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SIN AND DEATH.

DR. CURTISS' NOTES ON THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

Lesson II for Sunday, Jan. 9.—Lesson Text, Gen. iii, 1-6 and 17-19—Golden Text, Rom. v, 12: "By One Man Sin Entered into the World, and Death by Sin."

Paradise Lost.—It is one of the most universal traditions of the human race that man originally enjoyed a state of innocence and happiness, which he has somehow lost; and among some of the nations (Aryan) is also found the belief that the world is growing worse. It would seem as though the eyes of all peoples were turned longingly back to Paradise as something which they would gladly regain. The Scriptures, however, are free from those grotesque representations which we find of the fall in the Persian and other literatures.

Chaos and Satan.—Some commentators, relying on obscure hints in the Bible, have seen in Gen. i, 2, the wreck of a spiritual world, once the abode of Satan and of the angels who kept not their own principality (Jude v, 6, Revised Version). This world, they maintain, was materialized by God in order to make it the substratum of new creation, described in Gen. i, 3-7. But of this there is no adequate evidence. Satan is indeed called in the New Testament the god of this age, and the prince of the power of the air. There is, however, no proof that he had any connection with this earth before the time indicated in our lesson, since we have no right to say that God did not create chaos, and therefore that it must be the work of Satan.

The Crisis in Human History.—The third chapter of Genesis marks a crisis in human history. Whatever explanation may be given of this narrative, that history from this time on takes a different turn, and God's verdict regarding man is of an entirely different sort from that which we find in Gen. i, 31. The serpent in the passage before us, as well as in ancient Persian and other traditions, introduces this crisis.

THE LESSON.

The Image of Satan (v. 1).—We have seen in the last lesson that there is a glorified human form, which was fitted to be the outward expression of the image of God, in which man was created, and which was the mode in which the Angel of Jehovah appeared, and also our Lord himself. The proper image for the arch enemy of God and man is the most cunning of the reptiles, the serpent. Satan is not mentioned in this passage, but his work is described in such a way that we should recognize him even if he were not pointed out in later writings.

There are only two cases in which animals are mentioned as speaking—here where the serpent speaks by his own power, and in the story of Balaam, where God gives an ass the power of speech that he may rebuke a self-willed and covetous prophet.

The Woman Tempted.—He approaches the woman, as more guileless and confiding, if anything, than the man, and by an ingenious question casts an imputation on God's goodness—"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" In other words, Is it possible that God has said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? He secures just the answer which he desires. The woman says that they are permitted to eat of every tree of the garden but one, and concerning that one God has said: "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." The exact time is not specified in Gen. ii, 17, when they should die, for the word day is used in the same general signification as in v. 4 of the same chapter. Death is simply regarded as a result of eating the forbidden fruit, just as the death penalty in some states is the result of the crime of murder, although there are cases where a long time intervenes between the sentence and the execution.

Satan's Lie (vs. 4, 5).—The serpent, having secured the statement that he desires by consummate artifice, boldly denies the truth of God's word—"Ye shall not surely die;" that is, he makes God a liar, and accuses him of jealously withholding from them the same kind of knowledge that he has, forbidding them to eat of the tree; since he adds, "for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods" (Revised Version, which is to be preferred "as God"), "knowing God and evil." This statement of the serpent was indeed half true, but it was also half false. Death did not come at once, and their eyes were opened. Their knowledge, however, brought them only shame and disappointment, as all human knowledge does which seeks to solve the problems of existence without a divine revelation. Such knowledge leads to despair. Man finds that he is utterly ignorant of those things which he desires to know. Hence in religion he becomes an agnostic and in philosophy a pessimist. Men without God are like the babes in the wood, and are hungry, tired and full of fears. Such is man when he lets go the divine hand and seeks to determine for himself the laws of his own being and destiny.

Disbelieving God (v. 6).—The woman in believing the serpent disbelieved God. She seems no longer to have had fear of death, and therefore did not fear to disobey God's command. The temptation addressed itself to her senses and her intellect. She saw (1) that the tree was good for food; (2) that it was a delight to the eyes (Revised Version); (3) that it was to be desired to make one wise. Her sin, which had its genesis in unbelief, was twofold—(1) she herself disobeyed; (2) she tempted her husband to disobey. This illustrates the self-propagating character of sin. It does not stop with the transgressor. It seeks to make others transgressors. Israel is first "a seed of evil doers," then corrupters of others.

Man's Punishment (vs. 17-19).—The sorest part of man's punishment was self-inflicted. The question is sometimes asked why God should have visited such a terrible punishment on man for simply taking the fruit of the forbidden tree, as to curse the earth and drive him from the garden. This arises from a radically wrong conception of the nature and consequences of sin. Man as a free moral agent must choose for himself. He had the power to choose to obey God. If he had always chosen to obey him, there would have been harmony; but it was no ordinary sin when the woman, by disbelieving God, made him a liar (1 John v, 10), and not only did counter to his will, but also became a child of the devil by tempting her husband to sin. The moment man and woman disobeyed God they came into a state in which Eden could no longer be Paradise to them. They experienced the truth of Milton's lines—

The mind its own place, and in itself Can make a heaven or hell, a hell of heaven. From this point of view their sin was as great as though as the trees of the garden had been forbidden them, as the serpent sug-

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except, and as though, if there had been such a prohibition, they had eaten from all of them. No sin is little. The first conscious, deliberate transgression, unless repented of, is the beginning of a series of acts which drag men down. The verses, however, indicate an outward condition of things fitted to man's inward state. There is an outward penalty which is superadded. The punishment then is physical as well as mental. It consists of the following particulars: (1) Man is banished from Eden; (2) the ground is cursed for his sake; (3) its fruits can only be secured through severe toil; (4) he is to return to his native dust.

Results of Liberal Preaching.—What a commentary on the first liberal preacher and the results of his preaching! His text was, "Ye shall not surely die." His sermon tickled the ears of the first woman, for it did not require her to be strait laced. It flattered her vanity and raised her ambition, for it promised her that she should be as God, and in knowledge (revised Version). But God was true, and this preacher a liar. The beginning was misery, and the end was death.

The Second Death.—The account leaves the impression that the death threatened was simply physical. It is only through New Testament light that we learn of a second death, of which physical death is merely a type, and which is the result of sin.—Sunday School World.

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