

# Mr. Bryan's Bible Talks

## A NATION THAT FORGOT GOD

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

### BIBLE TEXT—LESSON FOR JUNE 18

(II Kings 25:1-12)

And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his host, against Jerusalem, and pitched against it; and they built forts against it round about.

And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

And on the ninth day of the fourth month the famine prevailed in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land.

And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between two walls, which is by the king's garden; (now the Chaldees were against the city round about;) and the king went the way toward the plain.

And the army of the Chaldees pursued after the king; and all his army were scattered from him.

So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.

And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon.

And in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which is the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzar-adan, captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem:

And he burnt the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great man's house burnt he with fire.

And all the army of the Chaldees, that were with the captain of the guard, brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about.

Now the rest of the people that were left in the city, and the fugitives that fell away to the king of Babylon, with the remnant of the multitude, did Nebuzar-adan the captain of the guard carry away.

But the captain of the guard left of the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

How graphically the closing days of the kingdom of Judah, to which we now come, makes plain the inexorable working of this great moral law.

Again and again, as kings came and went, the people of Jerusalem had scorned the prophets, turned to idolatrous practices, steeped themselves in the vices and sins of the heathen nations round about them, forgotten and mocked God. And now the harvest.

But even as the people of Jerusalem looked out over the city's walls upon the besieging host brought against them by the mighty king, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, God gave them their last chance to avert the terrible harvest of their own sowing. Through Jeremiah the prophet He had counseled: "Desist in your rebellion against your overlord, surrender to the Chaldeans, repent of your sins, and Jerusalem will not be destroyed and you shall live." But the stiff-necked rulers of Judah preferred their own judgment to the guidance of the Almighty, and, hence national disaster complete and full.

### PROOF OF PROGRESS

From the ninth unto the eleventh year of King Zedekiah's reign Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem round about. Then the city's food supply gave out, famine fell upon the people, a breach was made in the walls, and all Zedekiah's men of war and the king himself fled by night from the might and wrath of the Chaldean host. But the enemy pursued and overtook the Hebrew king in the plains of Jericho, took him prisoner, scattered his army from him, and took him up to Nebuchadnezzar to the town of Riblah for judgment.

What followed when the two kings came face to face is proof that the world has made some progress even in war.

While the purpose of war has not changed; while the taking of human life is still the first aim of war, and while outrages are still practiced by soldiers in the heat of passion and under the impulse of revenge, no civilized government would be guilty of the cruelties that were openly practiced in olden times. The Chaldeans slew the sons of the captive king before his eyes, and then they put out the eyes of the king himself. Any government that would now thus torture a prisoner, helpless in that government's

hands, would call down upon itself the condemnation of the world.

But in the time of which we write the slaughtering of conquered people was not an uncommon thing. That was a part of war whenever it did its bloody work, and the torture of Zedekiah was not out of harmony with cruelties then practiced.

Nor was it an uncommon thing to destroy a conquered city. And so Nebuzar-adan, a captain of the guard in the Chaldean army, was sent to Jerusalem to destroy it.

He did his work effectively. He burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house, and every great man's house in the city. The walls were broken down, and the inhabitants who were left, except the poorest, were carried away captive to Babylon. But the poor of the land were left to care for the vineyards and the farms. Thus Jerusalem was left desolate, its fate being just what Jeremiah, speaking by divine inspiration, had foretold God made him his messenger to the people, but they would not believe, and their punishment followed.

The most striking part of the Biblical description of Nebuzar-adan's desolating work relates to the destruction of Solomon's temple.

In beauty it was one of the wonders of the world. Its cost has been estimated at from two and a half to four billion dollars—an appalling sum even now and relatively much greater then.

Thirty thousand men were employed in cutting the cedar that was brought from Lebanon for the temple. The masons and others who aided in its construction were numbered at 150,000. When it is remembered that the building was not remarkable for its size (ninety feet long, thirty feet wide and forty-five feet high), the outlay upon ornamentation must have been vast.

### LOOTING OF THE TEMPLE

"And the pillars of brass that were in the house of the Lord, and the bases, and the brasen sea that were in the house of the Lord, did the Chaldees break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Babylon." And the pots and shovels and the snuffers and spoons and other vessels of brass, and the firepan, the bowls and such things as were "of gold, in gold, and of silver, in silver," were likewise carried away. The looting of the temple left no treasure overlooked.

While the historical facts are of very great interest, the lessons that the facts teach are of still greater value to us. We are prone to exaggerate the visible and to underestimate the invisible—prone also to be more shocked at the destruction of valuable property than at the disobedience that imperils everything.

What a place Jerusalem would be for tourists if Solomon's temple were still there!

When I visited the Holy City I was surprised to learn that but a small fraction of the tourists who go to Egypt are interested in the Holy Land. Not many thousands turn aside to visit the soil made sacred by the tread of the prophets and by the blood of the Saviour. It is a land of relics and of ruins. A few Jews wail by the walls of the temple and a few pilgrims wander from place to place in search of the hallowed spots described in the Bible. There is controversy about nearly every point of interest, so that one is seldom sure that he is seeing the places that he came to see. If the temple of Solomon were only there in all its beauty and magnificence, the lovers of art would wend their way to it from every land.

### THE ONLY STABLE FOUNDATION

Christ made impressive use of the difference between the house built upon the rock and the house built upon the sand. Solomon's temple was a religious structure; it rested on belief in God. It was built upon faith and obedience. When faith and obedience were gone, the temple fell; its treasures were stripped from it and the work of its artists became a shapeless mass.

A heathen nation became the avenger of an angry God. He administered punishment through the hands of an irreverent host that cared nothing for the sentiments of the Jews. All that the Chaldeans saw in the costly ornaments of God's house was the metal value of the brass, the silver and the gold.

And so today it is profitable for us to learn that all the boasted wealth of civilization is un-

stable unless it is built upon a moral foundation. The priceless treasures that are stored in the civilized states are unable to protect themselves; art may please and music may charm; literature may delight and learning may enrich; wealth may be piled up in fabulous sums and oratory may weave a spell around ill-gotten gains, but the value of all is measured by the value of the foundation upon which they may rest.

Judah fell because it forgot God. The kings relied upon the military strength of which they boasted and which their allies could supply. They felt themselves secure and obedience to God was spurned. When the test came they were helpless, and all the glories that had crowned their days when they found favor in the sight of the Lord and walked in His path vanished when they forsook God.

### GOD'S LAWS UNCHANGED

God is not changed; His laws have not been repealed. Disobedience carries the same penalties now that it did when Hebrew kings were unfaithful to Him. None of the refinements that have come with civilization can protect a nation from the wrath of God if the rulers and the people disregard the only sure foundation of enduring prosperity, viz., obedience to God. Even a temple, built for worship becomes a mockery when worship ceases.

The schoolroom may be a mighty auxiliary to the church because the brain can be made into a great machine tremendously valuable when under proper control and rightly directed. But the mind is no more fitted than the purse to occupy the throne. Brain and money are both good servants, but they have not the qualities that are needed in a master. A consecrated heart can make a splendid use of money honestly acquired, but money, even when legitimately secured can wreck any life or any nation of which it takes command.

A trained mind can add largely to the usefulness of life when it is under the control of the spiritual in man, but it can wreck any human being, even civilization itself, if it is allowed to exercise authority.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth of the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Every nation of the present day must stand, if it stands at all, upon the same foundation that Judah stood. It will fall as Judah fell if the foundation gives way.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

### THE OLD TESTAMENT'S VALUE TO US OF TODAY

By WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

#### REVIEW LESSON FOR JUNE 25

Since the first of the year our weekly Bible talks have been based on passages from the Old Testament. The cast of characters has included towering giants in faith and service, vacillating characters, and kings who sold themselves to evil. At this point it is not worth while to pause a moment and consider, in a general way, the value of the Old Testament Scriptures to us of today?

While Christianity is built upon Christ, the New Testament rests upon the Old. Christ was a Jew; he came in fulfillment of prophecy and He gave emphatic endorsement to the Book of the Law, not one jot or tittle of which was to fall until all was fulfilled. Without the Old Testament, we would have an incomplete view of the plan of salvation; those who speak in the New Testament assume in their hearers a knowledge of the Old. Without Moses and the prophets to furnish a foundation for the superstructure, Christianity would seem suspended in the air.

#### THE ROCK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

But the Old Testament does more than supply the rock upon which the New Testament stands; it has in it certain elements that contribute material strength to Christianity. Revelation did not begin with the birth of Christ; it culminated in His coming. The way was paved by the men of God who ennobled life with messages which they received direct from Jehovah.

Among the patriarchs who deserve a high place in Bible history we find Abraham, who gives us one of the earliest and most splendid illustrations of the power of faith and of its fundamental place in the history of individuals and nations.

At the call of God, he left his home and traveled into a distant land, there to become the father of a race, than which there has never