Ezekiel's Challenge

ILLUSTRATED SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Scripture—Ezekiel 18, 36:16-38.

By Alfred J. Buescher

In response to the exiles' complaints of being punished for their fathers' sins, Ezekiel vindicates God's justice saying God holds each man accountable for his deeds.—Ezekiel 18:1-13.

God pleads with His people to turn from their iniquities, do what is right and be restored to Him for He takes no pleasure in the death of an unrepentant sinner.—Ezekiel 18:14-32.

Because they had profaned His name and defiled the land with their wickedness and idolatry God was punishing His people but would later restore them to their own.—Ezekiel 36:8-20.

Inwardly reformed, they would walk in His way, keep His laws and He would pour blessings and wealth upon them.—Ezekiel 36:21-38.

GOLDEN TEXT: Ezekiel 36:26.

EZEKIEL'S CHALLENGE

God's Holiness And Mercy In Dealing With Israel

By R. H. RAMSEY

TODAY we begin a new quarter of lessons dealing with the final period of Old Testament history, the Exile and Restoration.

We shall briefly review those events climaxed by the downfall of the Southern Kingdom.

This was followed by the Exile and ultimate Restoration of Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehefiah.

The destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the Exile of its people constitutes one of the great turning points in Hebrew history.

Rebellion

Before the Exile the Hebrew people were frequently in rebellion against God, falling easily into the practices and vices of idolatry.

Carried off captive in 586 B.C., the Hebrews returned 70 years later to found a new political, economic, and religious order shorn of most of the vices which had plagued the people in the past.

From the first Jeremiah had said that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the enemies of Judah, unless God's people turned from their idolatry and immorality, repented of their sins and sought God's favor.

Message

Such a message was unwelcome in times of peace, and even more so in the last days of Jerusalem.

For more than twenty years the country had been pawed at and fought over by the Egyptians and the Babylonians.

Execution

Rulers put on the throne of Judah by the Egyptians were killed or captured and replaced by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah saw no hope for his country in those chaotic days and advised his people to submit to the enemy.

This made him even fore unpopular and an appeal for his execution was made to the king; Zedekiah, who had been placed on the throne of Judah by the Babylonians.

Unwilling to kill the prophet, Zedekiah compromised by having him thrown into the dungeon of Malchijah, where he would have starved to death had he not been released by Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian slave in the king's house.

Rescue

Hearing of Jeremiah's imprisonment, Ebed-Melech pleaded with the king for his release.

The king agreed, ordering Ebed-Melech to take others with him to aid in the rescue.

After Jeremiah had been freed, the king summoned him to an interview.

The king was anything but happy with the state of affairs.

His people and his reign were in jeopardy and he was well aware of the fates of his predecessors.

He knew Jeremiah had something to say to him and was determined to hear it.

Counsel

Already a prisoner, Jeremiah knew that whatever he said could be held against him.

He informed the king that if he spoke as a prophet, the king would have him killed; that if he gave him counsel, the king would not listen.

Zedekiah reassured Jeremiah and gave him his word that he would not be delivered into the hands of those who desired his death.

Then Jeremiah spoke.

Though the city was doomed, it was not yet destroyed.

If the king tries to defend the city or to escape to Egypt, he will be destroyed.

Destruction

In order to live and to save the city from total destruction, Zedekiah must surrender to the king of Babylon.

Otherwise the royal family, the king, his wives and children, would be seized as captives and the city burned.

Before he left the king, Jeremiah gave Zedekiah his word that he would say nothing to anyone of what he had said.

When he was interrogated by the princes, Jeremiah told only a part of what had taken place.

Prophecy

Jeremiah's prophecy was overwhelmingly fulfilled.

Nebuchadnezzar and his army besieged the city. After eighteen months the city fell.

When it dawned upon the king that the hour for the city's destruction had arrived, Zedekiah fled the city, contrary to the clear warning of the prophet.

He was seized, blinded and taken in chains to Babylon. His sons and the nobles of Judah were slain; the city was burned and its walls destroyed.

Exile

And the people were carried into exile. Only the poorest people, the ill and the elderly were left in Jerusalem.

Jeremiah, freed from prison by Nebuchadnezzar, elected to remain in Jerusalem with them.

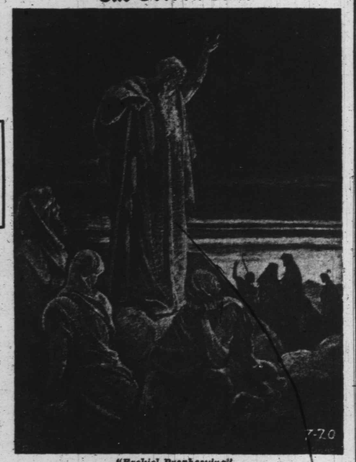
The final paragraph of our lesson properly belongs after 38:13.

For Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian slave who had delivered Jeremiah from the dungeon, there is God's promise that he will be kept safe during and after the destruction of the city for his kindness to Jeremiah and truest in the Lord.

GOLDEN TEXT

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."—Ezekiel 36:26.

The Golden Text



"Ezekiel Prophesying"

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh."—Ezekiel 36:26.

THE NEGRO

The Negro was brought from Africa as a slave.
He was a black man, bold and brave.
He was put into the fields to work the crops.

* * *

He was worked and beat until he dropped.
He lived in a small house built of logs.
He had no more comfort than stray dogs.

* * *

He had to work from sun-up to sun-down.
He never had a chance to go into town.
The slaves worked hard with very little rest,

* * *

And only once a year did they get a new dress.
His master was cruel and filled with greed.
He'd whip them to death if they didn't fill his need.

* * *

But the Negro never gave up hope of being free.
Being as free as you and me.

* * *

For he fought for his freedom and won.
And now that he has done it, most of his suffering is done.

—SHARON SINGLETON

'FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE'

Mrs. Sarah Walker lives in Baltimore and she describes most of the exciting things to happen to her during her lifetime as being ". . . just ordinary things."

She's the mother of three, Johnny Moore Jr., 11; Valerie Juanita, 9; and Aaron Ricardo, 7. She and Edward Neal Walker have been married 13 years. On Wednesday, June 12, the Walker family experienced something "extra-ordinarily exciting."

10 P.M.

"I was preparing the lunches for the children," Mrs. Walker relates "It was around 10:00 p.m. and the phone rang."

"The voice on the other end said that I had just won the Sweepstakes' Grand Prize from a local department store, which was an all expense paid trip for three to Miami Beach, Fla."

It was the first time in her life that she had won anything and the news left her breathless. Her husband, who works for the Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington, D.C. was at work when the news came.

Shopping

The store's representative promised to call back the following day when Mr. Walker would be at home to make arrangements for the trip.

Mrs. Walker hardly recalls what prompted her to enter the sweepstakes. "I was shopping for some summer clothing for the children," she says "my sister was with me.

"I've entered lots of contests so I guess it was an automatic thing to fill out the sweepstakes card at the store."

$2500

The trip which is worth approximately $2500 consists of a flight to St. Petersburg, Fla., hotel accommodations, a chauffered car and escort for three days and then a flight to Miami with the same arrangements.

The Walkers will take their oldest son Johnnie with them as the third party and will pay the half fare for Valerie and Aaron.

THE WALKERS AT HOME — Mr. and Mrs. Edward Walker (Sarah) relax moments after Mr. Walker and his son Johnny, 12, come in from a game of catch. The Walkers reside at 5560 Elderon Ave. in Baltimore and have two other children.

AMY By Jack Tippit

"Puleeeze, Archie, IF YOU DON'T MIND . . . this conversation is PRIVATE!"

MICHAEL McNAIR

Student Of The Year

On June 14, Michael McNair, outstanding student of the year 1968 and honors graduate from Baltimore's Dunbar Senior High School, began work at The John F. Kennedy Institute for Habilitation of the Mentally and Physically Handicapped Child under the auspices of the Neighborhood Youth Corps program.

Mike participates in a program which involves him in patient care as well as laboratory work in the mathematical problems of genetics.

Scholarship

Mike formerly attended Booker T. Washington Junior High School where he was in the enriched program. Subsequently, he won a scholarship to Cardinal Gibbons Private School in Catonsville, Md.; he then went on to Dunbar Senior High School where he graduated fifth in his class.

Recently, Mike was recognized in Dunbar's graduating ceremonies as having made outstanding contributions to the school government advisory committee.

Court

He has helped effect a merit-demerit system and a student court for his school. He has also been active in Training Now for Tomorrow, a Saturday Computer Math Course, and the annual Boys' State Program in Annapolis.

This fall Michael will attend the University of Maryland on an Educational Opportunity Grant Scholarship.

Once at the University Mike will participate in a work-study program while majoring in math.

Piranha

Mike's hobby is collecting fish. He has a 14-inch tropical Oscar, several baby alligators and an aquarium full of piranha, the man-eating tropical fish.

He and his parents, grandmother, Mrs. Bertha Knight, are members of the Faith Baptist Church.

At the church Mike serves as director of the Recreation Committee.