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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Golden Text.—He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.—Micah 6:8

The Lesson as a Whole
 Approach to the Lesson

The Bible is the only Book of prophecy in the world. While there are certain indefinite predictions in many of the so-called sacred books of the great religions of the East, it is only in the Holy Scriptures that we have clear and positive prophecies which have been fulfilled already in exact accord with what was written, or shall yet be fulfilled in connection with the events of the last days and the second advent and reign of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But prophecy is more than mere prediction of the future. It is the revelation of the mind of God concerning conditions and circumstances of which He either approves or disapproves. It has been aptly said that prophecy is not simply foretelling, but forth-telling. How often in the books of the prophets we read that "the word of the Lord came" to one and another of His servants, and that in a special, authoritative way. For our present lesson we have selections from two Old Testament prophets, Amos and Micah.

Amos sought to bring the truth of God to bear upon the consciences of the people of Israel and Judah at a time of great declension and indifference. His strong, virile messages were unheeded by the mass of the people, though others, a mere remnant, responded to them and turned to the Lord.

Micah dealt more with the glorious future which God had promised to His people. He foretold the coming of Messiah and indicated the actual city in which He was to be born. It was this Scripture that the scribes in Jerusalem brought to Herod's attention (Matt. 2:4-6; Mic. 5:2). But, though familiar with the prophecies, they rejected Him of whom they spoke. Micah also set forth the glorious reign in righteousness of the coming King and told of a time when wars should cease and peace prevail throughout the world under the beneficent reign of God's Anointed.

The Historical Setting
 Amos though a herdman of Tekoa in Judah (Amos 1:1), was sent by God to testify to the northern kingdom when Jeroboam II was reigning in Samaria. At that time Uzziah was king of Judah, so Amos ministered somewhat earlier than Isaiah, who dates his prophetic call in the year that King Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1). So far as the record goes, Amos was without any formal education. He was a country boy who earned his living tending cattle and sheep and gathering wild figs (Chap. 7:14). The "sycamore" mentioned was a wild fig tree. To this young man came the call of God, separating him from his ordinary avocation and commissioning him to go forth as a prophet to proclaim the Word of the Lord.

Micah prophesied in the eighth century before Christ, being contemporary with Isaiah. Both of these prophets denounced intemperance in no uncertain terms.

Verse 5:21.—"I despise your feast days." Religious formalities are revolting to God when not accompanied by righteousness of life and true self-judgment.

Verse 22.—"Though ye offer me burnt-offerings and your meat-offerings, I will not accept them." Samuel declared, long before, that obedience is better than sacrifice. The outward forms and ceremonies of religion mean nothing to God if the heart is not right with Him.

Verse 23.—"I will not hear the melody of thy viols." Beautiful anthems and well-played instruments bring no joy to God when wickedness goes on unrebuked and unrepented of.

Verse 24.—"Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." It is this that pleases God: when those who call themselves by His name carry out the principles of justice, and practice righteousness.

Chap. 7:10.—"Amaziah the priest," who was what we might call chaplain to King Jeroboam II of Israel, resented the rugged prophet from Judah interfering, as he considered it, with the affairs of his parish. He complained that the land was not able to bear the keen cutting ministry of Amos.

Verse 11.—"Amos saith, Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel.....be led away captive." To Amaziah such predictions were not only pessimistic but treasonable. Instead of facing the conditions that called them forth and seeking to rectify them he would send the prophet back to Judah.

Verse 12.—"Go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there.....prophecy." It would be a relief to get rid of the man of God whose scathing utterances were calculated to arouse and alarm the back-slidden people of the northern kingdom.

Verse 13.—"Prophecy not again any more in Beth-el: for it is the king's chapel, and it is the king's court." To Amaziah Amos was an unauthorized upstart who had no right to interfere in the ecclesiastical matters of the realm over which he himself was the authoritative representative of the king.

Verse 14.—"I was no prophet, but.....an herdman." In reply, Amos makes no pretension to scholarly standing, or priestly preferment. He acknowledges that he was but a farmer's boy when God laid His hand upon him and chose him to be His messenger to both Israel and Judah.

Verse 15.—"The Lord took me.....and.....said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel." This was the basis of Amos's authority. He was called and commissioned by God, and so he went forth fearless to proclaim the message given to him.

Micah 4:1.—"In the last days.....the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established." Here we have a clear prediction of the coming Kingdom, when Jerusalem's sorrows will be over and she will become a means of blessing for the whole earth.

Verse 2.—"The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Do not confound Zion and Jerusalem with the church of this age. The prophecy has to do directly with restored Israel in the day when Messiah shall return and His Kingdom be established over all the earth.

Verse 3.—"Neither shall they learn war any more." At long last the centuries of strife and discord among nations shall come to an end. When the Prince of Peace takes the reins of government into His own pierced hands, there will dawn a warless world, when all mankind will be brought into blessing and none shall seek to harm another.

Verse 4.—"They shall sit every man under his vine and.....fig tree; and none shall make them afraid." Ideal economic conditions will prevail throughout the world when Jesus reigns in righteousness. God has declared it, and He will never go back on His Word.

The Heart of the Lesson
 It is a great mistake to suppose that God finds pleasure in religious rites and ordinances, when those who thus profess to draw near to Him are guilty of unrighteousness in their attitude toward their fellow men and are simply using the forms of piety to cover up their hypocritical behavior. He demands truth in the inward parts. His Word obeyed would solve all the problems from which society is suffering today. When that Word is ignored, or flagrantly cast to one side, disaster must inevitably follow.

When our Lord returns in glory He will put down all iniquity and judge every evil power; then the principles laid down in the pro-

W. A. NIGHSWANDER LOCAL RESIDENT AT ONE TIME

Member of the composing room staff of The Evening Telegram for 25 years, William Austin Nighswander, 65, died suddenly on Thursday at his home, 88 Kenneth ave., Toronto.

Mr. Nighswander was born in Markham, to a family of Pennsylvania Dutch settlers, and went to Toronto as a young man. He was a son of Menno Nighswander and lived in Stouffville for some time. He was active in church and fraternal organizations, being a member of High Park United Church and on the board of stewards, and also belonged to Antiquity Lodge, AF & AM, the IOOF and the LOL. He was an enthusiastic bowler.

Surviving are his wife, the phetic Word will prevail throughout all the world. Meanwhile, it is our responsibility to apply these principles to our own conduct.

former Kathryn Forbes, a daughter, Mrs. Albert Ensley, London, Ont., and a son, Forbes (Don) Nighswander, of Toronto.

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