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"That's what the man said!"



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"But that auto expert said in the paper that we may have to make our old cars last for 2 or 3 years after victory. That's bad news for me!"



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Sunday School Lesson

For Sunday, May 20

By Dr. Paul Caudill

Topic: The Defeat Of The Southern Kingdom Bible Material: 1 Kings 12:1-17; 2 Kings 11 to 25; Jeremiah 18 to 39

The story of the defeat of the Southern Kingdom can be dealt with only in a limited manner within the scope of the present lesson. Certainly the careful student will wish to study closely the above passages of Scripture as well as the immediate context. One cannot appreciate the present series of lessons from the Old Testament without doing more than casual reading in the Scriptures. One needs so to familiarize himself with the various epochs in Israel's history that he will be able to enjoy from many vantage points a short perspective of the whole. In other words, he shall want to become so thoroughly acquainted with Israel that her experiences, from beginning to end, will stand out before him at all times as a vast panorama.

The Survival of Judah Following the downfall of Israel (722 B. C.) and the consequent exile of the inhabitants to Assyria, the Kingdom of Judah continued for an additional 135 years. The two kingdoms, be it remembered, had existed side by side already for 250 years. There are a number of reasons that may be given for the continued survival of Judah. To begin with, Judah was more advantageously situated geographically. She was less on the beaten pathway of invasion and attack from the northeast. Her life was a bit more sheltered, sequestered.

But more than this, Judah, despite her periods of infidelity, had manifested a greater regard for Jehovah than the Northern Kingdom. This can be easily understood in the light of the ministry of such a man as Isaiah. There had been periodically in her midst outstanding leaders whose courageous voices had served to call her back repeatedly to Jehovah. No nation can hear the voice of an Isaiah without feeling to its remotest bounds the impact of his compelling message. Then, too, Judah had been ruled by the

house of David; and throughout her 380 years she had had but nineteen kings. All of this contributed to the stability of the kingdom and made for its survival.

Good and Bad Kings Judah had both her good and bad kings. There were, for instance, Hezekiah and Josiah who furnished the inspiration for reforms that were felt throughout the kingdom. Under the influence of such men of God as these telling reforms were brought about throughout the nation.

The Scriptures tell us, for instance, that when Hezekiah came to the throne he did not follow in the footsteps of his wicked forebears but, rather, it is said that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, "according to all that his father David did." The high places were removed by him; the images broken, and the groves of pagan worshipers were cut down and destroyed. He even went so far as to do away with the brazen serpent that Moses had made because some of the people had come to revere it idolatrously. His loyalty to Jehovah was of such high order that it was said of him "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah nor any that were before him."

The story of Hezekiah's intercession before God in connection with the siege of the Assyrian host under Sennacherib is thrilling beyond words. The result of the threatened invasion is too well known for mention. "It came to pass that night that the angel of the Lord went out and smote in the camp of the Assyrians one hundred four score and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold they were all dead corpses."

But the reigns of the kings of Judah were not all good. Some of them were bad! Hanasseh reigned for fifty-five years, having begun at the age of twelve, and his reign was one of the most tragic in the history of Judah. A word of summary will suffice: He did the opposite to what his father had done before him, building up

again the high places and erecting altars for Baal, even as Ahab, the king of Israel, had done. In worship and in service he departed from the ways of Jehovah. Of him it was said, "Manasseh seduced them to do evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel." Tragedy upon tragedy his reign!

The Parable of the Potter

The prophet Jeremiah is commonly regarded as one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. Called into his holy office during the reign of King Josiah, his ministry extended over a period of some fifty years. "He was by nature gentle and tender in his feelings and sympathetic; a decided contrast to this being found in the hard and unmerciful judgement which it was the mission of Jeremiah to announce. God made him strong and firm, and immovable like iron, for his mission. He loved his people as nobody else, and yet was always compelled to prophecy evil for them, and seemed to be the enemy of his nation. He was expelled more than all the other prophets to suffer through the anger of God, which was to afflict his people."

In the parable of the potter the

prophet is led by Jehovah down to the potter's house for the purpose of hearing his words. By means of an object lesson Jeremiah is instructed to proclaim to Israel that just as marred and misshapen clay can be remade by the potter into another suitable vessel, "as seemed good to the potter to make it," even so God is able to take the nation Israel and remold her life according to his will and purpose. But Israel must be willing to be in the hands of God as is clay in the hands of the potter. It is a striking picture, one that is so simple that even a child could understand. It is a picture that has afforded inspiration for the transformation of tens of thousands of lives in the centuries that have followed the ministry of Jeremiah.

If humanity today, humanity that is wasting itself upon the shameful indulgences of life, could be induced to hear this message of Jeremiah, the parable of the potter, there would be tens of thousands of other transformations still. And humanity needs this message; never before in world history have there been more evidences of perverted lives and wasted talents than today.

One needs only to glance at the nation's annual drink bill and the

staggering sums spent on gambling and at the evidences of woe-fal crimes to realize the need of this message now. God has a plan for every life, and that plan is always best, but it can be ignored by the individual; it can be ignored and left to the ravages of neglect. The prophet reminds us however that so long as there is a spark of faith left, an iota of trust, God is able to reshape, to remake, the penitent life.

Impending Doom

The lesson closes with a stirring proclamation of the doom of the Southern Kingdom. "Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity . . . I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy." The court at Jerusalem could reject, if they so desired, the plaintive appeal of the weeping Jeremiah, but they could not nullify the awakening utterance of Jehovah. In their bold and daring apostasy they had made their way into the very jaws of doom. Already the hot, scorching breath of the east wind could be felt approaching their threshold. And this is the tragic end that must be faced ultimately by all who fail to heed the gracious admonition of a loving God.

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