

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(Lesson for December 18)

THE SOVEREIGN GOD

Isaiah 7:14; Jeremiah 29:31; Luke 1 Golden Text.—Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.

—Jer. 29:13

The Lesson as a Whole

Approach to the Lesson
How good it is to know that our God—the God of the Bible—the Creator and Redeemer—knows the end from the beginning, and worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). Nothing ever takes Him by surprise. All has been foreseen and every event that transpires is either in accord with His directive or His permissive will (Dan. 2:20-22). He foresaw all the experiences Israel would pass through before ever He called them out of Egypt to be His "peculiar treasure" (Exod. 19:5). Savior for them and for all mankind long before sin itself had come in, calling for One who could bring deliverance. He foresaw "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8). In the fullness of time His promise of the virgin-born Saviour was fulfilled. He foretold Israel's captivity and scattering among the nations even before they had entered into Canaan (Deut. 28:64). No word of His is void of power (Isa. 55:11); nor will His plan ever be defeated by all Satan's efforts. Whatever He has declared shall come to pass. It is a wonderful thing to know such a God and to realize

that we who trust in Him are the objects of His care (Phil. 4:19; 1 Pet. 5:7). Faith can rest upon His Word undismayed by all the changing scenes of time, knowing Him as the eternal sovereign God. The Historical Setting

Jeremiah prophesied for many years prior to the fulfillment of his own words in regard to the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah. He foresaw the victorious Chaldean armies ravaging the land of Palestine and he looked beyond and saw by the eye of faith the restoration of a remnant who would return to the land and would be dwelling there when the long promised Messiah should appear. He also looked beyond that to a return yet future, when the nation as a whole shall be brought to know the Lord.

Verse by Verse
Jer. 29:1.—"The letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem." After the conquest of Palestine by the Chaldeans and the carrying away of many thousands of the people of Judah into captivity, Jeremiah continued to give the Word of the Lord by sending a letter to all those who had been dispersed among the Gentiles. In this letter he urged them to accept their captivity as the will of the Lord for the time then present, but he assured them that God had wonderful plans for their blessing and restoration in years to come.

Verse 4.—"Whom I have caused to be carried away." No power could have prevailed against Judah if God Himself had not permitted it. The Captivity was His rod of chastisement inflicted upon them because of their willful disobe-

dience and with a view to their future blessing.

Verse 5.—"Build ye houses, and dwell in them." False prophets had risen up who pretended to foresee a speedy return to the land and the end of their captivity, but instead of this Jeremiah made it clear that for at least seventy years they must abide among the Gentiles. In view of this he counselled them to settle down as contentedly as possible and make proper provision for the care of their family.

Verse 6.—"Take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters . . . that ye may be increased there, and not diminished." In view of God's purpose for their future blessing, He would not have the nation die out under Chaldean domination, nor would He have them so discouraged that they would lose all concern about the preservation of their national life.

Verse 7.—"In the peace thereof shall ye have peace." Instead of giving way to a spirit of resentment or even hatred toward their conquerors, they were to pray for them and seek the peace of the cities and the nations wherein they dwelt. Their own peace and prosperity depended to a very large extent on that enjoyed by those who had become their captors and masters.

Verses 8, 9.—"Let not your prophets . . . deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams . . . I have

not sent them, saith the Lord." It is so easy to give way to wishful thinking and to ignore facts instead of facing the realities of life. Even though facts are disagreeable, it is far better to recognize them and act in accordance with God's revealed Word than to rest upon an unfounded optimism, which can only result in disappointment.

Verse 10.—"After seventy years . . . I will visit you . . . causing you to return." The seventy-year period coincides with the actual duration of the Babylonian Empire. God foresaw the triumph of Cyrus the Persian and the overthrow of Chaldean power, after which the way would be opened for the return of His people to their own land. This as we know, was fulfilled at the appointed time.

Verse 11.—"I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord." Even when conditions demand chastening, God's heart is ever toward His people. His judgments do not mean that His thoughts of love and kindness are no longer toward those who are called upon to pass under the rod. All will work out for their blessing eventually (Rom. 8:28).

Verse 12.—"Then shall ye call upon me . . . and I will hearken." This is in accordance with His promise as given in Psalm 50:15: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: and I will deliver thee, and thou

shalt glorify me."

Verse 13.—"Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." God is always waiting for opportunities to manifest Himself and His grace and power on behalf of His people, but He maintains a holy reserve at times until they realize their own helplessness and feel their need of Him. When in the hour of distress they turn to Him in repentance and faith, He is always ready to meet their need in His loving-kindness.

Verse 14.—"I will be found . . . I will turn . . . I will gather . . . I will bring you again." Note the definite declarations of the divine will in response to the cry of His own, when they humble themselves before Him and look up to Him for deliverance. This promise had only partial fulfillment when a remnant returned in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. It will be fulfilled completely in a future day.

Jer. 31:3.—"I have loved thee with an everlasting love . . . with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." He who took Abram into covenant relationship with Himself and promised that in his seed all nations should be blessed will never forget or retract His Word. No failure or defection on our part can alter the love of His heart. Like Himself, it is everlasting and has been manifested to the fullest extent in the person and work of His beloved

Son (1 John 4:9).

The Heart of the Lesson
The faithfulness of God demands the fulfillment of every promise. He has made regarding both earthly and His heavenly people. His dealings with Israel and Judah may well be taken as the great example of His unfailing interest in those who, in this age of grace constitute the Church, the body of Christ. We, too, are called to the path of obedience. To turn from is to bring down upon ourselves the disciplinary rod; but as our hearts are exercised by His dealings with us, we shall find blessing as we turn to Him in fellowship. No waywardness on our part can change His love toward us. His counsels of old are faithful and truth and nothing can ever turn aside His purpose of grace.

STOLE GAS FROM HEARSE IN VILLAGE OF AYR

William Ball, undertaker in the Waterloo village of Ayr, near Kitchener, has not yet discovered the culprit who took the gas from his hearse.
He went out to take the vehicle out of the garage one day last week and found that it was nearly out of gasoline. He had a full tank last time he used it.
He figures that it must have been someone with a queer sense of values who would remove gas from a funeral coach. It could have proved embarrassing had he not discovered the theft.

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