children, bringing sin and death upon the earth, and upon all, whether man or brute, who dwelt therein.

Yet the merciful God would not give up all the creatures whom He had made, to eternal destruction without a ray of hope, and even while sentencing them to the punishment they had drawn on themselves, He held out the promise that the Seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent, the Devil; and they were taught by the sight of sacrifices of animals, that the death of the innocent might yet atone for the sin of the guilty; though these creatures were not of worth enough really to bear the punishment for man.

Abel's offering of the lamb proved his faith, and thus was more worthy than Cain's gift of the fruits of the earth. When Cain in his envy slew his brother, he and his children were cast off by God, and those of his younger brother, Seth, were accepted, until they joined themselves to the ungodly daughters of Cain; and such sin prevailed, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of judgment at hand, before he was taken up alive into Heaven. When eight hundred and nine hundred years were the usual term of men's lives, and the race was in full strength and freshness, there was time for mind and body to come to great force; and we find that the chief inventions of man belong to these sons of Cain—the dwelling in tents, workmanship in brass and iron, and the use of musical instruments. On the other hand, the more holy of the line of Seth handed on from one to the other the history of the blessed days of Eden, and of God's promise, and lived upon hope and faith.

Noah, whose father had been alive in the latter years of Adam's life, was chosen from among the descendants of Seth, to be saved out of the general ruin of the corrupt earth, and to carry on the promise. His faith was first tried by the command to build the ark, though for one hundred and twenty years all seemed secure, without any token of judgment; and the disobedient refused to listen to his preaching. When the time came, his own family of eight persons were alone found worthy to be spared from the destruction, together with all the animals with them preserved in the ark, two of each kind, and a sevenfold number of those milder and purer animals which part the hoof and chew the cud, and were already marked out as fit for sacrifice.

It was the year 2348 B.C. that Noah spent in floating upon the waste of waters while every living thing was perishing round him, and afterwards in seeing the floods return to their beds in oceans, lakes, and rivers, which they shall never again overpass.

The ark first came aground on the mountain of Ararat, in Armenia, a sacred spot to this day; and here God made His covenant with Noah, renewing His first blessing to Adam, permitting the use of animal food; promising that the course of nature should never be disturbed again till the end of all things, and making the glorious tints of the rainbow, which are produced by sunlight upon water, stand as the pledge of this assurance. Of man He required abstinence from eating the blood

of animals, and from shedding the blood of man, putting, as it were, a mark of sacredness upon life-blood, so as to lead the mind on to the Blood hereafter to be shed.

Soon a choice was made among the sons of Noah. Ham mocked at his father's infirmity, while his two brothers veiled it; and Noah was therefore inspired to prophesy that Canaan, the son of the undutiful Ham, should be accursed, and a servant of servants; that Shem should especially belong to the Lord God, and that Japhet's posterity should be enlarged, and should dwell in the tents of Shem. Thus Shem was marked as the chosen, yet with hope that Japhet should share in his blessings.

It seems as if Ham had brought away some of the arts and habits of the giant sons of Cain, for in all worldly prosperity his sons had the advantage. In 2247 B. C. the sons of men banded themselves together to build the Tower of Babel on the plain of Shinar, just below the hills of Armenia, where the two great rivers Euphrates and Tigris make the flats rich and fertile. For their presumption, God confounded their speech, and the nations first were divided. Ham's children got all the best regions; Nimrod, the child of his son Cush, kept Babel, built the first city, and became the first king. Canaan's sons settled themselves in that goodliest of all lands which bore his name; and Mizraim's children obtained the rich and beautiful valley of the Nile, called Egypt. All these were keen clever people, builders of cities, cultivators of the land, weavers and embroiderers, earnest after comfort and riches, and utterly forgetting, or grievously corrupting, the worship of God. Others of the race seem to have wandered further south, where the heat of the sun blackened their skins; and their strong constitution, and dull meek temperament, marked them out to all future generations as a prey to be treated like animals of burden, so as to bear to the utmost the curse of Canaan.

Shem's sons, simpler than those of Ham, continued to live in tents and watch their cattle, scattered about in the same plains, called from the two great streams, Mesopotamia, or the land of rivers. Some travelled westwards, and settling in China and India, became a rich and wealthy people, but constantly losing more and more the recollection of the truth; and some went on in time from isle to isle to the western hemisphere—lands where no other foot should tread till the world should be grown old.

Japhet's children seemed at first the least favoured, for no place, save the cold dreary north, was found for most of them. Some few, the children of Javan, found a home in the fair isles of the Mediterranean, but the greater part were wild horsemen in Northern Asia and Europe. This was a dark and dismal training, but it braced them so that in future generations they proved to have far more force and spirit than was to be found among the dwellers in milder climates.

LESSON II

THE PATRIARCHS

"The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham."—Acts, vii. 2.

Among the sons of Shem (called Hebrews after his descendant Heber, who dwelt in Mesopotamia) was Abram, the good and faithful man, whom God chose out to be the father of the people in whom He was going to set His Light. In the year 1921, He tried Abram's faith by calling on him to leave his home, and go into a land which he knew not, but which should belong to his children after him—Abram, who had no child at all.

Yet he obeyed and believed, and was led into the beautiful hilly land then held by the sons of Canaan, where he was a stranger, wandering with his flocks and herds and servants from one green pasture to another, without a lot of land to call his own. For showing his faith by thus doing as he was commanded, Abram was rewarded by the promise that in his Seed should all the families of the earth be blessed; his name was changed to Abraham, which means a father of a great multitude; and as a sign that he had entered into a covenant with God, he was commanded to circumcise his children.

One son, Ishmael, had by this time been born to him of the bondmaid Hagar; but the child of promise, Isaac, the son of his wife Sarah, was not given till he was a hundred years old. Ishmael was cast out for mocking at his half-brother, the heir of the promises; but in answer to his father's prayers, he too became the father of a great nation, namely the Arabs, who still live in the desert, with their tents, their flocks, herds, and fine horses, much as Ishmael himself must have lived. They are still circumcised, and honour Abraham as their father; and with them are joined the Midianites and other tribes descended from Abraham's last wife, Keturah.

Isaac alone was to inherit the promise, and it was renewed to him and to his father, when their faith had been proved by their submission to God's command, that Isaac should be offered as a burnt-offering upon Mount Moriah, a sign of the Great Sacrifice long afterwards, when God did indeed provide Himself a Lamb.

When Abraham bought the Cave of Machpelah for a burial-place, it was in the full certainty that though he was now a stranger in the land, it would be his children's home; and it was there that he and the other patriarchs were buried after their long and faithful pilgrimage.

Isaac's wife, Rebekah, was fetched from Abraham's former home, in Mesopotamia, that he might not be corrupted by marrying a Canaanite. Between his two sons, Esau and Jacob, there was again a choice; for God had prophesied that the elder should serve the younger, and Esau did not value the birthright which would have made him heir to no lands that would enrich himself, and to a far-off honour that he did not understand. So despising the promises of God, he made his right over to his brother for a little food, when he was hungry, and though he repented with tears when it was too late, he could not win back what he had once thrown away.

His revengeful anger when he found how he had been supplanted, made Jacob flee to his mother's family in Mesopotamia, and there dwell for many years, ere returning to Canaan with his large household, there to live in the manner that had been ordained for the first heirs of the promise. Esau went away to Mount Seir, to the south of the Promised Land, and his descendants were called the Edomites, from his name, meaning the Red; and so, too, the sea which washed their shores, took the name of the Sea of Edom, or the Red Sea. They were also named Kenites from his son Kenaz. Their country, afterwards called Idumea, was full of rocks and precipices, and in these the Edomites hollowed out caves for themselves, making them most beautiful, with pillars supporting the roof within, and finely-carved entrances, cut with borders, flowers, and scrolls, so lasting that the cities of Bosra and Petra are still a wonder to travellers, though they have been empty and deserted for centuries past. The Edomites did not at once lose the knowledge of the true God; indeed, as many

believe, of them was born the prophet Job, whom Satan was permitted to try with every trouble he could conjure up, so that his friends believed that such sufferings could only be brought on him for some great sin; whereas he still maintained that the ways of God were hidden, and gave utterance to one of the clearest ancient prophecies of the Redeemer and the Resurrection. At length God answered him from the whirlwind, and proclaimed His greatness through His unsearchable works; and Job, for his patience in the time of adversity, was restored to far more than his former prosperity.

Jacob's name was changed to Israel, which meant a prince before God; and his whole family were taken into the covenant, though the three elder sons, for their crimes, forfeited the foremost places, which passed to Judah and Joseph; and Levi was afterwards chosen as the tribe set apart for the priesthood, the number twelve being made up by reckoning Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, as heads of tribes, like their uncles. Long ago, Abraham had been told that his seed should sojourn in Egypt; and when the envious sons of Israel sold their innocent brother Joseph, their sin was bringing about God's high purpose. Joseph was inspired to interpret Pharaoh's dreams, which foretold the famine; and when by-and-by his brothers came to buy the corn that he had laid up, he made himself known, forgave them with all his heart, and sent them to fetch his father to see him once more. Then the whole family of Israel, seventy in number, besides their wives, came and settled in the land of Goshen, about the year 1707, and were there known by the name of Hebrews, after Heber, the great-grand-son of Shem. There in Goshen, Jacob ended the days of his pilgrimage, desiring his sons to carry his corpse back to the Cave of Machpelah, there to be buried, and await their return when the time of promise should come. He gave his blessing to all his sons, and was inspired to mark out Joseph among them as the one whose children should have the choicest temporal inheritance; but of the fourth son, he said, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." Shiloh meant Him that should be sent, and Judah was thus marked out to be the princely tribe, which was to have the rule until the Seed should come.

LESSON III

EGYPT

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt."—*Hosea*, xi. 1.

The country where the Israelites had taken up their abode, was the valley watered by the great river Nile. There is nothing but desert, wherever this river does not spread itself, for it never rains, and there would be dreadful drought, if every year, when the snow melts upon the mountains far south, where is the source of the stream, it did not become so much swelled as to spread far beyond its banks, and overflow all the flat space round it. Then as soon as the water subsides, the hot sun upon the mud that it has left brings up most beautiful grass, and fine crops of corn with seven or nine ears to one stalk; grand fruits of all kinds, melons, pumpkins, and cucumbers, flax for weaving linen, and everything that a people can desire. Indeed, the water of the river is so delicious, that it is said that those who have once tasted it are always longing to drink it again.

The sons of Mizraim, son of Ham, who first found out this fertile country, were a very clever race, and made the most of the riches of the place. They made dykes and ditches to guide the floodings into their fields and meadows; they cultivated the soil till it was one beautiful garden; they wove their flax into fine linen; and they made bricks of their soft clay, and hewed stone from the hills higher up the river, so that their buildings have been the wonder of all ages since. They had kings to rule them, and priests to guide their worship; but these priests had very wrong and corrupt notions themselves, and let the poor ignorant people believe even greater folly than they did themselves.

They thought that the great God lived among them in the shape of a bull with one spot on his back like an eagle, and one on his tongue like a beetle; and this creature they called Apis, and tended with the utmost care. When he died they all went into mourning, and lamented till a calf like him was found, and was brought home with the greatest honour; and for his sake all cattle were sacred, and no one allowed to kill them. Besides the good Power, they thought there was an evil one as strong as the good, and they worshipped him likewise, to beg him to do them no harm; so the dangerous crocodiles of the Nile were sacred, and it was forbidden to put them to death. They had a dog-god and a cat-goddess, and they honoured the beetle because they saw it rolling a ball of earth in which to lay its eggs, and fancied it an emblem of eternity; and thus all these creatures were consecrated, and when they died were rolled up in fine linen and spices, just as the Egyptians embalmed their own dead.

Mummies, as we call these embalmed Egyptian corpses, are often found now, laid up in beautiful tombs, cut out in the rock, and painted in colours still fresh with picture writing, called hieroglyphics, telling in tokens all the history of the person whose body they contained. The kings built tombs for themselves, like mountains, square at the bottom, but each course of stones built within the last till they taper to a point at the top. These are called pyramids, and have within them very small narrow passages, leading to a small chamber, just large enough to hold a king's coffin.

They had enormous idols hewn out of stone. The head of one, which you may see in the British Museum, is far taller than the tallest man, and yet the face is really handsome, and there are multitudes more, both of them and of their temples, still remaining on the banks of the Nile. The children of Israel, being chiefly shepherds, kept apart from the Egyptians at first; but as time went on they learnt some of their habits, and many of them had begun to worship their idols and forget the truth, when their time of affliction came. The King of Egypt, becoming afraid of having so numerous and rich a people settled in his dominions, tried to keep them down by hard bondage and heavy labour. He made them toil at his great buildings, and oppressed them in every possible manner; and when he found that they still thrived and increased, he made the cruel decree, that every son who was born to them should be cast into the river.

But man can do nothing against the will of God, and this murderous ordinance proved the very means of causing one of these persecuted Hebrew infants to be brought up in the palace of Pharaoh, and instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, the only people who at that time had any human learning. Even in his early life, Moses seems to have been aware that he was to be sent to put an end to the bondage of his people, for, choosing rather to suffer with them than to live in prosperity with their oppressors, he went out among them and tried to defend them, and to set them at peace with one another; but the time was not yet come, and they thrust him from them, so that he was forced to fly for shelter to the desert, among the Midianite descendants of Abraham. After he had spent forty years there as a shepherd, God appeared to him, and then first revealed Himself as JEHOVAH, the Name proclaiming His eternal self-existence, I AM THAT I AM, a Name so holy, that the translators of our Bible have abstained from repeating it where it occurs, but have put the Name, the LORD, in capital letters in its stead. Moses was then sent to Egypt to lead out the Israelites on their way back to the land so long promised to their fore-fathers; and when Pharaoh obstinately refused to let them go, the dreadful plagues and wonders that were sent on the country were such as to show that their gods were no gods; since their river, the glory of their land, became a loathsome stream of blood, creeping things came and went at the bidding of the Lord, and their adored cattle perished before their eyes. At last, on the night of the Passover, in each of the houses unmarked by the blood of the Lamb, there was a great cry over the death of the first-born son; and where the sign of faith was seen, there was a mysterious obedient festival held by families prepared for a strange new journey. Then the hard heart yielded to terror, and Israel went out of Egypt as a nation. They had come in in 1707 as seventy men, they went out in 1491 as six hundred thousand, and their enemies, following after them, sank like lead in the mighty waters of that arm of the Red Sea, which had divided to let the chosen pass through.

LESSON IV

THE WILDERNESS

"Where Is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? Where is He that put His Holy Spirit within him?"—*Isaiah*, lxiii. 11.

When Moses had led the 600,000 men, with their wives, children, and cattle, beyond the reach of the Egyptians, they were in a small peninsula, between the arms of the Red Sea, with the wild desolate peaks of Mount Horeb towering in the midst, and all around grim stony crags, with hardly a spring of water; and though there were here and there slopes of grass, and bushes of hoary-leaved camel-thorn, and long-spined shittim or acacia, nothing bearing fruit for human beings. There were strange howlings and crackings in the mountains, the sun glared back from the arid stones and rocks, and the change seemed frightful after the green meadows and broad river of Egypt.

Frightened and faithless, the Israelites cried out reproachfully to Moses to ask how they should live in this desert place, forgetting that the Pillar of cloud and fire proved that they were under the care of Him who had brought them safely out of the hands of their enemies. In His mercy God bore with their murmurs, fed them with manna from Heaven, and water out of the flinty rock; and gave them the victory over the Edomite tribe of robber Amalekites at Rephidim, where Joshua fought, and Moses, upheld by Aaron and Hur, stretched forth his hands the whole day. Then, fifty days after their coming out of Egypt, He called them round the peak of Sinai to hear His own Voice proclaim the terms of the new Covenant.

The Covenant with Abraham had circumcision for the token, faith as the condition, and the blessing to all nations as the promise. This Covenant remained in full force, but in the course of the last four hundred years, sin had grown so much that the old standard, handed down from the patriarchs, had been forgotten, and men would not have known what was right, nor how far they fell from it, without a written Law. This Law, in ten rules, all meeting together in teaching Love to God and man, commanded in fact perfection, without which no man could be fit to stand in the sight of God. He spoke it with His own Mouth, from amid cloud, flame, thunder, and sounding trumpets, on Mount Sinai, while the Israelites watched around in awe and terror, unable to endure the dread of that Presence. The promise of this Covenant was, that if they would keep the Law, they should dwell prosperously in the Promised Land, and be a royal priesthood and peculiar treasure unto God. They answered with one voice, "All the words the Lord hath said will we do;" and Moses made a sacrifice, and sprinkled them with the blood, to consecrate them and confirm their oath. It was the blood of the Old Testament. Then he went up into the darkness of the cloud on the mountain top, there fasting, to talk with God, and to receive the two Tables of Stone written by the Finger of God. This was, as some believe, the first writing in the letters of the alphabet ever known in the world, and the Books of Moses were the earliest ever composed, and set down with the pen upon parchment.

Those Laws were too strict for man in his fallen state. Keep them he could not; breaking them, he became too much polluted to be fit for mercy. Even while living in sight of the cloud on the Mountain, where Moses was known to be talking with God, the Israelites lost faith, and set up a golden calf in memory of the Egyptian symbol of divinity, making it their leader instead of Moses. Such a transgression of their newly-made promise so utterly forfeited their whole right to the covenant, that Moses destroyed the precious tables, the token of the mutual engagement, and God threatened to sweep them off in a moment and to fulfil His oaths to their forefather in the children of Moses alone. Then Moses, having purified the camp by slaying the worst offenders, stood between the rest and the wrath of God, mediating for them until he obtained mercy for them, and a renewal of the Covenant. Twice he spent forty days in that awful Presence, where glorious visions were revealed to him; the Courts of Heaven itself, to be copied by him, by Divine guidance, in the Ark and Tabernacle, where

his brother Aaron, and his seed after him, were to minister as Priests, setting forth to the eye how there was a Holy Place, whence men were separated by sin, and how it could only be entered by a High Priest, after a sacrifice of atonement. Every ordinance of this service was a shadow of good things to come, and was therefore strictly enjoined on Israel, as part of the conditions of the Covenant, guiding their faith onwards by this acted prophecy; and therewith God, as King of His people, put forth other commands, some relating to their daily habits, others to their government as a nation, all tending to keep them separate from other nations. For transgressions of such laws as these, or for infirmities of human nature, regarded as stains, cleansing sacrifices were permitted. For offences against the Ten Commandments, there was no means of purchasing remission; no animal's, nay, no man's life could equal such a cost; there was nothing for it but to try to dwell on the hope, held out to Adam and Abraham, and betokened by the sacrifices and the priesthood, of some fuller expiation yet to come; some means of not only obtaining pardon, but of being worthy of mercy.

The Israelites could not even be roused to look for the present temporal promise, and hankered after the fine soil and rich fruits of Egypt, rather than the beautiful land of hill and valley that lay before them; and when their spies reported it to be full of hill forts, held by Canaanites of giant stature, a cowardly cry of despair broke out, that they would return to Egypt. Only two of the whole host, besides Moses, were ready to trust to Him who had delivered them from Pharaoh, and had led them through the sea. Therefore those two alone of the grown-up men were allowed to set foot in the Promised Land. Till all the rest should have fallen in the wilderness, and a better race have been trained up, God would not help them to take possession. In their wilfulness they tried to advance, and were defeated, and thus were obliged to endure their forty years' desert wandering.

Even Moses had his patience worn out by their fretful faithlessness, and committed an act of disobedience, for which he was sentenced not to enter the land, but to die on the borders after one sight of the promise of his fathers. Under him, however, began the work of conquest; the rich pasture lands of Gilead and Basan were subdued, and the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, were permitted to take these as their inheritance, though beyond the proper boundary, the Jordan. The Moabites took alarm, though these, as descended from Abraham's nephew Lot, were to be left unharmed; and their king, Balak, sent, as it appears, even to Mesopotamia for Balaam, a true prophet, though a guilty man, in hopes that he would bring down the curse of God on them. Balaam, greedy of reward, forced, as it were, consent from God to go to Balak, though warned that his words would not be in his own power. As he stood on the hill top with Balak, vainly endeavouring to curse, a glorious stream of blessing flowed from his lips, revealing, not only the fate of all the tribes around, even for a thousand years, but proclaiming the Sceptre and Star that should rise out of Jacob to execute vengeance on his foes. But finding himself unable to curse Israel, the miserable prophet devised a surer means of harming them: he sent tempters among them to cause them to corrupt themselves, and so effectual was this invention, that the greater part of the tribe of Simeon were ensnared, and a great plague was sent in chastisement. It was checked by the zeal of the young priest, Phineas, under whose avenging hand so many of the guilty tribe fell, that their numbers never recovered the blow. Then after a prayer of atonement, a great battle was fought, and the wretched Balaam was among the slain.

The forty years were over, Moses's time was come, and he gave his last summing up of the Covenant, and sung his prophetic song. His authority was to pass to his servant, the faithful spy, bearing the prophetic name of Joshua; and he was led by God to the top of Mount Nebo, whence he might see in its length and breadth, the pleasant land, the free hills, the green valleys watered by streams, the wooded banks of Jordan, the pale blue expanse of the Mediterranean joining with the sky to the west; and to the north, the snowy hills of Hermon, which sent their rain and dew on all the goodly mountain land. It had been the hope of that old man's hundred and twenty years, and he looked forth on it with his eye not dim, nor his natural force abated; but God had better things for him in Heaven, and there upon the mountain top he died alone, and God buried him in the sepulchre

whereof no man knoweth. None was like to him in the Old Covenant, who stood between God and the Israelites, but he left a promise that a Prophet should be raised up like unto himself.

LESSON V

ISRAEL IN CANAAN

"But He was so merciful, that He forgave their misdeeds and destroyed them not."—*Psalm Lxxviii. 38.*

In the year 1431, Joshua led the tribes through the divided waters of the Jordan, and received strength and skill to scatter the heathen before them, conquer the cities, and settle them in their inheritance.

The Land of Canaan was very unlike Egypt, with its flat soil, dry climate, and single river. It was a narrow strip, inclosed between the Mediterranean Sea and the river Jordan, which runs due south down a steep wooded cleft into the Dead Sea, the lowest water in the world, in a sort of pit of its own, with barren desolation all round it, so as to keep in memory the ruin of the cities of the plain. In the north, rise the high mountains of Libanus, a spur from which goes the whole length of the land, and forms two slopes, whence the rivers flow, either westward into the Great Sea, or eastward into the Jordan. Many of these hills are too dry and stony to be cultivated; but the slopes of some have fine grassy pastures, and the soil of the valleys is exceedingly rich, bearing figs, vines, olive trees, and corn in plenty, wherever it is properly tilled. With such hills, rivers, valleys, and pastures, it was truly a goodly land, and when God's blessing was on it, it was the fairest spot where man could live. When the Israelites entered it, every hill was crowned by a strongly-walled and fortified town, the abode of some little king of one of the seven Canaanite nations who were given into their hands to be utterly destroyed. Though they were commanded to make a complete end of all the people in each place they took, they were forbidden to seize more than they could till, lest the empty ruins should serve as a harbour for wild beasts; but they had their several lots marked out where they might spread when their numbers should need room. As Jacob had promised to Joseph, Ephraim and half Manasseh had the richest portion, nearly in the middle, and Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was set up, was in their territory; Judah and Benjamin were in a very wild rocky part to the southwards, between the two seas, with only Simeon beyond them; then came, north of Manasseh, the fine pasture lands of Issachar and Zebulon, and a small border for Asher between Libanus and the sea; while Reuben, Gad, and the rest of Manasseh, were to the east of the Jordan, where they had begged to settle themselves in the meadows of Bashan, and the balmy thickets of Gilead.

Many a fortified town was still held by the Canaanites, in especial Jebus, on Mount Moriah, between Judah and Benjamin; and close to Asher, the two great merchant cities of the Zidonians upon the sea-shore. These were called Tyre and Zidon, and their inhabitants were named Phoenicians, and were the chief sailors and traders of the Old World. From seeing a dog's mouth stained purple after eating a certain shell-fish on their coast, they had learnt how to dye woollen garments of a fine purple or scarlet, which was thought the only colour fit for kings, and these were sent out to all the countries round, in exchange for balm and spices from Gilead; corn and linen from Egypt; ivory, pearls, and rubies from India; gold from the beds of rivers in Chittim or Asia Minor; and silver from Spain, then called Tarshish. Thus they grew very rich and powerful, and were skilful in all they undertook. The art of writing, which they seem to have caught from the Hebrews, went from them to the Greeks, sons of Japhet, who lived more to the north, in what were called the Isles of the Gentiles.

The Canaanites had a still fouler worship than the other sons of Ham in Egypt. They had many gods, whom they called altogether Baalim, or lords; and goddesses, whom they called Ashtoreth; and they thought that each had some one city or people to defend; and that the Lord Jehovah of the Israelites was such another as these, instead of being the only God of Heaven and earth. Among these there was one great Baal to whom the Phoenicians were devoted, and an especial Ashtoreth, the moon, or Queen of Heaven, who was thought to have a lover named Tammuz, who died with the flowers

in the autumn and revived in the spring, and the women took delight in wailing and bemoaning his death, and then dancing and offering cakes in honour of his revival. Besides these, there was the planet Saturn, or as they called him, Moloch or Remphan, of whom they had a huge brazen statue with the hands held a little apart, set up over a furnace; they put poor little children between these brazen hands, and left them to drop into the flames below as an offering to this dreadful god.

Well might such worship be called abomination, and the Israelites be forbidden to hold any dealings with those who followed it. As long as the generation lived who had been bred up in the wilderness, they obeyed, and felt themselves under the rule of God their King, Who made His Will known at Shiloh by the signs on the breastplate of the High Priest, while judges and elders governed in the cities. But afterwards they began to be tempted to make friends with their heathen neighbours, and thus learnt to believe in their false deities, and to hanker after the service of some god who made no such strict laws of goodness as those by which they were bound. As certainly as they fell away, so surely the punishment came, and God stirred up some of these dangerous friends to attack them. Sometimes it was a Canaanite tribe with iron chariots who mightily oppressed them; sometimes the robber shepherds, the Midianites, would burst in and carry off their cattle and their crops, until distress brought the Israelites back to a better mind, and they cried out to the Lord. Then He would raise up a mighty warrior, and give him the victory, so that he became ruler and judge over Israel; but no sooner was he dead, than they would fall back again into idolatry, and receive another chastisement, repent, and be again delivered. This went on for about 400 years, the Israelites growing constantly worse. In the latter part of this time, their chief enemies were the Philistines, in the borders of Simeon and Judah, near the sea. These were not Canaanites, but had once dwelt in Egypt, and then, after living for a time in Cyprus, had come and settled in Gaza and Ashkelon, and three other very strong cities on the coast, where they worshipped a fish-god, called Dagon. They had no king, but were ruled by lords of their five cities, and made terrible inroads upon all the country round; until at last the Israelites, in their self-will, fancied they could turn them to flight by causing the Ark to be carried out to battle by the two corrupt young priests, sons of Eli, whose doom had already been pronounced—that they should both die in one day. They were slain, when the Ark was taken by the enemies, and their aged father fell back and broke his neck in the shock of the tidings. The glory had departed; and though God proved His might by shattering Dagon's image before the Ark, and plaguing the Philistines wherever they carried it, till they were forced to send it home in a manner which again showed the Divine Hand, yet it never returned to Shiloh; God deserted the place where His Name had not been kept holy; the token of the Covenant seemed to be lost; the Philistines ruled over the broken and miserable Israelites, and there was only one promise to comfort them—that the Lord would raise up unto Himself a faithful Priest. Already there was growing up at Shiloh the young Levite, Samuel, dedicated by his mother, and bred up by Eli. He is counted as first of the prophets, that long stream of inspired men, who constantly preached righteousness, and to whom occasionally future events were made known. He was also last of the Judges, or heaven-sent deliverers. As soon as he grew up, he rallied the Israelites, restored the true worship, as far as could be with the Ark in concealment, and sent them out to battle. They defeated the Philistines, and under Samuel, again became a free nation.

LESSON VI

THE KINGDOM OF ALL ISRAEL

"As is the fat taken away from the peace-offering, so was David chosen out of the children of Israel ... In all his works he praised the Holy One Most High with words of glory The Lord took away his sins and exalted his horn for ever, He gave him a covenant of kings, and a throne of glory in Israel."—*Ecclus.* xlvii. II.

When Samuel grew old, the Israelites would not trust to God to choose a fresh guardian for them, but cried out for a king to keep them together and lead them to war like other nations. Their entreaty was granted, and in 1094 B. C. Saul the son of Kish, of the small but fierce tribe of Benjamin, was appointed by God, and anointed like a priest by Samuel, on the understanding that he was not to rule by his own will, like the princes around, but as God's chief officer, to enforce His laws and carry out His bidding.

This Saul would not do. When, instead of lurking in caves, with no weapons save their tools for husbandry, the Israelites, under his leading, gradually became free and warlike; and his son Jonathan and uncle Abner were able generals, he fancied he could go his own way, he took on him to offer sacrifice, as the heathen kings did; and when sent forth to destroy all belonging to the Amalekites, he spared the king and the choicest of the spoil. For this he was sentenced not to be the founder of a line of kings, and the doom filled him with wrath against the priesthood, while an evil spirit was permitted to trouble his soul, Samuel's last great act was to anoint the youngest son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, the great grandchild of the loving Moabitess, Ruth, the same whom God had marked beside his sheepfolds as the man after His own Heart, the future father of the sceptred line of Judah, and of the "Root and Offspring of David, the bright and morning Star."

Fair and young, full of inspired song, and of gallant courage, the youth David was favoured as the minstrel able to drive the evil spirit from Saul, the champion who had slain the giant of Gath. He was the king's son-in-law, the prince's bosom friend; but, as the hopes of Israel became set on him, Saul began to hate him as if he were a supplanter, though Jonathan submitted to the Will that deprived himself of a throne, and loved his friend as faithfully as ever. At last, by Jonathan's counsel, David fled from court, and Saul in his rage at thinking him aided by the priests, slew all who fell into his hands, thus cutting off his own last link with Heaven. A trusty band of brave men gathered round David, but he remained a loyal outlaw, and always abstained from any act against his sovereign, even though Saul twice lay at his mercy. Patiently he tarried the Lord's leisure, and the time came at last. The Philistines overran the country, and chased Saul even to the mountain fastnesses of Gilboa, where the miserable man, deserted by God, tried to learn his fate through evil spirits, and only met the certainty of his doom. In the next day's battle his true-hearted son met a soldier's death; but Saul, when wounded by the archers, tried in vain to put an end to his own life, and was, after a reign of forty years, at last slain by an Amalekite, who brought his crown to David, and was executed by him for having profanely slain the Lord's anointed.

For seven years David reigned only in his own tribe of Judah, while the brave Abner kept the rest of the kingdom for Saul's son, Ishbosheth, until, taking offence because Ishbosheth refused to give him one of Saul's widows to wife, he offered to come to terms with David, but in leaving the place of meeting, he was treacherously killed by David's overbearing nephew, Joab, in revenge for the death of a brother whom he had slain in single combat. Ishbosheth was soon after murdered by two of his own servants, and David becoming sole king, ruled prudently with all his power, and with anxious heed to the will of his true King. He was a great conqueror, and was the first to win for Israel her great city on Mount Moriah. It had once been called Salem, or peace, when the mysterious priest-king, Melchizedek, reigned there in Abraham's time, but since it had been held by the Jebusites, and

called Jebus. When David took it, he named it Jerusalem, or the vision of peace, fortified it, built a palace there, and fetched thither with songs and solemn dances, the long-hidden Ark, so that it might be the place where God's Name was set, the centre of worship; and well was the spot fitted for the purpose. It was a hill girdled round by other hills, and so strong by nature, that when built round with towers and walls, an enemy could hardly have taken it. David longed to raise a solid home for the Ark, but this was not a work permitted to a man of war and bloodshed, and he could only collect materials, and restore the priests to their offices, giving them his own glorious Book of Psalms, full of praise, prayer, and entreaty, to be sung for ever before the Lord, by courses of Levites relieving one another, that so the voice of praise might never die out.

David likewise made the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites pay him tribute, and became the most powerful king in the East, receiving the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham; but even he was far from guiltless. He was a man of strong passions, though of a tender heart, and erred greatly, both from hastiness and weakness, but never without repentance, and his Psalms of contrition have ever since been the treasure of the penitent. Chastisement visited his sins, and was meekly borne, but bereavement and rebellion, care, sorrow, and disappointment, severely tried the Sweet Psalmist of Israel, shepherd, prophet, soldier, and king, ere in 1016, in his seventieth year, he went to his rest, after having been king for forty years, he was assured that his seed should endure for ever.

All promises of temporal splendour were accomplished in his peaceful son, Solomon, who asked to be the wisest, and therefore was likewise made the richest, most prosperous, and most peaceful of kings. No enemy rose against him, but all the nations sought his friendship; and Zidon for once had her merchandise hallowed by its being offered to build and adorn the Temple, Solomon's great work. The spot chosen for it was that of Isaac's sacrifice, where was the threshing-floor bought by David from Araunah, but to give farther room, he levelled the head of the mountain, throwing it into the valley; and thus forming an even space where, silently built of huge stone, quarried at a distance, arose the courts, for strangers, women, men, and priests, surrounded by cloisters, supporting galleries of rooms for the lodging of the priests and Levites, many hundreds in number. The main building was of white marble, and the Holy of Holies was overlaid even to the roof outside with plates of gold, flashing back the sunshine. Even this was but a poor token of the Shechinah, that glorious light which descended at Solomon's prayer of consecration, and filled the Sanctuary with the visible token of God's Presence on the Mercy Seat, to be seen by the High Priest once a year.

That consecration was the happiest moment of the history of Israel, What followed was mournful. Even David had been like the kings of other eastern nations in the multitude of his wives, and Solomon went far beyond him, bringing in heathen women, who won him into paying homage to their idols, and outraging God by building temples to Moloch and Ashtoreth; though as a prophet he had been inspired to speak in his Proverbs of Christ in His Church as the Holy Wisdom of God. A warning was sent that the power which had corrupted him should not continue in his family, and that the kingdom should be divided, but he only grew more tyrannical, and when the Ephraimite warrior, Jeroboam, was marked by the prophet Ahijah as the destined chief of the new kingdom, Solomon persecuted him, and drove him to take refuge with the great Shishak, King of Egypt, where he seems to have learnt the idolatries from which Israel had been so slowly weaned. Sick at heart, Solomon in his old age, wrote the saddest book in the Bible; and though his first writing, the Canticles, had been a joyful prophetic song of the love between the Lord and His Church, his last was a mournful lamentation over the vanity and emptiness of the world, and full of scorn of all that earth can give.

LESSON VII

THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH

"But if his children forsake My Law, and walk not in My judgments: if they break My statutes, and keep not My Commandments, I will visit their offences with the rod, and their sin with scourges."—*Ps. lxxxix. 31, 32.*

Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, brought about, by his own harshness and folly, the punishment that God had decreed. By the advice of his hasty young counsellors, he made so violent a reply to the petition brought to him by his subjects, that they took offence, and the ten northern tribes broke away from him, setting up as their king, Jeroboam, who had been already marked out by the prophet.

The lesson of meekness seems to have been the one chiefly appointed for Rehoboam, for when he assembled the fighting men of Judah and Benjamin to subdue the revolt, Shemaiah the prophet was sent to forbid him, and he submitted at once; and when again Jeroboam's friend Shishak invaded his kingdom, Shemaiah told him it was as a punishment sent him by God, against which he must not struggle; so he gathered all the riches left him by his father, paid the tribute that the Egyptians required; and for being thus patient and submissive, he was again blessed by God, and Judah prospered. No doubt Rehoboam's obedience saved him from sharing the fate of the other kings whom Shishak conquered and dragged back to Egypt, where he yoked them to his chariot, four abreast, and made them draw him about. Shishak was a great conqueror, and in nine years overran all Asia, as far as the river Ganges. All his victories were recorded in hieroglyphics, and the learned have made out the picture of a people with the features of Jews, bringing their gifts to his feet, no doubt the messengers of Rehoboam. He lost his sight in his old age, and is said to have killed himself.

In 955 Abijah came to the throne instead of Rehoboam, and was permitted to gain a great victory over Jeroboam, but he died at the end of three years, and was succeeded by his son Asa. The great temptation of the men of Judah seems to have been at this time the resorting to hill tops and groves of trees as places of worship, instead of going steadily to the Temple at Jerusalem; and the kings, though obedient in other respects, did not dare to put down this forbidden custom. Asa's mother, Maachah, a daughter of Absalom, even had an idol in a grove; but after the king had been strengthened to gain a great victory over the Ethiopians, he destroyed the idol, and put her down from being queen. His end was less good than his beginning; he made a league with the Syrians instead of trusting to God; and threw the prophet Hanani into prison for having rebuked him; and in his latter years he was cruel and oppressive. He died in 891.

His son Jehoshaphat was a very good and gentle prince, but his very gentleness seemed to have led him into error, for he became too friendly with the idolatrous House of Ahab in Samaria, and allowed his son Jehoram to take to wife the child of Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah, who proved even more wicked than her mother. Jehoshaphat was in alliance with Ahab, and went out with him to his last battle at Ramoth-Gilead, where Ahab tried to put his friend into danger instead of himself by making him appear as the only king present, but entirely failed to deceive the hand appointed to bring death. Afterwards, when the Edomites, Ammonites, and Moabites came up against Judah, Jehoshaphat was commanded to have no fears, but to go out to meet them, with the Levites singing before him, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endureth for ever!" So the battle should be his without fighting; for the three banded nations fought among themselves, and made such a slaughter of one another, that the Jews had nothing to do but to gather the spoil, which was in such heaps, that they spent three days in collecting it. And again, when Jehoshaphat went out with Jehoram, King of Israel, against the Moabites, with Jehoshaphat's tributary, the King of Edom, another miraculous deliverance was granted by the hand of Elisha, and the water which was sent to relieve the thirsty hosts of Israel

and Judah, seemed to the Moabites as blood; so that, thinking the three armies had quarrelled and slain each other, they made an unguarded attack, and suffered a total rout.

Jehoshaphat was succeeded in 891 by his son Jehoram, who, though he had seen such signal proofs of God's power, chose rather to follow the will of his wicked wife Athaliah, than to obey the commands of God. To strengthen his dominion, he followed the example of the worst heathen tyrants, and killed his seven brethren; and he permitted and encouraged idolatry in the most open manner. He was first punished by the loss of the Edomites, who rose against him, and set up a free kingdom according to the prophecy of Isaac; next by an in-road of the Arabians and Philistines, who ravaged his very house, and killed all his children except the youngest, Ahaziah; and lastly, by a loathsome and deadly disease, which ended his life in the fortieth year of his age.

Ahaziah was only twenty-two, and was ruled by his mother Athaliah for the one year before, going to visit his uncle Jehoram, of Israel, he was slain with him in Jehu's massacre of the House of Ahab. Athaliah herself fulfilled the rest of the decree which she did not acknowledge. She was bent on reigning, and savagely murdered all her grandsons who fell into her hands; but as the House of David was never to fail, one tender branch, the infant Joash, was hidden from her fury by his aunt, the wife of the High Priest Jehoiada; and when the fitting time was come, the Levites were armed, and the people were shown their little king. They acknowledged him with shouts of joy, and Athaliah coming to see the cause of the outcry, was dragged out of the Temple and put to death. Jerusalem was cleansed from the worship of Baal, and all prospered as long as the good Jehoiada lived. After his death, however, Joash fell away grievously, and promoted idol worship; nay, he even slew the son of his preserver, Jehoiada, for bringing him a Divine rebuke, and for this iniquity his troops suffered a great defeat from the Syrians, and his servants slew him as he lay sick on his bed in 838. His son Amaziah began well, obeying the Lord by dismissing the Ephraimites whom he had hired to aid him against the Edomites, and he was therefore rewarded with a great victory; but so strangely blind was he, that he brought home the vain gods of Edom and worshipped them. He too was slain by rebels in the flower of his age, leaving his son Uzziah, also called Azariah, to succeed him at sixteen years old. Uzziah met with such success at first, that his heart was lifted up, and in his pride he endeavoured to intrude into the priest's office, and burn incense on the Altar; but even while striving with the High Priest, the leprosy broke out white on his brow, setting him apart, to live as an outcast from religious services for ever. His son Jotham became the governor of the kingdom during his lifetime, and afterwards reigned alone till the year 759, when he was succeeded by his son Ahaz, one of the worst and most idolatrous of the Kings of Judah. The Syrians made alliance with Israel, and terribly ravaged Judea, till Jerusalem stood alone in the midst of desolation; and Ahaz, instead of turning to the Lord, tried to strengthen himself by fresh heathen alliances, though the prophet Isaiah brought him certain messages that his foes should be destroyed, and promised him, for a sign, that great blessing of the House of David, that the Virgin's Son should be born, and should be God present with us.

LESSON VIII

THE KINGDOM OF SAMARIA

"As for Samaria, her king is cut off as the foam upon the water."—*Hosea*, x. 7.

Many promises had marked out Ephraim for greatness, and at first the new kingdom seemed quite to overshadow the little rocky Judah. But the founder of the dominion of the ten tribes sowed the seeds of decay, because, like Saul, he would not trust to the God who had given him his crown. He was afraid his subjects would return to the kings of the House of David, if he let them go to worship at Jerusalem, and therefore revived the old symbol of a calf, which he must have seen in Egypt in his exile, setting up two shrines at Bethel and at Dan, the two ends of his kingdom, bidding his people go thither to offer sacrifice. Thus he made Israel to sin; and while hoping to strengthen his power, was the cause of its ruin. Prophets warned him in vain, that his line should not remain on the throne; and in the reign of his son Nadab, the rebel Baasha arose and slew the whole family of this first king of the idolatrous realm, in the year 952. Baasha was not warned by the fate of Nadab, but followed the same courses; and his son Elah and all his house were destroyed in 928, when after the slaughter of two short-lived usurpers, the captain of the army, Omri, became king. Omri belonged to the city of Jezreel, in the inheritance of Issachar; but he built Samaria in the midst of Ephraim, between the two hills of blessing and of cursing, and this town becoming the capital, gave its name to the whole kingdom. In 918, Omri left his crown to his son Ahab, who allied himself with the rich Phoenicians, and took the Zidonian princess Jezebel for his wife; the most unfortunate marriage in the whole Israelitish history. Sinful as had been the calf-worship, it was still meant for adoration of the true God; but Jezebel brought her foul Phoenician faith with her, and tried to force on the Israelites the worship of Baal as a separate god, in the stead of the Lord Jehovah.

Ahab was weak, and yielded; and the greater number of the nation were so much corrupted by the breach of the Second Commandment, that they were not slow to break the First, although God had sent the most glorious of all His prophets to prove to them that "the Lord, He is the God." Three years of drought showed who commands the clouds, and then came Elijah's challenge to the four hundred prophets of Baal, to prove who was the God who could send fire from Heaven! All day did the four hundred cry wildly on their idol, while Elijah mocked them; at evening his offering was made, and drenched with water to increase the wonder of the miracle. He prayed, the fire fell at once from Heaven, and the people shouted "The Lord He is the God!" and gave their deceivers up to punishment; and when this partial purification was made, he prayed upon Mount Carmel, and the little cloud arose and grew into a mighty storm, bringing abundance of rain on the thirsty land.

Who could withstand such wonders? Yet they only hardened Jezebel into greater cruelty, and Elijah was forced to flee into the utmost desert, where he communed with God on Mount Sinai, even like Moses. Only once more did he appear again to Ahab, and that was to rebuke him for having permitted the murder of a poor subject whose property he had coveted, and to foretell the horrors in which his line should end.

Ahab was not wholly hardened, and often had gleams of good which brought favour upon him. A new enemy had risen up since the Canaanites had been destroyed, and the Philistines repressed, by David; namely, the Syrians, a powerful nation, whose capital was at Damascus, a city which is said to be a perfect paradise, so delicious is the climate, and so lovely the two rivers, one making the circuit of the walls, the other flowing through the middle of the town. These Syrians were appointed to bring punishment upon Samaria; but at first, two great victories were vouchsafed to Ahab, because Benhadad, King of Syria, fancied that the Israelites only won because their gods were gods of the hills. Afterwards, when Ahab went out to recover Ramoth Gilead, wilfully trusting to lying prophets,

and silencing the true one, not all his disguise could avail to protect him; he was slain in the battle; and when his chariot was washed, the dogs licked his blood, as they had licked that of his victim Naboth.

Ahaziah, his son, soon died of a fall from the top of his palace, and the next brother Jehoram reigned, trying to make an agreement between the worship of God and of Baal. It was now that Elijah was taken away into Heaven by a whirlwind, leaving behind him Elisha to carry on his mission of prophecy and to execute the will of the Lord. It was Elisha who sent a messenger to anoint Jehu, the warrior who performed the vengeance of the Lord upon the House of Ahab. In the year 884 Jehoram was slain in his chariot; Jezebel, thrown out of window by her own slaves, perished miserably among the ravenous flocks of street dogs; and all the princes of the line were slaughtered by the rulers of Samaria; the worshippers of Baal were massacred, and the land purified from this idolatry. Still Jehu would not part with the calves of Dan and Bethel; and he was therefore warned that his family should likewise pass away after the fourth generation.

Elisha had already wept at the fore-knowledge of the miseries which Hazael of Syria should bring upon Israel; and Hazael, murdering his master Benhadad by stifling him with a wet cloth as he lay sick on his bed, became a dreadful enemy to Samaria. So much broken was the force of Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, that at one time he had only one thousand foot, fifty horse, and ten chariots; but after this, prosperity began to return to the Israelites. Joash, his son, was a mighty king, and would have been still greater, if he would have believed that obeying the simple words of the prophet Elisha on his death-bed would bring him victory. Yet so much greater was his force than that of Judah, that when Amaziah sent him a challenge, he replied by the insulting parable of the thistle and the cedar. Jeroboam II., his son, was likewise prosperous; but neither blessings nor warnings would induce these kings to forsake their golden calves. Amos, the herdsman-prophet of Tekoa, was warned to say nothing against the king's chapel at Bethel; and Hosea in vain declared that Ephraim was feeding on wind, and following after the east-wind, namely, putting his trust in mere empty air. So in the time of Zechariah, son to Jeroboam, came the doom of the House of Jehu, and in 773 the king was murdered by Shallum, who only reigned a month, being killed by his general, Menahem. Again, Menahem's son, Pekahiah, was killed by his captain Pekah, a great warrior, who made an attack upon Ahaz of Judah, and slew one hundred and twenty thousand Jews in one day. Many more with all their spoil were brought captives to Samaria; but there was some good yet left in Israel, and at the rebuke of the prophet Oded, the Ephraimites remembered that they were brethren, gave back to the prisoners all their spoil, fed them, clothed them, and mounted them on asses to carry them safely back to their own land. But Pekah, and his ally, Rezin of Damascus, were sore foes to Ahaz, and cruelly ravaged his domains; and though God encouraged him, by the words of Isaiah, to trust in Him alone, and see their destruction, Ahaz obstinately resolved to turn to a new power for protection.

LESSON IX

NINEVEH

"Where is the dwelling-place of the lions, and the feeding-place of the young lions?"—*Nahum*, ii. 11.

When the confusion of tongues took place at Babel, and men were dispersed, the sons of Ham's grandson, Cush, remained in Mesopotamia, which took the name of Assyria, from Assur, the officer of Nimrod, the first king. This Assur began building, on the banks of the Tigris, the great city of Nineveh, one of the mightiest in all the world, and the first to be ruined. It was enclosed by a huge wall, so wide that three chariots could drive side by side on the top, and built of bricks made of the clay of the country, dried in the sun and cemented with bitumen, guarded at the base by a plinth fifty feet in height, and with immense ditches round it, about sixty miles in circumference. Within were huge palaces, built of the same bricks, faced with alabaster, and the rooms decked with cedar, gilding, and ivory, and raised upon terraces whence broad flights of steps led down to courts guarded by giant stone figures of bulls and lions, with eagles' wings and human faces, as if some notion of the mysterious Cherubim around the Throne in Heaven had floated to these Assyrians. The slabs against the walls were carved with representations of battles, hunts, sacrifices, triumphs, and all the scenes in the kings' histories, nay, in the building of the city; and there were explanations in the wedge-shaped letters of the old Assyrian alphabet. The Ninevites had numerous idols, but their honour for the Lord had not quite faded away; and about the year 830, about the time of Amaziah in Judah, and Jeroboam II. in Israel, the prophet Jonah was sent to rebuke them for their many iniquities. In trying to avoid the command, by sailing to Tarshish in a Phoenician ship, he underwent that strange punishment which was a prophetic sign of our Lord's Burial and Resurrection; and thus warned, he went to Nineveh and startled the people by the cry, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" At that cry, the whole place repented as one man; and from the king to the beggar all fasted and wept, till God had mercy on their repentance and ready faith, and turned away His wrath, in pity to the 120,000 innocent children who knew not yet to do good or evil.

The prophet Nahum afterwards prophesied against the bloody city, and foretold that her men should become like women, and that in the midst of her feasting and drunkenness an overflowing flood should make an end of her. But first God had a work for the Ninevites to do, namely, to punish His own chosen, who would not have Him for their God. Therefore, He strengthened the great King Tiglath Pileser, who already held in subjection the other great Assyrian city of Babylon, and the brave Median mountaineers, to come out against the Syrians and Israelites. Ahaz, King of Judah, hoping to be delivered from his distresses, sent messengers to Tiglath Pileser, to say, "I am thy servant and thy son," and to beg him to protect him from his two enemies, promising to pay him tribute. Tiglath Pileser did indeed take Damascus, and put the king to death, destroying the old Syrian kingdom for ever, and he carried away the calf of Dan, and severely chastised Samaria, where Pekah was shortly after murdered by his servant Hoshea; so that Isaiah's prophecy of the ruin of "these two tails of smoking firebrands," Pekah and Rezin, was fulfilled; but as Ahaz had tried to bring it about in his own way, he gained nothing. Though he went to pay his service to the conqueror at Damascus, Tiglath Pileser did not help him, but only distressed him; and instead of learning Who was his true Guardian, Ahaz only came home delighted with the Syrian temples, and profanely altered the arrangements in the Temple, which Moses and Solomon had ordained by God's command, as patterns of the greater and more perfect Tabernacle revealed to Moses in Heaven. He soon died, in the year 725, when only thirty-six years old, leaving his crown to Hezekiah, then only sixteen, the king whose heart was more whole with God than had been that of any king since his father David, and whose first thought was to

purify the Temple, and to destroy all corrupt worship, breaking down idols, and destroying the high places and groves, which had stood ever since Solomon's time.

Hoshea, too, was the best King of Samaria that had yet reigned, for he encouraged his subjects to go to worship at Jerusalem, whither Hezekiah invited them to keep the Passover, and that feast had not been held so fully since Solomon's time. They came back full of zeal, and destroyed many of the idols; but the reformation came too late; the measure of Israel's sin was full. Hoshea offended Shalmaneser, who had succeeded Tiglath Pileser, by making friends with So, King of Egypt, and the Assyrian army came down upon Israel in the year 722, and killing Hoshea, carried off all the people as captives, settling them in the cities of the Medes, never more to dwell in their own land. Sargon seems to have dethroned Shalmaneser about this time, and to have completed the conquest of Israel, of which he boasted on the tablets of a great palace near Nineveh, which has been lately brought to light.

The remnant that was left, the small realm of Judah, took warning, and turned to God with all their heart, and therefore were protected; but they had much to suffer. Sargon's son, Sennacherib, was a proud and ambitious monarch, who used his Israelite captives in building up the walls of Nineveh, and making the most magnificent of all the palaces there, eight acres in size, and covered with inscriptions. He invaded Judea, took forty-six cities, and besieged Jerusalem, raising a mound to overtop the walls; but on receiving large gifts from Hezekiah, he returned to his own land. At Babylon a prince named Merodach Baladan had set himself up against Sennacherib, and sought the friendship of Hezekiah. When the good King of Judah recovered from his illness by a miracle, the sign of which was, that the sun seemed to retreat in his course, it probably won the attention of the Chaldeans, who were great star-gazers; and Merodach Baladan sent messengers to compliment the king, whose favour with Heaven had thus been shown to all the earth. For once Hezekiah erred, and was so much uplifted, as to display his treasure and his new-born son in ostentation. Isaiah rebuked him, telling him that his children should be slaves in the hands of the very nation who had heard his boast. He meekly submitted, thankful that there should be peace and truth in his days. Soon after, Babylon was reduced by Sennacherib, and Merodach Baladan driven into exile. In the latter years of his reign, Sennacherib undertook an expedition into Egypt, and on his way sent a blasphemous message by his servant, Rabshakeh, to summon Hezekiah to submit, and warning him and his people, that their God could no more protect them than the gods of the conquered nations had saved their worshippers. In answer to the prayer of Hezekiah, came, by the mouth of Isaiah, an assurance that the boaster who insulted the living God, was only an instrument in His Hands, unable to go one step against His will. Not one arrow should he shoot against the holy city, but he should hear a rumour, a blast should be sent on him, and he should fall by the sword in his own land.

Accordingly, on the report that Tirhakah, the great King of Ethiopia, was coming to the aid of the Egyptians, he hurried on to reinforce the army he had sent against him, intending to take Jerusalem on his way back. But on the night when the two armies were in sight of each other, ere the battle, the blast of death passed over the Assyrians; and in early morning the host lay dead, not by the sword, but by the breath of the Lord, and Sennacherib was left to return without the men in whom he had trusted! Even heathens recorded this deliverance, but they strangely altered the story. They said that it was the prayer of the Egyptian king that prevailed on his gods to send a multitude of mice into the enemy's camp, to gnaw all the bow-strings, so that they could not fight; and they showed a statue of the king with a mouse in his hand, which was, they said, a memorial of the wonder.

Sennacherib, in rage and fury, cruelly persecuted the Israelites at Nineveh for their connection with the Jews; and then it was that the pious Tobit buried the corpses that were cast in the street until he lost his sight, afterwards so wonderfully restored. Sennacherib was murdered in the year 720 by two of his sons, while worshipping his god Nisroch; and another son, Esarhaddon, became king.

Esarhaddon, who is known by many different names, soon after came out and marauded all over the adjacent country; and it is believed that it was about this time that Bethulia was so bravely

defended, and the Ninevite general slain by the craft and courage of Judith. Esarhaddon took away all the remaining Israelites from their country, and filled it up with Phoenicians and Medes from cities which had been conquered. These, bringing their idols into the land of the Lord, were chastised with lions; and, begging to be taught to worship the God of the land, had priests sent them, who taught them some of the truth, though very imperfectly; and these new inhabitants were called Samaritans.

In the time of Hezekiah, many more of the Psalms than had been before collected, were written down and applied to the Temple Service. The latter part of the Proverbs of Solomon were first copied out, and the inspired words of the prophets began to be added to the Scriptures. Joel's date is unfixed, but Hosea, Amos, and Jonah, had recently been prophesying, and the glorious evangelical predictions of Isaiah and Micah were poured out throughout this reign, those of Isaiah ranging from the humiliation and Passion of the Redeemer, to the ingathering of the nations to His Kingdom, and Micah marking out the little Bethlehem as the birth-place of "Him whose goings are from everlasting."

Manasseh, the son of the good Hezekiah, began to reign in 699. He was in his first years savagely wicked, and very idolatrous. It is believed that he caused the great evangelical prophet, Isaiah, to be put to death by being sawn asunder, and he set an image in the Temple itself. He soon brought down his punishment on his head, for the Assyrian captains invaded Judea, and took him captive, dragging him in chains to Babylon. There he repented, and humbled himself with so contrite a heart, that God had mercy on him, and caused his enemies to restore him to his throne; but the free days of Judah were over, and they were thenceforth subjects, paying tribute to the King of Assyria, and Manasseh was only a tributary for the many remaining years of his reign, while he strove in vain to undo the evil he had done by bringing in idolatry.

Meantime the greatness of Nineveh came to an end. The Babylonians and Medes revolted against it, and it was ruined in the year 612. Sardanapalus succeeded his father at Nineveh, but was weak and luxurious. His brother, Saracus, was so like him, that what seems really to have been the end of Saracus, is generally told of Sardanapalus. He was so weary of all amusement and delight, that, by way of change, he would dress like his wives, and spin and embroider with them, and he even offered huge rewards to anyone who would invent a new pleasure. He said his epitaph should be, that he carried with him that which he had eaten, which, said wise men, was a fit motto only for a pig, not a man. At last his carelessness and violence provoked the Babylonians and Medes to rise against him, and they besieged his city; but he took no notice, and feasted on, putting his trust in an old prophecy, (perhaps Nahum's,) that nothing should harm Nineveh till the river became her enemy. At last he heard that the Tigris had overflowed, and broken down a part of the wall; and so giving himself up, he shut himself up in his palace, and setting fire to it, burnt himself with all his wives, slaves, and treasures, rather than be taken by the enemy. So ended Nineveh, in the year 612. No one ever lived there again; the river made part a swamp, and the rest was covered with sand brought by the desert winds. It was all ruin and desolation; but of late years many of its mighty remains have been brought to our country, as witnesses of the dealings of God with His people's foes.

LESSON X

THE CAPTIVITY

"Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?"—*Larn.*
ii. 15.

Manasseh's son, Amon, undid all the reformation of his latter years, and brought back idolatry; and indeed, the whole Jewish people had become so corrupt, that even when Amon was murdered in 642, after only reigning two years, and better days came back with the good Josiah, it was with almost all of them only a change of the outside, and not of the heart. Josiah was but eight years old when he came to the throne, and at sixteen he began to rule, seeking the Lord earnestly with his whole heart, as David and Hezekiah alone had done before him. One of his first acts was to purify the Temple, and in so doing, the book of the Law of Moses was found, cast aside, and forgotten by all. Josiah bade the scribes read it aloud, and then for the first time he heard what blessings Judah had forfeited, what curses she had deserved, and how black was her disobedience in the sight of God. Well might he rend his clothes, weep aloud, and send to the prophetess Huldah, to ask whether the anger of the Lord could yet be turned aside. She made answer by the word of the God of Justice, that the doom must come on the guilty nation, but that in His mercy, He would spare Josiah the sight of the ruin, and that he should be gathered into his grave in peace; and at the same time Zephaniah likewise spoke of judgment, and Jeremiah, the priest of Anathoth, was foretelling that treacherous Judah should soon suffer like backsliding Israel. Yet even this hopeless future did not daunt Josiah's loving heart from doing his best. He collected his people, and renewed the Covenant, he rooted out every trace of idolatry, even more thoroughly than Hezekiah had done, overthrowing even Solomon's idol temples; and he went to Bethel, which he seems to have held under the King of Assyria, and defiled the old altar there by burning bones on it, as the disobedient prophet had foretold of him by name, when that altar was first set up. He likewise caused copies of the Law to be made, so that it might never be lost again; and the Jews have a story, that knowing the Temple was to be destroyed, he saved the Ark of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, and the pot of manna, from sacrilege, by hiding them away in the hollow of Mount Nebo, where they have never since been found; but this is quite uncertain.

Josiah lived between two mighty powers; the King of Babylon, who had newly taken Nineveh, and Pharaoh Necho, King of Egypt, a very bold and able man, who hired Phoenician ships to sail round Africa, and then did not believe the crews when they came back, because they said they had seen the sun to the north at noon, and wool growing on trees. He tried to cut a canal from the Nile to the Red Sea; and wishing to check the power of Babylon, he brought an army by sea to make war upon Assyria, landing at Acre under Mount Carmel, and intending to march through Gilead. Josiah, being a tributary of Babylon, thought it his duty to endeavour to stop him, and going out to battle with him at Megiddo, was there mortally wounded, and died on his way home, in the year 611. The mourning of the Jews over their good king was so bitter, that it was a proverb long after; and they had indeed reason to lament, for he was the last who stood between them and their sin and their punishment.

Jehoahaz, or Shallum, his third son, a wicked young man, only reigned while Necho was fighting a battle with the Babylonians on the Euphrates, and then was carried off in chains to Egypt, while Necho set up Eliakim, or Jehoiakim, another brother, in his stead. Jehoiakim was idolatrous, cruel, and violent; he persecuted the prophets, and did everything to draw on himself the punishment of Heaven. Necho, making another invasion, was defeated by the great Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and hunted back by him into Egypt. On his way Nebuchadnezzar seized Jerusalem, in the year 606, and carried off some of the treasures of the Temple, and many of the royal family, to Babylon, among them the four holy children, but he let Jehoiakim continue to reign as his vassal. Jeremiah prophesied that the time of captivity and desolation should last seventy years from this time, but the worst was

not yet come. Jehoiakim was bent on trusting for help to the Egyptians, who had made him king, and treated Jeremiah as a traitor for counselling him to be loyal to the Assyrians; he threw Jeremiah into prison, and when Baruch read the roll of his prophecies in the Temple, he caused it to be cut to pieces and destroyed. At last he rebelled, relying on help from Egypt, but it did not come, for Necho was dying; and in the year 598, Nebuchadnezzar himself came up against Jerusalem, and besieged it. Jehoiakim died in the midst of the war, and his equally wicked son, Jehoiachin, Coniah, or Jeconiah, was soon forced to come out, and surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, who dishonoured his father's corpse, and carried him away to Babylon, with the chief treasures of the Temple, and a great multitude of warriors and mechanics. Among them was the prophet Ezekiel, who, on the banks of the Chebar, saw mighty visions of the chariot of God borne up by the Cherubim; and while he rebuked the present Jews for their crimes, promised restoration, and beheld the new and more perfect Building of God measured out by the angel. A marble cylinder with most of this prophecy engraven on it in Assyrian characters, has lately been found in the ruins near the Tigris.

The last son of Josiah, Mattanias, or Zedekiah, was set up as king, and reigned for eleven years; like his brothers, wavering and sinning, and trusting to false prophets, instead of Jeremiah, who gave him hopes of rest, if he would only bear his present fallen state meekly, and not trust to Egypt. The counsellors who loved Egypt, however, persuaded him to rebel, as Pharaoh Hophra was actually coming out to his assistance; and he put Jeremiah into prison for prophesying that he would bring ruin on himself, Nebuchadnezzar soon marched upon him, and besieged Jerusalem; and his friend, Pharaoh Hophra, left him to his fate, showing himself the broken reed that Jeremiah had said he would prove. The siege of Jerusalem lasted a year, and no one suffered more than the prophet, who was thrown into a noisome prison, and afterwards lowered into a pit, where he nearly died; but not for all this did he cease to denounce the judgments of God on the rebellious city. Horrible famine prevailed, and the streets were full of dead; but Jeremiah told the king, that if he would go out and make terms with Nebuchadnezzar all might yet be saved. But Zedekiah would not listen, and at last broke out with his men of war to cut his way through the enemy. His self-will met its deserts; he was taken by Nebuzaradan, the captain who had been left to carry on the siege, and brought a prisoner to Babylon, after his sons had been slain in his very sight, and his eyes then put out, according to a prophecy of Ezekiel, which he is said to have thought impossible; namely, that he should die at Babylon, and yet never see it.

The Temple was stripped of the last remains of its glory, and utterly overthrown, the walls were broken down, and the place left desolate; the Edomites who were in the conqueror's army savagely exulting in the fall of their kindred nation; but both Psalm cxxxvii. and the Prophet Obadiah spoke of vengeance in store for them likewise. All the Jews of high rank were carried away, and none left but the poorer sort, who were to till the ground under a ruler named Gedaliah. Jeremiah, who was offered his choice of going to Babylon or remaining in Judea, preferred to continue near the once glorious city, whose solitude and ruin he bewailed in the mournful Book of Lamentations; and he did his utmost to persuade the remaining Jews to rest quietly under the dominion of Assyria. Had they done so, there would yet have been peace; but Ishmael, a prince of the seed royal, who had fled to the Ammonites during the invasion, came back, and in the hope of making himself king murdered Gedaliah at a harvest feast, with many Jews and Chaldeans, and was on his way to his friend, the King of Ammon, when Johanan, a friend of Gedaliah, came upon him and slew many of his party, so that he escaped with only eight men to the Ammonites. So shocked were the Jews at this murder of Gedaliah, that they ever after kept a fast on the anniversary. Johanan now asked counsel from Jeremiah, who still enjoined him to submit to the Assyrians, but assured him that if he went to Egypt it would only be to share the ruin of that country; but Johanan and his friends would not listen, and carried all the remnant of Judah, and Jeremiah himself, off by force into Egypt. All this happened in the miserable year 588, and Jerusalem remained utterly waste, the land enjoying a long sabbath of desolation, What became of Jeremiah afterwards is not known; he is said to have been stoned in

Egypt, but this is not at all certain. He left behind him the promise that a Deliverer should come—the Lord our Righteousness—and that the former redemption out of bondage in Egypt should be as nothing in comparison with the ingathering of the New Covenant from the north country and from all countries; also that the New Covenant should be within, written upon the hearts and minds of the faithful.

LESSON XI

BABYLON

"By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Sion."—*Psalms* cxxxvii, 1.

Babylon, the city which was to be the place of captivity of the Jews, was the home of the Chaldeans, who are believed not to have been the sons of Gush, like the Assyrians whom they had conquered at Nineveh, but to have been at first a wandering tribe of the north, and to have descended from Japhet. They had nearly the same gods as the Ninevites, but thought the special protector of their city was Bel-Merodach, the name by which they called the planet Jupiter. They were such great observers of the courses of the stars, that astronomy is said to have begun with them; but this was chiefly because they fancied that the heavenly bodies would help them to foretell coming events, for they put great faith in soothsayers. They settled upon the bank of the Euphrates, near the ruins of the Tower of Babel, round which a city arose, sometimes free, sometimes under the power of the King of Nineveh.

In the time of the weak and luxurious Saracus, Nabopolassar was governor of Babylon. He joined himself to the Medea, giving his son, Nebuchadnezzar, in marriage to the Median Princess Amytis; and as has already been said, the two nations together destroyed Nineveh, after which, Babylon became the head of the Assyrian Empire, and Nebuchadnezzar was the king.

He made the city exceedingly grand and beautiful. It was fifty five miles in circuit, square, surrounded by a wall eighty-seven feet thick, and three hundred and fifty high, with houses and a street on the top, and an enormous ditch filled with water all round, another lesser wall some way within. There were one hundred brazen gates in the wall, besides two larger gateways upon the Euphrates, which ran through the middle, dividing the city into two parts. It was full of streets and houses, with such fields and vineyards, that it was like a whole country walled in; and the soil was exceedingly rich, being all brought down from the Armenian hills by the Euphrates. As this river rose in the mountains of Armenia, it used to overflow in the spring, when the snows melted and swelled the stream; but to prevent mischief, the country was covered with a network of canals, to draw off the water in safety. The pride of the city was the Temple of Bel, which is thought to have been built on a fragment of the Tower of Babel. It was a pile of enormous height, with seven stages in honour of the seven planets then known, and with a winding ascent leading from one to the other. On the top was the shrine, where stood Bel's golden image, twelve cubits high, and before it a golden table where meats and wine were served up to him. On either side of the river were two palaces, joined together by a bridge, and the nearer one, four miles round, with wonderful grounds, containing what were called the hanging gardens, namely, a hill which Nebuchadnezzar had caused to be raised by heaping up earth, and planted with trees, to please his Median queen, whose eye pined for her native mountains in the flats of Babylon.

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