

"WOE UNTO THEM THAT ARE AT EASE IN ZION."

– SEPT. 11. – AMOS 6:1-8. –

"They also have erred through wine, and through strong drink are out of the way." – Isa. 28:7.

THE THOUGHT of those who arranged the International Sunday School Lessons evidently was to make of this one a temperance lesson. Undoubtedly there was need for the inculcation of temperance, moderation, self-denial, self-restraint, in the days of Amos, as there is to-day, and as there will be so long as mankind is under the influence of depraved appetites, and weak through heredity, and exposed to temptations through association with others likewise depraved; – especially while the great adversary, Satan, is still at liberty, unbound, permitted to ensnare the depraved by putting darkness for light, and evil for good. We remember that temperance, self-control, is one of the fruits of the spirit of Christ, and as such it should be sought and cultivated by all who desire to be copies of God's dear Son. But it is a too frequent mistake to think of temperance merely as respects intoxicating liquors: the Christian may reasonably be supposed to have gotten such a victory over self, to have gained such self-control, that he will no longer be in danger as respects drunkenness, but he finds, nevertheless, a great necessity for the exercise of self-control, temperance, in respect to all the affairs of life – in matters which previously gave him no concern, respecting which he saw no necessity for self-control.

Temperance, self-control, in the Christian, is applicable to all the affairs of life; he is to be temperate in his language, not given to exaggeration or misrepresentation, better or worse than the facts; his yea is to be yea, and his nay, nay. He is to speak forth "words of soberness," and even if it be necessary to speak in correction or reproof, he is to be temperate, making sure that he speaks the truth in love, and not in severity or bitterness. His speech is to be with grace –

seasoned with the saltness, the preservative quality, of his consecration to Christ, – for is he not a part of the "salt of the earth?"

The Christian's *temperance* is to extend to his business. He is to be moderate in his aims and ambitions, in his money-getting and money-saving. He is to remember that under the Lord's call the riches which he seeks for are heavenly and not earthly, and that the Master says, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom." Christian moderation, then, will seek first the Kingdom of heaven, esteeming that its attainment would be great riches, and cheaply bought, even at the cost of earthly welfare, riches and comforts.

The Christian should be temperate in his food – his eating, as well as his drinking. As he has consecrated himself and all that he has to the Lord, is it not, therefore, a part of his bounden duty to obtain from life the largest possible yield to the Lord's glory? Must he not, therefore, consider what and how much he shall eat, to the intent that he may render to the Lord his largest, his best, service? This will mean self-denial, self-control, for the appetite of food, as well as the appetite of drink, is considerably depraved in all. True, gluttony will not rob one of his senses, and make him crazy, as will spiritous liquors, yet overeating [R2355 : page 251] does frequently, to a considerable extent, sap the energies of the mind, or by over-stimulation weakens them. Thus many are weak and sickly through self-gratification in the matter of food as well as drink. Temperance, self-control, is the command of the Lord to all such; – not that it will benefit the Lord, but that thus we may build up proper characters, – loyal to that which is right, good, reasonable, proper.

The Christian should be *temperate* in his joys. He should not set his chief affections upon the earth, or earthly things – pleasure, wealth, influence, popularity, etc. He is to remember that very much of the present order of things is wholly contrary to righteousness, and he is to seek to use even approved things of this world temperately, utterly rejecting those things which are contrary to righteousness, truth,

goodness, purity: he is to find his pleasure in another quarter – in serving righteousness – in the service of the Lord, in the Word of the Lord, in the promises of the Lord, in the spirit of the Lord.

The Christian is to be *temperate* in his sorrows. He "sorrows not as others who have no hope," but he believes that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, that he rose again in order to justification of those who believe and obey him, and that either now or in the age to come all mankind shall have a full opportunity to know of divine grace, and to accept and share therein, under the terms of the New Covenant. Thus may the Christian, living up to his privileges under divine grace, be temperate in his sorrows: –

"He'll bear unmoved the world's dread frown,
Nor heed its scornful smile;
Him seas of trouble cannot drown,
Nor Satan's arts beguile."

This quality of temperance, once attained, will manifest itself also in kindness, and in patience. The Christian who has developed in self-control is the one who will be the most patient with the unwilling, unintentional faults and frailties of others: he will be ready to restore the repentant ones, remembering himself also, lest he should be tempted. The Apostle has reference to this temperance in all things, when he says, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." The cultivation of this moderation from the right standpoint of desire to be pleasing to the Lord, and in full harmony with him, leads to kindness, sympathy: for, finding how many are his own weaknesses, besetments, difficulties and desires, such an one can have a larger measure of sympathy with the entire "groaning creation." As a result, this temperance will work kindness of speech and of look and of act, inspired by the kindness of heart.

There is need for this temperance, moderation, self-control, and its accompanying spirit of kindness and gentleness everywhere; in the shop, in the store, in the schoolroom, in traveling, in visiting, at home

with the various members of the family, – and above all, in the Church, the household of faith, the family of God. It will help us in cultivating this Christian temperance in all things to remember that we are the representatives of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world. We are his ambassadors, and as such our lives of temperance and godliness, or of intemperance and ungodliness, are living epistles, known and read of all men with whom we come in contact. It is a part of our bounden duty, day by day, to see to it that not only the thoughts of our hearts, but also the words of our lips and all the acts of life are acceptable in the Lord's sight, and showing forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

THE PROPHECY OF AMOS.

Through Amos, the Lord foretold a speedy coming doomsday, a time of trouble and retribution, upon Judah, Israel and the adjoining nations. These adjoining nations, Moab, Syria, Philistia, etc., had been subjugated to Israel, and incorporated in the Kingdom of Israel, under David and Solomon, but subsequently had separated themselves, and latterly had been recaptured and temporarily were again under the dominion of Israel. Probably it was because of their close identity with Israel, territorially and through intercourse, that they are made the subjects of this prophecy. (See chapters 1-4.) The principal burden [**R2356 : page 251**] of the prophecy, however, is against Israel, the ten tribes, and Judah, the two tribes, the Lord's covenanted people, the seed of Abraham.

The home of Amos was in Judah, where he was a herdsman, but under the Lord's direction he went into the territory occupied by the ten tribes, to deliver to them the Lord's message. Amongst other things, the Lord pointed out that the families of Israel (the twelve tribes) constituted his peculiar people, that he had brought out of Egypt, and of whom he had been specially careful to order their ways most favorably. He even declares of them, "You *only* have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your

iniquities. Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:1-3.) The Lord had made himself known to no other nation, had recognized no other nation, had made a covenant with no other nation, had given his laws to no other nation; and hence this nation, Israel (in its two parts), had a special responsibility. Nevertheless, instead of God's favor making them loyal of heart to him, they had continually resisted his favor, and were not even faithful as eye-servants. The reason of this was that they [R2356 : page 252] were of a different spirit: they would not walk in harmony with the Lord while their hearts were really in harmony with sin and wickedness.

The Lord, in foretelling the troubles he would bring upon Israel, because of misused privileges and opportunities, and rebelliousness of heart, wished them to discern distinctly that these judgments of the then near future, like their previous judgments, were not matters of accident, not matters of chance, but of divine providence. Consequently, the message of Amos is likened to a trumpet of alarm, announcing the dire catastrophies that shortly would come. And the announcement is thus made in advance, not with a view to the bringing of repentance, but with a view to the proper appreciation of the judgments when they would come – that the people might know that the things coming were judgments and not accidents. Accordingly, it is written, –

"Shall a trumpet be blown in a city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil [calamities, disasters] in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? Surely, the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." (Amos 3:6,7.) The Lord reveals his intentions thus that his people may know and profit by the chastisements, and experiences, and recognize them as of the Lord's hand.

We are not prepared to say that all the calamities, famines, pestilences, etc., which from time to time afflict mankind, are of divine providence – judgments sent of the Lord. On the contrary, we believe

that generally, so far as the world of mankind in general is concerned, they merely take their chances as respects famine, storms, pestilence, etc.; yet there are marked instances in which the Lord has evidently interposed to bring calamities upon certain nations of the world, as chastisements, as judgments for their correction in righteousness: for instance, the United States Civil War which resulted in the freeing of millions of slaves and the general awakening of fifty millions of people. Unquestionably God has made use of wars and human selfishness to awaken various nations at various times, and to let in the light of civilization. The present war with Spain may be of this character. The Spanish soldiers returning from Cuba will be wiser if not better men. All this does not prove that war is right, any more than it proves that pestilence and famine are desirable; but these things show us how God is able and willing to use even the wrath of man, and the selfishness of man, in the present time, and to overrule the effects indirectly for good, in harmony with his plan.

But there are many calamities and troubles not only national but individual, in which we have no reason to believe there is any divine providence whatever. There are epidemics of disease which very evidently are caused merely by lack of cleanliness, neglect of sanitary rules; and many calamities, such as earthquakes, cyclones, floods, etc., which give every evidence of being purely accidental, that is to say, without divine or human intervention or responsibility. We do not consider these beyond divine control, nor beyond divine foreknowledge: we do consider that in general they are the natural operations of the divine laws and regulations, which, as respects the earth at the present time, are not under special regulation for man's comfort and welfare: man's comfort and welfare being ignored, for the time being, because of sin and the curse or penalty of sin which rests upon man and upon the earth, his home. For, altho the ransom price has been paid for now eighteen hundred years and more, the results of the ransom, in the complete lifting of the "curse," have not yet been brought in, but are waiting for the Lord's due time – the Millennial age.

With fleshly Israel, the natural seed of Abraham, the Lord's dealing was different: his covenant with them was to the effect that nothing should happen to them by chance – in no sense or degree were they to be subject to the mutations of life, the accidents of nature, etc. This was God's special covenant with this one particular nation – it was a part of the Law Covenant as recorded in Lev. 26. Under that covenant, the seed of Abraham was to be God's peculiar people, devoted to his service, and he was to be peculiarly their God, careful of their interests. So long as that nation would be faithful to the Lord, no calamity could befall them personally or nationally; they would be spared from wars and disasters, spared from famines and pestilences; they would prosper in proportion as they would be faithful to their covenant. But if unfaithful to their covenant, then they would not only be liable to the same accidents of nature with the remainder of the world under the "curse," but might know that God would assuredly bring upon them, as special judgments or chastisements, calamities of every kind, physical and mental, individual and national. This is distinctly stated to be the Lord's rule of dealing with them; and it was to this covenant that they gave their assent at Sinai. Consequently, their failure to keep their covenant made it to them a curse, a greater burden and disadvantage than rested upon the other nations of the world, with whom God had made no covenant, and to whom he had extended no promises, but who were "without God, and having no hope in the world."

With this thought in mind it will be seen to have stronger force, that the Lord calls his people's attention to the fact that whatever calamities, disasters, **[R2356 : page 253]** troubles (evils, pestilences, etc.), they suffered were and would continue to be a sure proof to them that God was again chastising them for violation of their covenant with him. It is in harmony with this that he says to them, –

"I have given you cleanness of teeth in your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And also I have withholden the rain from you...and I caused it

to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereon it rained not withered....Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your garden and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive trees increased, the palmer worm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord. I have sent amongst you the pestilence, after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword [in war], and have taken away your horses...yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord...Thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel,...Seek the Lord and ye shall live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel [the city of idol worship]."

Having noted the character of the Lord's dealings with Israel under their covenant, that *all* calamities were of his providence and for chastisements; and having noticed that in the case of the nations in general, the Gentiles, the world, the calamities which come are not generally chastisements or judgments, but only occasionally so, we turn with interest to the new nation, the holy nation, the peculiar people, spiritual Israel, the royal priesthood, – now being gathered out of all nations, peoples, languages and tongues, – and we inquire, How is with these? Are all the calamities of life that may befall these of the spiritual house, to be reckoned as accidents, or are they all to be reckoned as judgments of the Lord because of sin?

We answer, Neither. As this is a "peculiar people," and being selected by the Lord for a peculiar purpose, it need not surprise us to find that he has a peculiar manner of dealing with them. He permits them in a general way to be subject to all the conditions that are upon the world, but guarantees to them that all of these calamities and difficulties which will befall them, as a part of the world, shall be overruled of divine providence so as to bring them some blessing, instead of injury. Hence, as the Apostle says, "We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God – to the *called ones* according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28.) These have the

satisfaction of knowing that any of the causalities of life which may befall them as a part of the human family, [R2357 : page 253] or even those which shall befall them as the ones against whom Satan and his blinded followers have a peculiar grudge and hatred, shall either be overruled and made to work a blessing, or else be warded off. For we are assured that, – He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but will with the temptation (too hard to be borne) provide a way of escape.

Thus we see that divine providence deals differently with spiritual Israel than with natural Israel, and still differently with the world. What a consolation to know that God is for us, not only to the extent of providing a Savior and redemption through his blood, but also to the extent of providing through that Savior "a present help in every time of trouble," and an ultimate salvation in the Kingdom to those who are faithful, loyal to him, obedient to his Word, under the New Covenant.

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The lesson, and its connection, points out that certain ones in Israel were in a very ease-loving and self satisfied condition, that many of them abounded in wealth, and drank the wine of earthly pleasure and extravagance inordinately, in bowlfuls. They neither were solicitous for the Lord's praise and worship, on their own part, nor on the part of others: nor were they solicitous for the poor – they were intemperately selfish, and hence the judgments were coming upon them, the evil days of their captivity and overthrow as a nation. That their sin of intemperance did not consist solely of literal drunkenness, nor perhaps specially of this, but rather that it consisted of a drunkenness of greed, by which many of the influential amongst them were disposed to swallow up the poor and the needy, is evident from the words of the Lord's reproof: –

"Forasmuch, therefore, as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat; ye have builded your houses of hewn

stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins. They afflict the just, they take a bribe, they turn aside the poor in the gate from their rights, and make it prudent for those who see the wrong to keep silence."

"Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the newmoon be gone, that we may sell corn, and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah [measure] small, and the shekel [price] great, and falsify the balancer by deceit? That we might buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell [them] the refuse of the wheat?"

"The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall not the land tremble for this, and everyone mourn that dwelleth therein?" – Amos 5:11-13; 8:4-8. [R2357 : page 254]

While this prophecy evidently applied specifically to natural Israel, and its captivity, nevertheless, some of the statements respecting that evil day that came upon Israel remind us of similar statements applied by the prophets and apostles and by our Lord to antitypical Israel – Christendom; – and hence, while noting the Lord's dealing with the natural Israelites, and their day of doom or punishment, it properly brings to our thoughts the judgments pronounced upon Christendom, "Babylon the Great," which are to come in the end of this age. And as we compare the conditions, now and then, the thought that the words of Amos have to some extent a double application is strengthened.

We find to-day a similar condition of things to that which the prophet describes. Many are at ease in nominal Zion: many are boasting of their prosperity, and symbolically are resting upon beds of ivory, taking their ease, and trusting that the Church is being carried forward to the conquest of the world along a new pathway which the Master and the apostles knew not of, a pathway of roses without

thorns, a pathway that is not narrow nor difficult, nor steep, but that is broad, pleasurable, easy. The wealthy are very generally members of nominal Zion, or at least liberal supporters of her arrangements, services, etc., and she in turn is appreciative, and boasts of her wealth, just as she is pictured prophetically by the Lord, in his description of the Laodicean period of the Church. Nominal Zion to-day is saying, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," and knows not that she is poor and miserable and blind and naked; and hence she neglects to purchase the true gold and the only wedding garment. The announcement to-day to nominal spiritual Zion, of calamities coming upon her in the "day of vengeance" just at hand, is as unacceptable and disbelieved as was the message of Amos to those who were prospering and at ease in nominal fleshly Zion, as recorded in our lesson. How unacceptable to the priests of Israel was the message of Amos, is indicated by the record, which says:

"Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to Jeroboam, King of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee, in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words [he is disturbing the peace of those who are at ease in Zion]....Also Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread and prophecy there; but prophecy not any more at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and the king's court." – Amos 7:10-13.

But as Amos was faithful in declaring the message of the Lord, and was not deterred into silence from prudential reasons, so those who to-day are spoken to by the Lord through his Word and are instructed respecting the things that are shortly to come to pass upon nominal spiritual Israel, are not to hold their peace from prudential reasons – for the fear of man bringeth a snare. They are to speak the truth in love, and to seek to pull as many as possible out of the fire of tribulation, and to bring as many as possible into the little flock of faithful ones, whom the Lord exhorted, saying, "Watch ye, therefore,

that ye may be accounted *worthy to escape all these things coming upon the world*, and to stand before the Son of Man."

In this prophecy of Amos, the Lord points out that the wrath he was about to permit to come upon Israel as chastisements, would, nevertheless, work out for them a blessing, and that in his due time he would bring them back again into harmony with himself, and that under more favorable conditions than in the past. We are not only to believe the calamitous portion of this prophecy, which we already see has been executed upon Israel in fullest measure, but we are also to believe the features of it which are favorable to Israel – the future blessings. For instance, we see how literally has been fulfilled the prediction: –

"Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth [as a nation, a kingdom]; save that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord [the people of the nation were to be preserved as a separate people from others]; for lo, I will give the command, and I will shake about amongst all nations the house of Israel, as one shaketh things in a sieve, while not the least piece falleth down upon the earth." Amos 9:8,9.

The Lord thus shows his continued supervision of Israel, according to the covenant made with them. And how accurately this has been fulfilled: the Israelites as a people have been scattered throughout the whole earth, yet they have not lost their identity; as a nation they were utterly destroyed, yet unlike every other nation, they have preserved their national identity, and have not been mixed and blended with the world in general.

And if this feature of the prophecy has been accurately fulfilled to-day before our eyes, we certainly have every reason to believe that the remainder of the prophecy will be just as accurately fulfilled – that portion which applies to the restitution times, after the true spiritual Israel has been selected, when natural Israel shall be brought back into

covenant relationship with God, and become the earthly agent of the spiritual Kingdom for blessing, instructing and restoring the families of the earth, under the terms of the New Covenant. This is clearly set forth in the closing words of the prophecy: –

"In that day will I raise up the standard of David which is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and of all the heathen which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this....And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them, and I will plant them in their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land, which I have given them, saith the Lord God."

We recall the quotation of this prophecy in the New Testament, by the Apostle James, and find it in full accord also with the words of the Apostle Paul, to the effect that after spiritual Israel has been developed as the true seed of Abraham, through Christ, **[R2358 : page 254]** then divine favor shall return to natural Israel, and she shall obtain mercy, according to the terms of the divine covenant, at the hands of spiritual Israel then glorified. – See Rom. 11:1-25-32; Acts 15:16,17.
