

The hastening of God's kingdom and for the promotion of the general weal is lavished upon expensive beds. They are no more comfortable than other beds, but they please the eye and tickle the vanity. The money spent in high living often excites envy, creates discontent, and establishes barriers between those who should be friendly.

Continuing his indictment, Amos accuses the notables of eating "the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall." Not satisfied with "food sufficient for them," they must have the choicest lambs out of the flock and the fatted calves—their thoughts still on the body and their affections set on the things that please the palate. Few generations have been entirely without such, and in many generations these epicures have been numerous. It is well that we have an occasional reminder of the evils into which we are led when thought is centered upon the throat and attention absorbed in ministering to the taste.

Another count in Amos's indictment is that they "chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music;" and, indignant at such base imitation, he adds, "like David." I wonder if Amos would find any music today that would draw forth his invectives?

THE MOTTO OF THE SENSUALIST

Those of whom the prophet was speaking drank "wine in bowls," and anointed themselves with the "chief ointments." Not a symptom of degeneration was absent.

Their chief business was feeding themselves and filling themselves with wine. In the intervals between meals they anointed themselves with oil and stretched themselves upon their ivory beds. They were concerned with their own pleasures, and they were not "grieved for the affliction of Joseph." They were not grieved for the affliction of anybody while they were not afflicted themselves.

The body has no sentiment; it knows self and self only. Just in proportion as the thought is centered on the body, it is withdrawn not only from fellowship with the world, but from fellowship with the soul, and even with the mind. It is possible to become so devoted to the body that intellectual pleasures have no attraction. "Eat, drink and be merry" is the motto of the sensualist.

"Drinking wine in bowls" recalls the conditions that existed in this country only a few years ago, and which exist in some countries today. Less than a generation ago wine was served in unlimited quantities at nearly all public banquets of prominence. The charge was \$5, \$10, or even \$25 a plate, the principal expense being for wine.

The banquet was divided into three parts. First, eating and drinking—mostly drinking. Then followed speaking—those speaking who were still able to speak. Third, "the mopping up"—those who were sober took the drunken ones from under the table, sorted them and sent them home; and all said, "What a glorious night we have had." Our public dinners are no longer riotous affairs; after-dinner drunkenness had disappeared, and banqueters find that genial companionship is possible without alcoholic stimulants.

GOD NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

Amos concludes his indictment of the ease worshippers of Israel with a prophecy: "Therefore, now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the revelry of them that stretched themselves shall pass away."

Here is a measure of justice which is not always administered in present day civilization. The "notables" were to go captive with the first. Why not? Do not those sin most grievously who have the most light and who best understand the character of the crime? Should they not be the punished first and most severely?

But it is not always so. Too often the social influence of the accused secures leniency, while the friendless prisoner receives the full penalty of the law. Amos spoke for the Almighty, and the Bible tells us that God is no respecter of persons. Prominence does not count in God's court—"Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished."

God, the Prophet Amos proclaimed, abhorred the "excellency of Jacob," hated his palaces, and "would deliver up the city with all that is therein." In our next Talk we shall see that the prophecy was fulfilled. The moral of today's lesson is that the laws of God cannot be disobeyed with impunity.

Whether it be an individual who separates himself from the righteous and gives himself over to self-indulgence, or a nation that forgets God and descends to the brute level, punishment is inevitable. This is history so clear-

ly written that no intelligent person can be excused for not knowing that the laws of God are sure.

DO WE DESERVE AMOS'S REBUKE?

It is our duty to examine ourselves and inquire whether we deserve the rebuke of Amos; whether our horizon extends beyond the flesh-pots. If our hearts are set upon food and clothing and shelter, we may be sure that punishment will be our lot. And we are just as sure of punishment if for the body we substitute the mind, and do not rise above the level of intellectual joys.

There is a region still higher in which the soul holds sway. It is the only part of man that is fit to rule. It is the only sovereign under whose government men and nations are safe. When the soul is on the throne, the body is made an obedient subject, and in obedience finds life and health and happiness.

The mind likewise needs spiritual direction. Under the leadership of the soul it can roam at will throughout the universe and still be humble and reverent. Amos recorded in advance the punishment that would befall individuals and peoples which were led away from God.

THE TRAGEDY OF ISRAEL

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR MARCH 19

(II Kings xvii:9-18)

And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree;

And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen whom the Lord carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger:

For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent you by my servants the prophets.

Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God.

And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them.

And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger.

Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

In the course of our weekly Bible Talks we now come to one of the great tragedies of history—the downfall of the kingdom of Israel. And what a lesson the account of the end that kingdom twenty-six hundred odd years ago, as set forth in the seventeenth chapter of the Second Book of the Kings, holds for all nations—even for our own beloved America!

After an apostasy of more than two centuries, encouraged and tolerated by its rulers, Israel had at last reached a point where the wrath of the Almighty overflowed and He permitted the people—His chosen people—to be carried captive into Assyria and dispersed throughout that land.

The Lord had brought them out of the land of Egypt, had guided them through the wilderness, had given them a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, had fed them manna in the wilderness, had protected them against their enemies and had given the promised land as an inheritance. And, yet, in spite of His repeated favors and continued care, they had turned away and worshipped heathen gods. They "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord." When God withdrew His protecting arm their weakness became manifest, they found that they were defenseless before their enemies, and Israel disappeared forever from the company of nations.

THE CAUSE OF ISRAEL'S DOWNFALL

The text of our Talk begins with the direct statement: "And the children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right against the Lord their God."

They set images upon every high hill and under every green tree. They burnt incense in all the high places as did the heathen nations; they served idols in spite of Jehovah's

commandment that "Ye shall not do this thing."

God testified unto Israel and unto Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes." Notwithstanding they did not hear but hardened their necks as their fathers had done before them and believed not in the Lord their God. "They rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified unto them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them."

This is given as the cause of the downfall of Israel before the Assyrian host.

We are interested in this bit of history because it is tremendously practical. We are dealing with sin and its punishment, with disobedience and the retribution that follows.

In these Bible Talks I have tried to gather the truths that are applicable to the present day, so that the lesson will be useful to us in our own lives. Is there any moral in this lesson that we as citizens of the United States can take to heart?

THE ONLY STANDARD OF MORALS

Many lessons can be drawn from the text: First, there is only one standard of morals for individuals and groups of individuals. Many of the international complications that have disturbed the peace of the world and involved the nations in bloody conflicts have arisen from an attempt to evade the moral standards that God has set up for the individual.

The Ten Commandments are intensely personal; they touch human life at every point. The first group lays down rules for man in his relation to God; the second group suggests rules for the government of man in his relation to his fellow men. There never has been any attempt to formulate a different code of morals for nations, and yet, time and time again throughout history, groups of men have acted on the theory that they were relieved from the obligation of these commandments. They have trifled with life and property, with honor and with virtue.

Covetousness in the individual, such as was punished in Ahab, Israel's king, for the theft of Naboth's vineyard and the murder of its owner, has often been exalted into patriotism, and crimes have been excused on the ground that the nation profited—as if any nation could profit permanently by a violation of God's law. All the sins that have brought punishment upon mankind have violated the second commandment as given by Christ, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

This was a condensation of all the Ten Commandments that relate to man's duty to man. If one loves his neighbor as himself, he will not kill him, nor steal from him nor bear false witness against him. Society will find full and complete security from every injustice when all love their neighbors as they love themselves.

THE BASIC LOVE

But on what does this second commandment rest?

Some ignore the first commandment; they think it is enough to consider man's social needs: they exalt humanitarianism above all other virtues and dream of a world made perfect by love of fellow men. They forget that love of neighbor is built upon love of God. How can one be led to renounce brutishness and be brought into a brotherly relationship with his fellows? By learning that all are brothers, and this relationship is traced through the common Father of us all.

When the lawyer tempting Christ asked him to name the great commandment in the law, He condensed into one commandment those that related to man's duty to God and proclaimed as the first and great commandment "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This came first, and the second was not only like unto it but dependent upon it.

Until one loves God with heart and soul and mind, he is not likely to love his neighbor as himself, nor even to inquire who is his neighbor. A sense of responsibility to God is the foundation of social justice—it is the most potent influence that acts upon a human life. Strike out the thought of God and a life may run for a little while on the momentum that it has acquired, but it slows down when the divine current is turned off.

The sin of the children of Israel was that they forgot God, and because they forgot God they yielded to divers temptations, and punishment overtook them.

Man has not changed in this respect. With-