The Boiling Cauldron

A “Never-Old-Story”
by Lettice Bell

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Introduction

We have always considered it to be very difficult — if not impossible, to teach children the great prophetic books in such a way as to be of any real use to them.

Yet here, the work is done — and so well done, and so naturally, that we are amazed that no one has done it before.

The stories of the Weeping Prophet are here told in such wise as to give the reader an understanding of the historic background; sympathy with the prophet; and a clear idea of the general purpose of his work.

It seems to me that if any child -- or adult -- is taken through this book in a perfectly natural way, by one who has the child heart, the result will be, that when a little later the Book of the Prophet is considered in more careful detail, these stories will group themselves in the mind, and constitute an illumination and guide of the greatest value. And this surely is the true method of teaching the Bible to little ones.

With all confidence, I commend this book to mothers and fathers, and all those who desire to fulfill the highest and most gracious responsibility to the children under their care, as a most valuable aid. I hope the author will go on with her work until in a series she has gathered up all these Bible stories in this most systematic and therefore most valuable way.

— G. Campbell Morgan
Dear Richard,

Here is your book. I am very sorry it is so long since you asked for it. All I can say is, there is not one story about a girl in it, so perhaps you will forgive and forget.

There are plenty of texts for you to hunt for as you read these stories. Though there is often only one word to find, it generally means that the rest of the verse also has something to do with the story.

I am afraid when you see the book is about Jeremiah, you may think it is going to be dull. But nothing is further from the truth. Everything in the Bible is interesting when we set ourselves to understand it. Besides, I had to tell you Jeremiah stories after you told me the only thing you knew about him was that he “blew the fire”—which is just the opposite of what he really did do.

God told him about the fire, and the Boiling Cauldron, and he had to tell the people what God told him. He himself could neither blow it up, nor out.

Next time you come and visit me here (we’ll invite your brother and sister too), I’ll tell you what we will do for our story-time—

We will make a Jeremiah museum. It could very well be that Jeremiah had one for himself, with the many object lessons God gave him. Perhaps he explained the objects to the boys and girls who came to visit him.

We shall have to get for our museum:

An almond rod,

An iron cauldron,

A clay pot,

A broken water jar,
A wooden yoke,

A linen girdle (a bedsheets will do),

and a basket of figs.

You might make some of these out of modeling clay yourself.

The stories we tell shall be the lesson each of Jeremiah’s objects are meant to teach. I think you will find his story very interesting, exciting, sad and wonderful indeed.

Goodbye from your grown-up friend,
Lettice Bell

PS — It is only the words printed in italics that you have to find — and you will need a good old fashioned King James version of the Bible to spot them.
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The Royal Bible Study Club

Ever so long ago, when there was only a very little bit of the Bible, God founded the first Bible Study Club. It was at the time when His Own People were tired of being different to other Nations, and were beginning to want a King like the rest.

God knew that only Heavenly Laws could bring happiness and prosperity to the Land, and He told Moses to write a Book containing all His Commands, Plans and Warnings, and then put it in the very safest possible place — inside the Holy of Holies at the side of the Ark, so it might never be lost. Copies of the Book were made for daily use. Then the first Bible Study was started. Every King was to write him a copy of the Book, and keep it always with him, and he was told to read therein all the days of his life.

And the first Bible Study Club, Royal though it was, fared very much like others have done since. That is to say -- a few members read their portion every day; others read it now and then, and some did not read it at all. Saul, for instance, must often have gone to bed with his Bible unopened, while David read his Bible every day, and thought thereon at night. As for Solomon, he was a member who began diligently, but ended carelessly, like so many others.

Rehoboam and Jeroboam can never have joined at all. The last thing Jeroboam cared to learn about was what God had said. He liked to make laws out of his own heart, and ruled just as he chose. He disregarded all that God had planned, and made different feast days, and different altars, and different priests, in spite of all that God had taught about His Worship in the Wonderful House.

One day, Jeroboam’s presumption reached a climax. On his own altar, the pattern and placing of which he had made from
his own ideas, he disobediently offered up *incense* with his own hands. For one sin leads on to another, and he stopped at nothing that entered his heart to devise.
The Voice at the Altar

See him as he stands on this memorable day by the Altar he has made. The crowd around him are awed into silence. For every Israelite assembled there knows their King is breaking Heaven’s law. But defiance is on his face as he takes the censer into his hand. There he stands. The Priests of his own making have slain the sacrifice. Swinging the incense, Jeroboam boldly approaches and lays his hand upon the Altar.

Suddenly he starts backward! For at this very moment, a voice of thunder is heard, electrifying every heart.

"O altar, altar," cried a prophet of God, "thus saith the Lord."

Jeroboam grows white with anger. What does he want with God?

But the prophet cares not for angry looks and frowns. Behold, a child shall be born unto the House of David, JOSIAH by name; and upon thee shall he offer (the bones of) the priests... that burn incense upon thee.

It was God’s message sent from Heaven about 940 BC to say that a little boy should reign in Jerusalem who would dig up the bones of these very Priests, and burn them upon that very altar.

The years went on, and many a little son was born to the House of David — but not one was called Josiah. And the bones lay undisturbed. Two hundred and fifty years went by, and Manasseh, a boy in years and a heathen at heart, reigned in Jerusalem. He surpassed in idolatry all that had come before him.

The temple of Solomon was sacred no longer. In its courts, the place of God’s forgiveness, he built altars to the sun, moon, and all the host of Heaven.
And greater than all his sins, he dared to go behind the Veil and replace the Golden Ark with a hideous idol.

Whether the precious Book in Moses’ handwriting was still beside the Ark, we cannot tell. If it was, we may be quite certain that Manasseh ordered it to be destroyed with every other copy in existence.

Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, until it was the think talked of from one end of Jerusalem to the other. These Martyrs must have been the faithful few who still followed Jehovah, and refused to do as was being done around them.

God punished Manasseh, and he repented and tried hard to undo all that he did.

Three hundred years had passed since the day when the prophet had cried, “Thus saith the Lord, a child shall be born to the House of David, JOSIAH by name.”

And at last the palace in Jerusalem was filled with joy. A baby grandson, named Josiah, was sent to comfort Manasseh’s last repentant years.

His own boy Amon broke his father’s heart, disregarding all entreaties to turn from his idols and serve the Living God. All the old King’s hopes and prayers centered in his little grandson. We can imagine the tiny child asking to go to his grandfather’s, where he heard the stories that by the Holy Spirit went right into his six-year-old heart.

Little Josiah would surely never be tired of the story of the Altar. And don’t you think he would say at the end of the story, “Tell it again,” just like other children would who are not princes?

He must have felt a terribly lonely child when his grandfather died and was buried. Though it made him the Crown Prince, that
Josiah’s heart was tender and loving, because God made it so. Amon’s heart was hard and cruel. His idols made him like that.

Josiah had often seen his father’s harshness and cruelty at home, and many a time he had heard the servants, with whom he would spend most of his day, mutter and frown, and even shake their fists toward their Royal Master.

Perhaps, as he had grown up, with all this dissatisfaction, he would not notice that threats and whispered conversations were increasing alarmingly. Until one day — when everything in the palace was unnaturally quiet, as it always is before a storm — the storm of bitter hatred burst.

Suddenly, a terrible noise disturbed the little child at his play. A thud, a bitter wail, and Josiah was fatherless. The conspiracy, so long smouldering, had done its murderous work at last, and the King whose idols hardened his heart died by the hand of his own servants in his own house.

Bad news travels fast, and the people of the land rushed into the palace, killing every servant in the place. Such a scene of horror and bloodshed and cries must have terrified the little Prince, till he ran and hid his face in some far-away corner.

Never would he be a child again. Toys and games were forever left behind in the garden grave where they buried his father, when Josiah was eight years old. Among all the terrible thoughts and sounds that filled his heart, hiding as he was from the dreadful sights, did it occur to the child that the day of his father’s murder was also the day of his coronation?

It must have come as a shock to this tender-hearted boy to be dragged forth from the palace of bloodshed, out to the profaned Temple.
The bewildered little Prince, with white and tear-stained cheeks, was lifted onto the Throne. “God save the King, God save King Josiah,” the people cried—and God’s Word, spoken three hundred years before of the child named JOSIAH, had come to pass. He was King of Judah.
Although the people cried “God save the King,” although they had crowned him themselves, they did not really like it. For the Jews looked upon a child King as a mark of God’s displeasure. Because Saul was a head and shoulders above them, they had set their hearts on him. But Josiah was sent to them as a blessing.

Because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee King, might have truly been said of him. And very soon after he became King, he set his heart to do right in God’s sight.

We do not know who was the boy’s advisor or regent, but probably it was the High Priest Hilkiah. Hilkiah cried “God save the King” with his whole heart, and rejoiced to see God’s long-promised Josiah on the throne at last.

Did Josiah join the Royal Bible Study? No. How could he? Though Manasseh and Hilkiah could tell him what they knew of God’s Laws, they could not put a copy of the Law Moses wrote into his hand, for the Book was lost. We do not know exactly how long it had been lost; Hezekiah was the last King we read of who had it.

When Manasseh had the Ark taken out of the Holy of Holies, you may be quite sure he ordered the Book to be destroyed then, for it was kept beside the Ark. So, it had most likely been lost for about fifty years.

Josiah may have spoken to Hilkiah about the lost Book, and perhaps have wondered if in some way or other it might have been preserved, and never burnt at all. It was possible that some faithful Priest had hidden it —and though he himself had died before it was safe to reveal its hiding-place, God knew where it lay, and could bring the lost Treasure to light.

There was someone else Hilkiah would discuss the lost Book.
with, besides the King. That was his own son, Jeremiah, who was probably a few years younger than Josiah.

Hilkiah could not stay at home in Anathoth with his boy, but when his work in Jerusalem was over, no doubt he spent as much time as possible in teaching Jeremiah about God, and answering all the questions his little son besieged him with about the little King.

As Jeremiah grew older, he would be able to accompany Hilkiah to Jerusalem. There the two boys would come to know each other. They had many things in common, and in many ways were much alike. Both were servants of the King of Kings, and longed to obey every one of His Commands. Both were tender hearted to an extraordinary degree, both strong in principle and steadfast of purpose. If Josiah began a thing, he finished it. And when Jeremiah started anything, he carried it through.

Yet in one point, there was a tremendous difference in their characters. Josiah was brave and fearless, and never minded standing up, or speaking up, for the right. But Jeremiah shivered and shook at the bare thought of doing the courageous things Josiah did.

Often these two must have said together, “If only—if only we had God’s Book that Moses wrote, how gladly we would do all it says.” Without the Book, they were but groping in the dark, just doing right as far as they knew, and not knowing much.

At last, in the twelfth year of his reign, the King determined to carry out a great scheme he had long thought of. It was nothing less than to break every idol in the land. Josiah and a band of servants started off on this great expedition. Jeremiah did not go. He was left in his peaceful home, glad to do quiet things, learn of God and keep behind the scenes, thankful to be only a simple boy, and not called upon to make a public stand for the Truth like Josiah.
Meanwhile, up and down the land went the relentless young ruler, breaking down idols, and grinding them into powder, till such a clearance as never was before prevailed in the Kingdom. News of his progress and success would come to Hilkiah from time to time. He must have rejoiced with Jeremiah over the work of the brave young King.

Josiah was twenty when he started on this tour. He was twenty-six before he returned to his Capital.

After he had been gone one year, the most wonderful day in Jeremiah’s life came to pass.
The Boy Preacher in God’s School

Jeremiah would never forget the day he went to school and God taught him. He awoke one morning a timid child; but before he went to bed that night, he had learned how to be a courageous preacher. When he was quite alone on this day of all days, God spoke to him. He called him by his name, and told him that long ages ago, before he was born, he had been chosen to be the bearer of a heavenly Message to many people.

As Jeremiah heard God’s Voice, his heart sank low within him. It did not make him glad to know of the great honor, so overcome was he with his own unworthiness. How could he, a shy, sensitive boy, dare to stand up before his friends and neighbors, old men and women, and tell them of their sins?

“I can’t,” he said in his heart. Then aloud, “I cannot speak, for I am a child.” Jeremiah did not realize that children are often the very servants God uses best for His work. He does not need those who are clever and strong, only those who will do as they are told.

When God uses grown-ups to do His work, He first requires them to be like little children. But when He chooses children, He never asks them to be grown-ups.

So when Jeremiah said he couldn’t, because he was only a child, God answered: “Do not say, ‘I am a child,’” and explained to him that he had only to do what he was told, and speak the words God would teach him, and would never have to make up a sermon out of his own head.

But Jeremiah still trembled. He conjured up in his mind how the people would stare, and what contemptuous looks would be on their faces. It seemed so dreadful for him to have to look at them and say, “God will punish sin.” For it is always easier to say unpleasant things to a person’s back than to their face.
God looked down into the boy’s frightened heart, and very tenderly said, "Be not afraid of their faces."

When God tells us to be of good cheer, and not to fear, He does not just say “Do not mind,” but always gives a good reason why we should stop minding.

He told Jeremiah not to be frightened, and gave him two strong reasons why he should not be. Both begin with “for” (that is, because): For I am with thee, is one. Isn’t it always easier to do a hard thing if someone is with you? Why, of course, it makes all the difference. The other “for” told frightened Jeremiah that not only would the Strong and Mighty God be with him, but that a new strength and courage had already been put into his heart.

To teach him how strong this would make him in days to come, when he actually had to face Kings, Priests and People, God showed him the three strongest things in the world. Of each one He said, “Look —I have made you as strong as that.”
The Lesson on Bravery

A defended city, whose impregnable fortifications bristled with artillery, rose before his vision. Such a strong, inaccessible fortress — yet Jeremiah was made as strong as that.

An iron pillar towered above him next, firm and immovable, as though nothing could ever shake it. The timid boy learned then that God would make him as enduring as that iron pillar.

Lastly, massive brazen walls enclosed him securely. High, thick, impenetrable. He looked all around in wonder. There was not one weak spot in that shining barrier. “So the Lord is round about His people,” whispered a Loving Voice. ‘No one shall kill you, Jeremiah, though they will try their best — for I am your Strong Protector.’

On that day and for all other days, the boy who said ‘I can’t” at the beginning, found out how to say “I can” over every difficulty. God did make him strong, did keep him firm, and was a wall of defence around him, according to His Word.
The Lesson on Haste

But there were other lessons to learn on this never-to-be-forgotten day.

Jeremiah found himself looking hard at something God was showing him.

"Jeremiah, what seest thou?" came the question.

What he saw now was a wooden staff, like a long walking-stick, but the remarkable thing about it was that it was covered with pink flowers and nuts.

"I see a rod of an almond tree," answered Jeremiah.

Stop for a moment and think of all that the flowering Rod would mean to this young descendant of Aaron. His mind would instantly go back to the story of those twelve dry rods, with a name on each, and the day when God said, "The man's rod whom I shall choose shall blossom, and bring forth buds and almonds." Jeremiah was reminded in a way he could never forget that he was chosen, like Aaron, for special service.

But the rod meant more than this. And so that he should not miss its further and important meaning, God explained it.

The earliest of all trees to flower is the almond. It does not wait for the summer, but seems to hurry to get out while it is still winter. Haste is what the pink flowers meant. God's message must be quickly given. Thee was no time to lose, for the punishment was coming quickly, unless the people repented. So Jeremiah learned another lesson — he was to begin at once.
The History Lesson

Still another picture lesson was given him, before he quite understood what he had to preach. A fire of sticks with a boiling cauldron appeared next.

“What do you see now, Jeremiah?” asked his Heavenly Teacher.

“A pot,” said Jeremiah. No pretty flowers this time, but an ugly black cauldron, boiling away furiously, in clouds of thick smoke. He had often seen just such a pot before, cooking soup or heating water on a fire of sticks. But this one had a special meaning; and as he looked on in wonder, he noticed that, because of the uneven ground, the pot was about to tip over; and before the fire has burned much lower the boiling contents must be poured out all over the ground.

Jeremiah noticed, too, that the pot was tipping over towards the South side. What did it mean? Jeremiah was not left to guess. This too was explained by God Himself.

The scalding flood pouring out of the cauldron from the North onto the South meant that some dreadful, hurting punishment was coming upon the Land of Judah. Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.

Jeremiah knew quite well that the North meant Assyria and Babylon, and the South was Judah. He knew now that the message he had to arise and speak was this: That because of the idolatry of Judah, who had forsaken the true God, an enemy should take Jerusalem and carry the Jews away captive. That enemy would come from the North — from Babylon.

He would learn too, just as the pot had not yet boiled over, that there was still time for the people to repent, and so prevent the coming misery.
All this was unforgettably impressed upon his mind by the Boiling Cauldron.

What, then, did Jeremiah learn from these first lessons?

1. God had chosen him to preach.

2. God had made him strong and brave.

3. There was no time to lose.

4. There was still time for Israel to repent.
The Boy Preacher

Then Jeremiah saw no more pictures. He had learned his lesson for the time being, and must begin to do what he was told. We do not know how he felt that first day when he went out into the streets of Anathoth and began to preach. We only know that he did it, and God made him strong.

For after a while, God spoke to him again: He was to leave the village and go and preach in the streets of Jerusalem. How intimidating and formidable this must have seemed to the country boy. Why, his own father, the High Priest, might come and listen. But Jeremiah had only to remember the Boiling Cauldron to make him hurry to give the warning.

All this time, Josiah was trying to rid the land of idols, and the people were helping him with their hands—but their hearts were not changed. **Judah hath not turned unto Me with her whole heart** —only in pretense.

Jeremiah might have been deceived by them, and have failed to speak faithfully had he been preaching his own sermons. As it was, God, who sees the hearts, told him every word he was to say.

In God’s sight, the people’s pretense of worshiping Him was just like a doctor covering up a sore place and saying it was cured. The idols might be covered up out of sight, but the love of them, and the secret faith in them, was a dreadful wound in the people’s hearts. A deep-down wound, that must kill in the end, unless it was healed.

“*They have healed also the hurt... of My people slightly,*” said the Lord to Jeremiah. “Go and tell them of the only real remedy.”

As Jeremiah preached, the Boiling Cauldron was ever at the back of his mind—but God’s Love was in the front, and was foremost on his lips. It was only because God loved these
people so much, He sent Jeremiah to plead with them, to let their idols go out of their hearts, and to *return* to their Heavenly Father.

“Only acknowledge thine iniquity,” implored Jeremiah, “then God will not send you punishment, but mercy.”

As he spoke of mercy and repentance, so sure did his own young loving heart become that God’s Love must win theirs back, that he saw plainly pictured in his mind what he longed to see with his eyes. He put it into his Sermon then and there.
The Story of What Might Have Been

I see,” he began, looking far away with tears of joy in his voice, ‘I see the children of Israel gathered together upon a high mountain. Some are looking up with streaming eyes, others are covering their faces in shame and contrition. Men, women and little children are weeping on the mountain, and the sob of their earnest supplications for forgiveness fills the air.

‘I hear it, I catch the words they say: ‘Forgive us, we have gone our own way. Yet have mercy on us now, we beseech Thee.’

“And above the noise of the bitter cry comes, clear and plain, the Heavenly Father’s loving voice, ‘Return, ye backsliding children, I will heal your grievous wounds, and you shall call Me my Father once again. Only return to My Love and Care.’

“And I see the men and women rise, and the tears and crying are stilled, and the children look up with smiles, as with humble tones and bending heads they say together --

‘Behold, we come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord our God. No one else can help us. We come to Thee.’

“And now the sunshine floods the mountain, and thankful happy voices come sounding down the hills in a song of Praise.

‘Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. Thou art the Lord our God.’

The Story was over. Jeremiah came back again to the Land of Reality. Unmoved, the people stood around him.

“What more do you want, Jeremiah?” they ask. “Have we not broken our idols, and backed Josiah in his reformation?”

But Jeremiah, knowing how only skin deep the reform truly was, again began to plead with them to return in heart to God.
What they were doing to please Josiah was just like sowing corn in the middle of a thorn bush—no good at all, if fruit was wanted.

Jer. 4:__

“Sow not among thorns, but in prepared ground,” said Jeremiah, sighing to think how unprepared their hearts were to receive God’s messages of Love. He wonders if anything will stir them. Loving persuasion has left them untouched. He will try the opposite method. A look of horror and haunting fear spreads over his face....
The War Alarm

Blow ye the trumpet. Proclaim in Judah and Jerusalem the War alarm,” he cries.

“The Enemy is approaching. Assemble yourselves and let us go into the defenced cities. Set up the Standard.”

“A King, fierce as a lion... is on his way.

“He is coming down from the North to make our Land desolate, to take away every inhabitant. There is not a moment to lose.

“The Chariots of the terrible King will be upon us as a whirlwind.

“His horses are swifter than Eagles. They are upon us! Oh, woe unto us—we are taken!”

The Prophet’s hands fall at his side despairingly. Hard, stubborn faces look up at him—while, overcome by the remembrance of that terrible Cauldron with its boiling flood, he pleads again:

“I cannot hold my peace. I must plead with you. My soul has heard the sound of the enemy, the alarm of War. Oh my poor foolish people. What will you do? I am pained at my very heart.”

But again the story fell upon deaf ears and hard faces, and they said, “We will not hearken. We do not believe what you say. It will never come upon us, neither shall we see sword nor famine.”

Day after day, Jeremiah went home perplexed and cast down. “O Lord... let me talk with Thee,” he said to his Heavenly Teacher, one day. “I have given the warning, but they do not fear or care. They have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return.”
The Burning of the Bones

While Jeremiah was going up and down the streets of Jerusalem, Josiah’s tour was coming to an end.

The Altar at Bethel was still standing, where, three hundred years before, the Prophet had said, “Behold, a child shall be born... Josiah by name.”

The child, you remember, was to burn upon that very Altar the bones of Jeroboam’s idolatrous Priests, who were offering up sacrifices and incense on that memorable day.

Now the time had come for that prophecy to take place.

As the King stood on the spot, he turned and looked around. He spied out some Sepulchres behind him. In these Sepulchres lay the bones of Jeroboam’s Priests.

“Bring out the Bones,” said the King sternly.

The servants carried them out and placed them on the Altar, and after they were burned, the Altar itself was broken to bits and stamped... to powder.

Don’t you think Josiah himself added his stamping to that of his servants, rejoicing to fulfil the Word of God spoken so many years before?

He and all that were with him learned that day this fact: Whatever God says will happen, must surely be fulfilled.

Meantime, preparations were going on in the palace in Jerusalem for the King’s return.

Josiah’s small sons must have been longing to welcome their father back after his six years’ absence. Eliakim, afterwards Jehoiakim, was only five when he went away. Now at eleven,
he must have felt quite grown up in comparison, and very anxious to show off how much he had learned and how much he had grown. Any boy would feel like that when his father was coming home.

At length, the last idol was smashed up, and the little boys saw their father again. He had not come home to play in the nursery however, but to finish a great work in Jerusalem.
The Book Found

The Temple still needed repairing, and much had to be done there before the services could be set in order again.

Josiah knew it was no good taking bad things away from people without giving them something in their place. But the worst of it was, he did not quite know how to rightly re-start the Temple worship in the way the Lord commanded Moses. Moses had written it all down, as we know, but Josiah had never seen that Guide Book. It was lost.

Still, just as far as he knew, the young King determined to set things in order. He called carpenters and builders and masons. Consultations took place, and plans were laid concerning the House which Solomon built.

In those days, just as now, the first question to be faced was the money: How was the money to be collected to pay all the workmen?

Once before, when King Jehoash had needed money for this same purpose, Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in the lid, and placed it beside the great altar in the Temple court. Shaphan, Josiah’s secretary, would know about the first money-box, and the good idea Jehoash and Jehoiada had for collecting money to repair the temple.

The old money chest was unearthed from the lumber rooms around the Temple. Thick with dust, it was dragged out into the light. Once more, it stood in its old place in the courtyard. The Levites were again stationed at the door of the Temple to collect the coins and to drop the money into the box.

It was a glad day for Josiah, Hilkiah, Shaphan, Ahikam and all those in Jerusalem who served the Lord. For you must remember —there were always some who did not love idols, but kept true to the Lord their God.
So the money rattled into the money-box day after day, and God’s servants rejoiced to think how the big chest was filling up.

At last, *when they saw that there was much money in the chest*, King Josiah said to Shaphan, “The time has come to open the box and count the silver. *Go up to Hilkiah, the High Priest*, and tell him so.” It was one of the duties of the King’s Scribe to empty the money-box.

So, Shaphan and two other officials come up to the Temple. Hilkiah meets them by the money-box. The Levites bring scales and bags, and tools to open the chest. When everything is ready, the box is opened, and the silver coins filling it right to the brim, are disclosed. Then the Levites begin to haul the money out. It is weighed before being *put up in bags*. Shaphan, no doubt, with his notebook, jots down the amounts as they go along.

Before long, as their work comes nearly to an end, and they had nearly *brought out the money*, someone remarks that there seems to be something else besides money at the bottom of the chest.

Hilkiah bends down and hastily brushes aside the remaining coins with eager hands, until he is able to pull out from its hiding-place a packet of parchment sheets. His excitement, his white face and nervous haste, tell the party that something of tremendous importance has happened. The calculations and money counting stop, and every eye is fixed on the High Priest.

“What is it?” someone asks. But Hilkiah goes on anxiously examining his find, until at last he answered, in an awestruck voice:

“I HAVE FOUND THE BOOK OF THE LAW.” It was the very copy written by the hand of Moses.

He handed *the Book to Shaphan*, so that he might see for himself that the lost Bible had truly been found at last. Shaphan then
and there began to read it. He did not read far, however, for the King came into his mind. What joyful news this great and surprising find would be to him! Well did Shaphan know that no other treasure in the whole world would compare in Josiah's eyes with God's long-lost Book.

As soon as the thought struck him, he started off with quick steps to the palace, carrying not only the Book under his arm, but the good news in his face.

Shaphan carried the book, and went first, but Hilkiah was not going to be left out of the joyful scene. He hurried after him, out of the gate.

Quickly running along, they arrived at the palace.

"We counted the money, and have given it to the overseers, and Hilkiah the Priest hath given me a Book," said Shaphan.

Then Shaphan read out of the Book to the King right away....
The Book Feared

As the King listens to God’s commands, his face grows sadder and sadder. Tears gather in his eyes, and he begins to tremble. “Stop reading,” he calls out, “we have not done what this Book that is found says we must, and great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out upon us.”

So real was Josiah’s anguish that he tore his royal clothes in his sorrow.

“Go quickly,” he said through his tears. “There is no time to lose. Find out what God would have us do. We have disobeyed Him, and He is angry with us. First ask Him about me, and then about the People.”

Off went the whole party on this urgent errand. Jeremiah was in Anathoth, so they did not spare time to walk two miles to find him. Close at hand in Jerusalem lived a woman called Huldah, to whom God spoke and revealed His Will.

“We will go to Huldah,” they said. “She will speak to God, and tell us what He says the King must do.”

So they called Huldah, and they told her the Bible was found, and the King was crying.

Huldah went away and asked God to give her a message to send back to the King. This was the message:

“Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, tell ye the man that sent you to me all he has read is quite true. Punishment is coming on the people, because they have forsaken the Living God. But as for the King himself, before the trouble comes, he shall be taken away to My Home of Peace.”

Why was Josiah so favored?
Because he believed the Bible. Because his heart was tender and humble. Because, when he heard what God said against Jerusalem and the people, and about the Fierce Foe that was coming, he did not make light of it like the rest, who mocked the messengers of God, and despised His Words.

Josiah was comforted by Huldah’s message. God had heard his many prayers. He had forgiven all his sin. But the King’s heart ached over his people, for he knew the reformation had never got down to their hearts, and unless they would listen to God’s voice, and serve Him, They would be made to serve a cruel master, who would besiege them and carry them away captives to a land of idols.

“Let us call all the inhabitants together,” he said, “both great and small. They shall hear the Book that is found for themselves.”

The crowd collected from every quarter. The King began to read. His voice trembled as he came to the part about the Fierce Foe. But the words went in at one ear and out the other, as far as most of that great congregation was concerned.

The King read on until he came to the 29th Chapter of Deuteronomy — the story of the Covenant God made with His people. (A covenant is an agreement. You make a covenant every time you say to anyone, “If you do this, then I will do that.”)

This was the Covenant: If Israel obeyed God and loved Him, then no troubles would come to them. But if they became drawn away to love other gods, then one sorrow after another would befall the nation. “And this Covenant,” read Josiah in the Book that was found, “was not only for those who were then alive that day, but was also made with him that is not here.”

Josiah saw clearly that this meant God had made this Covenant also for the people who were standing around him at that moment. “Let us make it again,” he cried, “with all our heart, and with all our soul — let us do all God tells us in the Book.”
And all the people said “We will,” and stood to the Covenant.

They loved their generous young King, and were quite ready to say “yes” to his proposals, as long as it did not cost them much. Anyone can easily say “yes”, but the point is to do what you say you will do. So even though they said “we will,” they acted “we will not.”
Dearly Beloved

Listen,” said God to Jeremiah on the day of the Great Covenant, “listen to the words these people are saying, and go and speak to them; tell them it is no good promising all this, unless they really obey my Voice.”

“So be it,” answered Jeremiah, going straight to the Gate in the Lord’s House.

“Amend your ways, and not your Temple,” he said plainly. “It is no good for you people to point to the Temple and say over and over it is the Lord’s, while you steal, murder, and break every one of the Ten Commandments — and then come and stand in God’s House and say we are made so and can’t help it.

“It is not sacrifices God looks for, but those who will obey.

“When you were promising so casually just now to keep God’s Covenant, He harkened and heard that you did not speak truly. None of you repented of your wickedness, saying, What Have I done? Why, even the swallow has more sense than you. Do swallows stay and die of cold when the winter is coming on? You know they foresee the evil, and go away to find food, warmth and life. But you don’t go to your Father in Heaven, nor see His judgment coming!”

So Jeremiah reasoned with these foolish people, who said, “We are wise,” as they came in at the gates to worship the Lord. And not only did he preach in the gate, but God told him to take this same message to the Cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, which of course he did.

No Jeremiah’s sermon at the Covenant-making stirred up the indignation of his own family. They were furious to think he knew how insincere they really were. The even plotted and planned and made a conspiracy to kill the man who made them so uncomfortable.
From this time onward, Jeremiah’s troubles began, and his life was more or less in danger. Until now his friendship with Josiah had gained him safety at least, and he began to think of his own happiness, and to make a beautiful plan. He was going to have a home of his own like other people. Probably his father Hilkiah had died and left him a house, a little garden, and a vineyard. Such a pleasant portion and goodly heritage it was. And Dearly Beloved (a young lady Jeremiah hoped someday soon to marry) was quite ready to come and share his home. How happy they would be together, he and Dearly Beloved, with boys and girls growing up around them.

But... it was not to be. The little garden would never be trampled over by the feet of little children. The grapes of the vineyard would never be picked by little fingers. Never would Dearly Beloved comfort or cheer him at those sorrowful times when he wished he were a fountain, so that he might weep day and night.

For all the time that Dearly Beloved was listening to his happy plans, she was treacherously helping Jeremiah’s brothers in their secret plot to kill him.

Only a little while before Jeremiah had said in his sermons, “Oh, that I could live in the wilderness and leave my people, and go from them! They are all treacherous — you cannot even trust in a brother, for they are like Jacob, trying to supplant their brothers, and have taught their tongues to tell lies.”

Little did he realize, as he said this, that Dearly Beloved was deceiving him too — or how soon he was to prove the truth of these words, and find his own brothers trying to supplant him, and take away his heritage. For so cleverly were their plans laid to put Jeremiah off his guard, that instead of being angry and hateful any longer, they began to act particularly nice to him — and even pretended they wanted to hear more about God.

Jeremiah’s rejoicing at seeing his brothers in his hopeful frame of mind was short-lived. God spoke to him and showed him
their doings. “Believe them not, though they speak good things unto thee,” said the Heavenly Revealer of Secrets. And He told Jeremiah what was really on their minds.

So Jeremiah, knowing all the conspiracy and all the treachery of their hearts, went out and accused his brothers to their faces. But they did not care.

“You dare go on preaching to us, and you shall die by our hand,” they told him. Then, as they could not kill the object of their hatred, they revenged themselves by spoiling his pleasant garden and trampling down his vineyard underfoot.

It hardly added to Jeremiah’s sorrow, for he never wanted to see his house again. “I have forsaken mine house, I have left mine heritage,” he said, “for Dearly Beloved will never come into my house. From this time on, I will give her up into the hand of her enemies.” (Dearly Beloved thought the brothers were her friends, but Jeremiah called them by their true name.)

Jeremiah felt like this about his home, because God came to him and said, “Thou shalt not have a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place.” So, with his broken plans and broken heart, Jeremiah went out and buried Dearly Beloved in the graveyard of dead wishes and dreams.

He came back and preached as never before of the sorrow that would come to all the little children in that place, when God’s lovingkindness and mercies would be taken away, when glad and merry voices would cease out of the land, and wedding songs would be stilled.

His grief was only just a little picture of what would be the grief of the whole nation in the day when the Cauldron would be overturned.

From this time on, Jeremiah’s great joy was in the Book that Hilkiah had found. However discouraged he might be, that Book cheered and comforted him. What talks and Bible
readings he and Josiah must have had together, for Josiah was a Bible Study member now, if ever there was one.

"Thy words were found," said Jeremiah, "and I did eat them, and Thy Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Dearly Beloved’s place in his heart found a better tenant in God’s Word, for it was a joy that no one could take from him. You can see how Jeremiah studied the new-found Bible, by the many quotations in his sermons from Deuteronomy.
The Long Walk

None are so deaf as those who will not hear. Yet even people who won’t listen will generally look. Because messages had been useless, God tried to teach His people, just as He taught Jeremiah, by something they could see.

God called Jeremiah and told him exactly what to do, but He did not tell him what this doing meant.

He was to go and buy a linen girdle.

Lots of people would know when Jeremiah went shopping, because these deaf people were not dumb, and they had time to talk and gossip, and little to interest them. No one minded his own business in those days.

“What does he want a girdle for?” they would say. “Hasn’t he one already?” Of course he had, for was he not a priest? And part of a priest’s dress was a girdle.

So the village watched and talked and wondered, and learned the first part of the object lesson —

That a girdle was BOUGHT.

Now, a girdle was only a piece of linen — like a sash. But it was strong and useful to its owner, and Jeremiah’s girdle was his own paid-for property.

The next bit of the object lesson was — that the girdle had to be WORN. Jeremiah put it on, right around his waist, binding it close to his heart.

This started the tongues of Anathoth wagging, on the most important part of all the object lesson. Jeremiah was wearing his purchase without ever washing it with water.
You know how many times a priest had to wash. His clothes must always be clean.

Yet here was their prophet going about in a girdle that was all unbleached, and loom-soiled to start with—and letting it grow blacker and blacker every day. What could it mean? So the people learned another bit of the object lesson—the girdle was not WASHED.

Now Jeremiah got a further order. God called again. *Take the Girdle*—that spotted, grimy girdle—off.

And about time, too, thought the people, as they watched him unwind it. Perhaps now this strange prophet is going to wash it. That is all it really needs.

But no—they watch him fold it up, put it over his arm, and start off to walk. "What are you going to do?" they cry.

"I must take the unwashed girdle right away," is the answer Jeremiah gives. "God has told me to bury it out of sight, in a **hole** by the river Euphrates."

"Euphrates!" the amazed people reply. "Why, that is two hundred and fifty miles away at the least! You aren't really going to do such a mad thing are you? Isn't there earth sufficient here to bury a girdle?"

But the prophet started out on his long walk, just as if he was deaf instead of them. As God had told him, so he did. He walked the many, many miles to the river. He found a hole, put in the girdle, covered it over with earth, and walked back again.

How the people must have talked while he was away. And when he came back, footsore and weary, what jeers must have greeted his return.

"Did you go?" they would ask. "What a mad journey! How
much better off are you now? And at least,” they said, “that’s the end of that girdle.” Perhaps they wondered what strange thing he would be up to next — little dreaming that they were to hear of the much-talked-about girdle again.

But it was many days before God called Jeremiah next. He said to him: “Now start at once and go to the River, to the very place where you went before, and find the hole where you buried the unwashed girdle, and dig it up.”

Again, Jeremiah prepared for his long walk. And without questioning why, he trudged out of the city.

There were not many people in Anathoth that day who did not watch him go. As he disappeared in the distance, groups of gossipers stood and discussed the latest odd behavior of the man they would not listen to.

Well, they thought, he had always been peculiar — a most tiresome person. Now, there was no doubt in anyone’s mind: He was mad. No one but a madman would go for a two hundred and fifty miles’ walk four times over, on a wild-goose chase.

For nine days, Jeremiah’s doings were the talk of the town. But these deaf people had short memories, and no doubt out of sight was out of mind then, as it is now. Jeremiah was nearly forgotten until the day news came that a figure much like their preacher had been sighted, toiling back to Anathoth.

As the news went around the people came out to meet him. The very people who would not listen to a sermon left their work to hear what Jeremiah had to say for himself.

Weary and travel-stained, with thrilling voice, Jeremiah spoke:

“I went to Euphrates, as God told me. I took the girdle from the place where I had hid it, and lo and behold! — it was all spoiled, rotten, and good for nothing. A useless rag.”
Without stopping to let them get a word in, he went straight on:

“And this is just a picture of YOU. For you are a spoiled, useless nation. God meant you to be His own Girdle, bound close to His Heart, used by Him and an ornament to Him. That was God’s plan. You know how dirty and black you were, and how you needed washing. Your Owner would have washed you as white as snow, and kept you so. Because you would not listen to this invitation, like the spoiled girdle, you must be taken away to the River Euphrates and left there. You are good for nothing. No use, no ornament to your Owner.”

It is hard to believe, after hearing God’s beautiful name for them, “His Girdle,” these people did not all come crying to Him for forgiveness, asking Him to wash them and make them clean, and bind them securely to His Loving Heart.

If they had, God was ready to hear and make them still A Name, A Praise, and A Glory to Himself —but they would not.
The Singing Preacher

Josiah went on searching day by day in the long-lost Bible, where naturally he found many things that had been left undone.

One thing in particular had been forgotten in his grandfather’s sad and bad reign. That was the Passover Feast. Josiah no sooner found this written about, than he determined when the fourteenth day of the first month came around, the wonderful deliverance from Egypt a thousand years before should be remembered throughout the land.

With Josiah, to mean was to do. So we read that there was never such a Passover as the Passover that Josiah kept. As for the people, like the Pharisees later on, they only outwardly kept the Passover — but passed over the Love of God.

There was so much to remind them of God’s love, too. Preaching is not the only way God has for reminding us about His Care. All around the people could have seen it, if they had not been blind as well as deaf.

Their country was beginning to flourish, and trade was looking up. The unemployed found work in repairing the Temple. No one was laboring without being paid fair wages — and the poor and needy had in Josiah a powerful friend who always took their side.

You would think with so much to remind them what a blessing a good King was, they would like to listen to Jeremiah’s messages of a Greater King.

Yet, they did not. For the sad thing is that however much favor is showed to the disobedient, they will not learn righteousness.

Another preacher, Zephaniah, was sent to them to tell of all the Passover was meant to teach. How that in Heaven, God had
prepared a Sacrifice that would truly take away sins. It was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, of whom the Passover Lamb simply taught. Only those who were by faith already “feeding on Him in their hearts” were keeping the Passover in God’s sight. But all might do so, for Zephaniah said: “The Lord... hath bid His guests, He has provided a wedding garment so that all who will may be made fit to come to His Feast.

Why do you not accept the invitation? Why do you not seek the Lord with true repentance, and be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger?”

So preached Zephaniah. And if you want to know how the people treated this message, read Matthew 22:1-13.

Once while he was speaking, God filled Zephaniah’s mind with a wonderful picture, of a day that is coming when Jerusalem will no longer be a rebellious city — disobedient, ignorant, trustless and prayerless. A day when all the proud and haughty ones shall be taken away. Only those who trust and obey shall inhabit the Land with God Himself for their King.

Zephaniah was so overjoyed at the thought of this glorious future time, that he stopped preaching and began to sing:

“Sing,” he cried, “Shout, O Israel, be glad and rejoice with all the heart, for the Lord thy God... is mighty, He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy,... He will joy over thee with singing, ... He will make you a name and a praise among all people of the Earth. Sing and rejoice and be glad.”

But the people did not want that Day. They did not long for righteousness and truth. Idols and deceit were more to their liking. They never sang with Zephaniah, and his song had no more effect on them than Jeremiah’s tears.
And He Died

Palestine, as you know, was a small but very important country, that lay between two great Empires: Egypt on the south, and Assyria on the north.

The story of these nations and how Israel was forever chopping and changing their friendship from one to the other would fill a book in itself.

The whole thing was rather like a sandwich. Egypt and Assyria were the bread on either side, and Israel the jam in the middle—which sometimes stuck to one piece, sometimes to the other, while both wanted it.

When God put His people in such close quarters with the heathen, it was so that they might see His power and might on Israel’s account.

If Israel had trusted in God alone as their defence, they would have conquered all along the line. Instead, they turned to Egypt or Assyria for help whenever either—or any other King—came up to fight them.

At this point in our story, Pharaoh-Necho was on his way to fight with Assyria. Josiah, for some reason that does not matter to us, saw fit to interfere and try to prevent Necho from reaching Ninevah.

While Necho’s army marched along the coast northwards, Josiah’s did the same inland, until they met at Megiddo—and the rest of the story is told us in a sentence:

The Egyptian archers shot at King Josiah, and the King said to his servants, “Have me away, for I am sore wounded.”

So he died: The noblest, truest King that ever reigned in Jerusalem; the kindest heart that ever beat; the most faithful
student that ever searched the Scriptures. No wonder there was mourning through all the land. Mourning and sorrow and tears such as had never been before. Such mourning that a hundred years after, it was still spoken of as the greatest *mourning* that ever was.

2 Chron. 35:__

All their losses in the loss of Josiah, all his *kindnesses*, all his generosity, all his tender-heartedness, all his justice, and all his goodness were wept and wailed over, with a bitter wailing. And amongst all the men, and all the women, and all the little children who cried in every city that day and for many days beside, not one wept as did Jeremiah, the King’s friend.

Perhaps he used the burial hymn of David and cried, “I am distressed for thee, my brother —very pleasant hast thou been unto me, thy love to me was wonderful. The beauty of Israel is slain. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle.” But we cannot tell. But Josiah died, and Jeremiah lamented, and God was true to His promise, that Josiah’s tender heart should never see the punishment and sorrow that was on its way. The Egyptian arrow, the deadly wound, the last sigh in that Royal Chariot, were but a pathway of Light for him to the *Heavenly Jerusalem*.

Heb. 12:__

It would have broken Josiah’s heart to know all the wicked ingratitude that Jeremiah was made strong to live and bear. In love, God took Josiah *away from the evil* to come. In love, he left Jeremiah to plead on with His own beloved people.

Isa 57:__
Jehoiakim, the New King

For some reason, Josiah’s second son, Jehoahaz, was made King after him. In the twenty-three years of his life, he had not learned to do right in the sight of the Lord, and he very soon displeased Necho too —so that in three months’ time he found himself carried off a prisoner to Egypt, and saw his elder brother, Jehoiakim, made King in his stead.

Even in the nursery days, little Jehoiakim got his own way. Though he was not the eldest, he put himself first. His temper was so uncontrolled that if he could not get what he wanted in the beginning, he kicked and fought and threw things into the fire, until his brothers gladly gave him all he demanded. And he demanded all, for covetousness was the ruling principle of Jehoiakim’s unruly heart.

Supposing Jeoiakim’s name had been Jack, and he had lived in the present time, he would have collected butterflies for the fun of seeing them wriggle on a pin. He was cruel from his youth up, just as he was passionate and disobedient.

If at night the Royal servants discussed the young Prince’s temper over their supper, they may have shaken their heads and said “he would be a hard master,” and “it would be a bad day if he ever was King.” But they rather admired his spirit and overbearing manner —and no doubt helped on his downfall.

But Josiah had grieved over all he found in him. Sometimes, he took his small son to the Temple to watch the repairs going on. As Jehoiakim stood by the stonemasons and the overlayers of gold and the carpenters and painters, he admired it all. “But,” he said in his heart, “I wish it was for us. What a house I shall build myself when I am a man.”

Then his father would call him to listen to a chapter from the long-lost Bible —and if they said “Fooey!” in those days, Jehoiakim, Prince of Judah, said it then.
It was not really much bother, because he did not listen. He just went on building his castle in the air, and said in his heart "I will not hear." If he had dared, he would have torn the book from Hilkiah’s hand and trampled on it. The Bible bored him. He wanted to get back to his bricks and paints and toys and build a palace for himself in the nursery.

It may have been that, seeing all this in his son’s character, Josiah — with his tender heart — determined that a boy so tyrannical and covetous and cruel should not be King after him, with power to inflict untold misery. He made Jehoahaz, two years younger, his heir.

Perhaps Jehoiakim was not very sorry when Josiah died, for all his father loved, he hated — and what his father hated, he loved. Though it must have been painful and grievous to him to see his younger brother on the coveted throne, he found a way to find favor in Pharaoh-Necho’s sight. For in three months’ time, as we said, the King of Egypt made Jehoiakim King over Judah.

“Now I will build,” said Jehoiakim. “This palace is too drab and small for anything. It will not hold me. The house I shall build will be wide, and the rooms large and airy. And as to my windows, they shall be the talk of the town. My doors and my cedar woodwork shall be painted with vermillion. The glory of my Red House shall strike every eye.”

And so it was — and everything comfortable, and everything beautiful was put into that Red House. Everything except the thought of right and wrong. That was never in the young King’s heart. How could it get down to the foundations of his palace?

The workmen labored and toiled. Hour after hour and day after day, Jehoiakim used his neighbor’s service without wages. Never a penny did he pay for all the work in his magnificent house.
The laborers went on strike. But this only cost them their lives. Fresh workers were imported, who did not dare to refuse the King. Such was the oppression and violence into which Jehoiakim’s covetous heart led him.

“Splendid! Wonderful!” he said, as he gazed on the Vermillion House, complete at last.

“Woe,” said God, looking down at the murdered workmen and their empty pockets.

“Woe to him that coveteth. The very stones of his unrighteous house shall cry shame, and the beams of the vermilion-painted timber shall answer it. For the sin of Jehoiakim is against his own soul.”

Palaces do not establish a kingdom, nor make a King great. After all this, no one ever even knew where Jehoiakim, the owner of the Red House, was buried — of no more account was he than an ass in the day of his death.

Also, the character of Jehoiakim was another — though unrecorded — bit of Solomon’s work. For that craze for building, which Solomon allowed to run riot in his own heart, came to be handed down, like the kingly crown, from father to son — until at last it came down to a heart that had a use for it, and that heart was Jehoiakim’s.

But that was not its end by any means. Perhaps when you look next time on an over-great and over-ornamental dwelling, with more windows than you can count, and towers and turrets, and extravagant designs — possibly you will be actually looking on the fruits of Solomon’s doings handed down, down, down, even until this day. If the house is painted red, you may be pretty sure of it.

All of this is written for our learning and meant to teach us — well, you know what it is meant to teach us. And if you don’t the sooner you find out, the better.
Anyway, take this to heart: That a character built on the True Foundation is the only one that can be safely left behind as an heirloom to the third and fourth generation. And a good name to leave is rather to be desired than a great fortune.
In Danger

Jeremiah’s life became harder than ever after Josiah’s death. As soon as Jehoiakim began to reign, Jeremiah was sent to preach another sermon in the Court of the Lord’s House.

This sermon nearly cost him his life.

His audience rose up in indignation. “Kill him,” they shouted, “how dare he say our city shall be destroyed!” Angry hands seized him. “Thou shalt surely die,” cried one and all, for every single soul that heard Jeremiah speaking was against him, because of the truths that fell from his lips.

In the midst of the hubbub of furious words and shouts, a grand procession of Princes came slowly down from the King’s house to the Temple Court.

The angry Priests hurried up to meet them. The crowd stopped threatening and shouting, to hear what the Priests would make of it all.

Pointing to Jeremiah, they said furiously: “This man is worthy to die for the things he is saying about our city.”

While Josiah was alive, no one had dared to say openly that Jeremiah should be killed. Such words were whispered, and secret plans were made. Now, Josiah was dead, Hilkiah was dead, Shaphan was dead — was there no one to befriend the lonely preacher?

Yes, Shaphan’s son Ahikam stood up for Jeremiah, and Jeremiah himself pleaded his cause so convincingly that at last the Princes and the people agreed with one voice: “This man is not worthy to die.”

So, from one more danger Jeremiah was delivered. This was all the more remarkable as Jehoiakim, in his unreasonable tyranny,
ordered another preacher called Urijah, to be put to death. As Urijah had the exact same message as Jeremiah, it was quite unreasonable to kill one and not the other. Urijah fled and took refuge in Egypt, the land of refugees. But this made no difference to Jehoiakim. He ordered his father-in-law, Elnathan, to go off immediately to Egypt and fetch him back. Urijah was found and brought to Jehoiakim — and the King, whose cruelty was known by all, killed him with his own sword.

“And good riddance, too,” said his wife, Queen Nehushta, proudly. “The sooner this sort of people are gotten rid of, the better.” Then she sent for her small son Jehoiachin, and taught him to admire his father’s tyranny. Poor little boy — with such a father and a heathen mother — he had every encouragement to grow up just like them.

God looked down into Nehushta’s heart, and this is what He said: “What wilt thou say, O Queen, when I shall punish thee, when I shall give thee and thy son into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar?”

“Nehushta” meant “brazen”. But Nehushta did not feel very brazen in the day when the thing she feared most came upon her.
The Temperance Family

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign the Cauldron began to overturn—which means that the great Conqueror was on his way.

Nineveh, after a long siege, had surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar’s father.

At the battle of Carchemish, Pharaoh-Necho lost Palestine, so that he went off and never came back _again any more_. Whether Jehoiakim liked it or not, he had to change masters and become Nebuchadnezzar’s servant.

Nebuchadnezzar, to impress his victory, marched down from the North to Jerusalem.

One day, while the enemy was coming down like a _flood_ through the land, a very remarkable party of gypsy-like people came hurrying into Jerusalem for safety.

For nearly three hundred years, this wandering tribe had never been inside a town—and nothing but sheer terror of the Fierce Foe had driven them in now. The reason why the Rechabites lived in tents away from cities and the ordinary doings of men goes back to the time of Jehu, when there lived a good man named Jonadab. Now when Jonadab saw all the wickedness in the cities—the drunkenness and idolatry, and the little children learning bad ways—he thought how much better it would be for his family to live always away from towns and adopt the fashion of “the simple life.”

He told them to build no _house_, to sow no _seed_, to grow no grapes, to _drink no wine_, to do with as little as possible, and to bring up their children in the same Spartan manner.

So did the family of Jonadab, the son of Rechab—and their sons followed in his footsteps, unto the third and fourth...
generations and after —right up to the day when the Fierce Foe drove them inside the walls of Jerusalem for shelter.

The arrival of the Rechabites certainly must have created quite a stir and excitement! No doubt, the children of Jerusalem crowded around the gypsies, poking their little noses in wherever a nose could poke, and carrying back to their homes many a strange tale of these new arrivals. Perhaps the strangest would be that not one Rechabite had been seen to touch a drop of wine. Then their parents would very likely smile and say meaningfully: “When we go to Jerusalem, we do as Jerusalem does.”

But, the Rechabites did NOT do as Jerusalem did, strange though they felt in their new surroundings. The ways of Jerusalem did not attract them in the least.

After the excitement of their coming had quieted down, Jeremiah himself went to their encampment. He went because God had told him to go, and invite them all to a feast.

The feast was to be held in one of the rooms over the gate inside the Temple Court. And all the Rechabites accepted the invitation gladly.

Quite a long procession of them started off with Jeremiah, and crowds collected all along the way.

The mad prophet, with a tribe of gypsies at his heels, was not a sight to miss —even though Nebuchadnezzar was causing great anxiety in high quarters.

Right down the Courtyard the crowd followed eagerly, full of interest and gossip, as the gypsies passed inside the gate and up the stairs into the chamber, where the feast was prepared.

And what a feast it was. Just such a feast as the best citizens of Jerusalem would have loved. A cup was placed by every seat, and the table was filled —with brimming pots full of wine.
“Drink,” said Jeremiah anxiously, when all were assembled.

You could have heard a pin drop in the silence that followed. Jeremiah’s suspense was almost unbearable. Supposing, after all, these men “did do as Jerusalem did!” They were but human after all, and the temptation was great.

The Rechabites looked at the table, they looked at each other, they looked at Jeremiah. Then, they said firmly, with one accord:

“No, we will drink no wine. Our father told us not to, and we always have — and always will — obey him.”

The crowd outside did not have long to wait for their curiosity to be rewarded. Jeremiah appeared before them with a quiet, triumphant face, and preached to them a sermon on OBEDIENCE.

“These Rechabites,” he said, “have been sorely tempted to disobey their earthly father’s commandment. The table in here is loaded with wine — and I, a servant of God, have offered it to them. Yet they have resisted and kept true to their principles.

“Oh, how different these people are from you! You to whom your Heavenly Father has sent message after message to tell you of His love, and the blessings that He will send if you obey Him! But you never listen to his voice. Will ye not learn wisdom, even now?”

The crowd had not come to be preached to, so they began to melt away as they found the tables turned on themselves. Muttering in their usual manner, “We will not hearken,” they slunk back to their own homes.

The Rechabites had not turned out to be amusing and entertaining after all.
Daniel

The next thing that happened was that the dreaded Conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, marched into Jerusalem.

Jehoiakim did not even attempt to resist — so Nebuchadnezzar contented himself with looking around the city to see what he would like to take back with him to Babylon.

His first choice fell upon the beautiful golden furniture in the Temple.

It had been such a joy to Jeremiah to help Josiah arrange the Temple worship, and replace, repair and re-use those bowls and tables and oil vessels that God Himself had shown Solomon how to make. We can imagine with what grief Jeremiah would see the best of them taken away to adorn an idol temple in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar’s other choice was even more heart-breaking — for, after all, golden vessels cannot feel. Children can, however — and among the captives Nebuchadnezzar saw fit to take was a group of young Princes. They were splendid boys, picked out just because they were so tall and straight and clever.

Standing out noticeably among them was the little Prince Daniel. Jehoiakim may not have grieved very much to see the Temple vessels carried away (except for their value in gold). But letting these royal Princes be taken away forever was a different thing altogether.

How could he bear to see Prince Daniel, with chained hands, led away!

When this punishment came, we can but wonder if Jehoiakim cried like Cain: “My punishment is greater than I can bear!” For Daniel, in all likelihood, was his own little son. A child,
moreover, that any father would be proud of—and Jehoiakim was not behind any father in pride.

We may be sure that there was sorrow and anguish in the Red House when Prince Daniel was led through its gorgeous gateway, a prisoner bound in chains.

We can picture the parting and the tears, and then the farewell with Jeremiah.

Away from the palace, along the road to Babylon, perhaps the Prophet joined the captive band, and walked sorrowfully along by the boy’s side.

“Only seventy years, Daniel, then God will bring you back here to this place. You will live until then, though I shall not see that glorious return. You are going to a heathen city now—but God will go with you. And Daniel—continue in the things you have learned. Never do as the people will be doing around you. Pray, pray, pray! God will take care of you, and make you a blessing where you are going, and keep you faithful even unto death.”

With words like these, we may be sure Jeremiah took a last farewell of the lovable little Prince and his three friends.

And Daniel went on to begin his new life in the Palace of the dreaded King.

He was only a little boy, but he had a great purpose in his heart. He, too, like the Rechabites, would not do as Babylon did—but would at all times be true to his God, and seek His help in every time of need. And so it was. Three times every day in Babylon, Daniel opened his window wide, so that he might kneel and pray, with his face towards Jerusalem.

Jeremiah prayed for Daniel with his face toward Babylon. He would remember to commend the young Princes to God’s care many times each day.
How much grace and strength and help came down from Heaven from those prayers — and how Daniel counted up the years that he must stay in Babylon, until at last the time really came to go back to Jerusalem — can only be known by reading the story of what befell them there.

There is no better time for you to stop in this book and read the Book of Daniel chapters 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9, right now.

So, Nebuchadnezzar settled affairs in Jerusalem, went back to his own land, and dreamed dreams — and began to learn that Daniel’s God was the true Lord of kings.

Daniel was only a boy and a captive, but God used him as He had used Josiah and Jeremiah to witness for His Truth.

No boy who has lived since these three should ever feel ashamed to “stand alone” for his master, especially when we see the honor God put on this one who honored Him.

As for Jehoiakim — we would not expect to hear of a man with his temper quietly submitting to being ordered about, having to pay large sums of money to a far-off monarch. He was not going to do it.

Just as Jehoiakim continually rebelled against the King of Kings, we now read that at the end of three years, he turned and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

Perhaps he thought that Nebuchadnezzar would not bother to come back so far to punish his unfaithfulness. If so, he found to his sorrow that this was just what Nebuchadnezzar did bother to do.

He apparently did not come for some years, but first sent some of the neighboring nations who were under his power. These came up and fought against Judah, until Nebuchadnezzar found it convenient or necessary to come himself.
He came determined not to let Jehoiakim off so easily this time....
Jeremiah in God’s School Again

While the punishment was coming nearer and nearer every day, and while the people were still saying, “We can’t help doing wrong — we are made so,” God told Jeremiah He was going to give him another object lesson — this one on making pots.

“Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words.”

Jeremiah went as he was told. He always did go directly. The potter was at work, and Jeremiah silently stood and watched. As the wheel went round, the potter molded lump after lump of clay, pressing here and widening there until — as if by magic — jars and pitchers grew in his skillful hand.

Soon the fascinated watcher noticed that the potter, who was in the middle of fashioning a beautiful vessel, suddenly took it all unfinished off the wheel. It was only half done, and was quite useless, yet the potter held it tenderly in his hand.

Some hard lump in the clay had spoiled the potter’s work. It would not make the vessel he wanted.

Every moment, Jeremiah expected to see the spoiled pot thrown away. But the potter held it still. He picked out the hard, unyielding bit, then squeezed it firmly into a lump, just as it was at first. Then, he started to make the vessel all over again.

This time the wheel turned on, until Jeremiah saw before him the spoiled pot, made over again, into one good to look at, and good to use. There was nothing wrong with it this time, for the potter was skillful, and the clay was soft.

Then said Jeremiah’s Teacher: “Is not Israel like that spoiled vessel? I had a beautiful plan for them. But it never came to pass, because of their hard, unyielding hearts. Yet — cannot I
do with them as this potter did with the clay?"

And Jeremiah knew the lesson that the spoiled pot was meant to teach. He went back to Jerusalem to tell of God’s almighty Power to re-make spoiled, good-for-nothing people.

Just as the girdle could not wash itself, he told them, so the pot could not re-make itself. All of which means, for our learning, that it is about as impossible for us to make ourselves good as it would have been for us to create our own bodies.

The Heavenly Potter says to us today —for He means us all to go to school and learn with Jeremiah — ‘Cannot I do with YOU as an earthly potter does with clay?’

We must each answer this question for ourselves. David, long before this time, summed up the prayer that should follow the lesson of the dirty girdle and the lesson of the spoiled pot, in two sentences: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God.”

This is our heart’s answer which God waits, day by day, to hear —for we always read of God’s Love waiting to bestow blessings on us. It is not the will of your Father that one of His little ones perish.
The Broken Pot

The people did not care one bit about the sermon on the potter.

They were quite satisfied with themselves, and did not wish to be made any different. “Don’t listen,” they said to one another. “Let us speak as loudly as we can against him, and drown his voice.” It was no use for Jeremiah to go on trying to shout against the rising uproar. He did not want to shout. He longed to plead gently and touch their hearts with God’s wonderful love and patience.

He walked home, wondering which was the greatest marvel — God’s love, or the people’s indifference. (Is that not something we can also ponder today?)

As he pondered this along the road, God spoke to him. Jeremiah stopped short to listen, then made straight for the potter’s shop again. This time, he was not told to watch — but to buy an earthen bottle.

Did his choice fall on the re-made jar? No. Surely Jeremiah had already taken that home, and put it in the chief place in his house, where it would say to him every day: “God keeps those He re-makes.” It would be the most prized ornament in his house, because of what it reminded him.

No, it was not that pot, but just an ordinary water jar.

Now, in Palestine, men never carried water pots. Only women did that. Men carried water in skins, if they needed to carry it at all. It would be just as strange to these people to see Jeremiah with a jar of water, as it would be for us to see a man in a dress.

Nevertheless, Jeremiah bought his water bottle and carried it through the streets. The children must have followed his steps with laughter and jeers. But Jeremiah sent the children away.
This was not going to be a children’s lesson, but one for old people only.

All the old people and all the old priests were called to come together. They came willingly enough when they heard that their mad prophet carried a water pot. Something out of the ordinary and entertaining might happen —and life was quite monotonous in Palestine.

“Come with me for a walk,” said Jeremiah. “I am going down to the Valley ... of Hinnom. Send all the children back.” Then, he led the way through the streets to the valley in silence —while behind him, gossiping hard, followed the ancients.

The Valley of Hinnom was not a pleasant place, nor did it have pleasant associations. But Jeremiah looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, until he halted by a great rock. Upon the rock Jeremiah took his stand. He looked down on the curious, eager group of uplifted faces. Rugged and grey, cunning and deceitful was every countenance that day in the Valley of Hinnom. They were sin-spoiled, useless men and women. One shudders to think of the sight that Jeremiah looked down upon from the rock. But he was not there to look, but to act.

He seized his water jar, and holding it high above his head, he suddenly poured out its contents. A stream ran down to his feet, and trickled away in a hundred tiny rivulets.

“Hear ye the word of the Lord,” he cried. “So will He empty out Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of the coming invasion.”

Then, raising the now empty jar into the air, he thundered out: “Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, even so will I break this people... as one breaketh a potter’s vessel that cannot be made whole again.”

With those terrible words, he hurled the earthen bottle to the ground. It broke on the rock, and the echo crashed and crashed again up the narrow valley in the awful silence that followed. But the noisy echo in the valley was soft compared to the echo
in Jeremiah’s heart. That echo would live with him forever more. Never would he stand and preach without the smash of broken pottery sounding in his ears. The “ancients” would ever hear its ring in his imploring tones. “Thus saith the Lord, turn ye, O turn—for why will ye die?”

Silently and shamefacedly, the old people stole away. Jeremiah, alone in the valley with the chips of pottery around him, could only cry: “Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow... I will fear no evil, for THOU art with me.” What other comfort had he, or did he need?

As for the water bottle—it lay in a little heap of dust and chips. Jeremiah sought in vain among the larger pieces for any that were worth preserving. But not one was large enough to carry to the nearest well to serve as a cup for travellers’ use. Not one was worth his taking home as a little shovel to carry fire in from house to house, if a neighbor came out borrowing. He left the pieces and went back to Jerusalem, and preached a sermon on the broken pot in the Court of the Lord’s House, so that old and young might hear.
Now Pashur the priest, who was also chief officer in the House of the Lord, was among the listeners to the broken pot sermon. It must have been an unusual thing for so great a person to condescend to hear Jeremiah. But somehow, with the morning’s scene fresh in his mind, and the rumors of what had taken place in the Valley of Hinnom, he found himself edging closer and closer to the preacher.

The nearer he got to Jeremiah, the harder the prophet’s words hit his conscience. He grew more and more angry every moment.

When he heard Jeremiah actually dare to say that Nebuchadnezzar was going to take everyone away from Jerusalem, and everyone away from the cities of Judah, he could contain his passion no longer.

Pushing fiercely up to the front, he struck Jeremiah a sudden, staggering blow. Hard as the blow was, it was nothing to the blows God’s Word had dealt him, for that is sharper than a two-edged sword, and Pashur had no weapon but his fist. Smarting under his wounded pride, he ordered Jeremiah to be put in the stocks.

Now, the stocks were in a public gateway. In the very gateway by which Jeremiah came in, day by day, from Anathoth. Everyone going back that afternoon would see the preacher in his shame, and there would be laughter and gossip in Anathoth at suppertime.

All night long, Jeremiah endured those stocks, until every bone and joint in his body ached and ached again. But the aching of his bones was a small matter to the aching of his heart.

That night in the stocks was a night to be remembered, as Self and Satan contended in his heart just as they have contended
against the Spirit ever since they first started in the Garden of Eden.

“Everyone mocks you, Jeremiah,” said Satan boldly.

Jeremiah tried to move his aching limbs. “I know,” he cried, “daily everyone mocketh me.”

“All your family are against you,” the enemy went on. It is always his method to trample on a man when he is down.

“True,” moaned Jeremiah. “All my familiars watched for my halting, saying peradventure he will be enticed.”

Satan leaned close to the stocks and almost whispered under his breath: “Why do you go on preaching, Jeremiah?”

Jeremiah cried out in agony: “Then... I will not... speak any more; the reproach of it all has broken my heart!”

Even as he uttered the faithless words, Satan moved back. Another —far stronger than Satan, stronger even than Self — came and stood beside the stocks in the darkness.

At the touch of His Loving Hand, at the sound of His Still Small Voice, Jeremiah’s heart burned within him. “I never meant it,” Jeremiah cried remorsefully. And all the words of the “Book that was found,” having sunk long ago into his heart, cried to be let out, as though they were fire shut up.

“I must preach till I die,” he said, “for I cannot help it. The Lord is with me as a Mighty terrible One. He will make me strong again like an iron pillar and a defenced city. One day my persecutors... shall be greatly ashamed, they shall never prevail against me.”

So comforted and uplifted was Jeremiah, he forgot the stocks and forgot his aches and pains. He burst out into a song of praise, like Paul and Silas in their prison later on.
“Sing unto the Lord,” he sang in the dark, “for He hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers.”

Yet, even in that triumphant moment, Satan stepped up again. The song ceased abruptly.

“Has He, indeed?” the Arch-Deceiver asked.

“Has He?” questioned Jeremiah’s old deceitful Self.

A shadow fell, even in the darkness. It was Satan, edging nearer. Again the One stronger than Satan was blotted out of Jeremiah’s vision.

“Your birthday was a bad day for you, Jeremiah,” Satan began afresh. “Your father was very glad, but it was a bad day nevertheless.”

“I know, I know,” writhed poor Jeremiah, aching from head to foot. “Nobody knows better than I. I wish I had never been born.”

A hundred times that long night, this tempted, tortured saint was down in the depths with Satan, and up in the heights with God. Which shows us that Jeremiah was a man of like passions to us, and that Satan has never changed his tactics.

Worn out in mind and body, the sun rose over Jeremiah. And Satan, who cannot bear the sunshine, went away confounded.

Then God spoke to Jeremiah about Pashur.

The next morning Pashur came down to the Gate of Benjamin to order his release.

Numbed and stiff, Jeremiah struggled to his feet. But the fire in his heart burned fiercely as he faced Pashur. Fixing his persecutor with his fearless gaze, and pointing his finger toward his shrinking form, Jeremiah spoke.
“God does not call your name Pashur,” he said, “whatever you call yourself. He calls you “Fear”. And do you know why? Because He is going to make you a terror to yourself and your friends.”

Now, all night Pashur had been mentally patting himself on the back. He was not a brave man. His new name fit him very well, and he did not like it. At the very mention of the King of Babylon, his legs began to quake. If they had not quaked so, he might not have stayed to hear what more Jeremiah had heard about him. As it was, he remained. This is what he heard:

“Thou Pashur and all that dwell in thine house, shall go into captivity, and thou shalt come to Babylon, and there thou shalt die, and shalt be buried there, thou and all thy friends.”

Pashur found his legs and walked away. But his heart trembled from that day onwards.

A lifelike portrait of Pashur was written by Moses a thousand years before, for the Holy Spirit knew Pashur just as well before as after he lived: “Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee: and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life. The Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind.”

And of all the mean, despicable cowards frightened at their own shadow that have ever walked the earth, Pashur the priest is as much to be pitied as any. Remember—a guilty conscience makes cowards of us all, and we all need a conscience void of offence toward God, if we are to lie down in peace and sleep.

Pashur never slept again in peace. Every night he had a nightmare, and every day he thought a bogey man was after him.
The Writing Lesson

Pashur did not intend to be annoyed by Jeremiah’s voice again. He banned him from coming into the Temple Court, or to preach any more at all.

It meant that Jeremiah was to stay at home for a while. This was far easier than to go outside and preach.

But God had work for His servant indoors. He was going to teach him to write a book.

“Write My words in a book, Jeremiah,” God said. “Maybe My people will attend to My written Word.”

Baruch, his friend, came to do the actual writing. Baruch was a prince, but it was an honor for him to share Jeremiah’s disgrace. This is the way the book was made: God told Jeremiah what was to be written, then Jeremiah dictated, while Baruch wrote it down with ink.

When the book was finished, it did not look like a book does now. It was a long page rolled up around a stick like a scroll.

“Now, Baruch,” said Jeremiah. “I cannot go into the House of the Lord, therefore go thou and read in the roll which thou has written.”

At last Jerusalem was beginning to get alarmed. Nebuchadnezzar’s approach was getting too close to be comfortable. In their fear, the people remembered the God they had so long neglected, and gladly fell in with the idea of setting aside a whole day for fasting and prayer for deliverance.

It was on that very day, the day of the great fast, when all Judah and Jerusalem came crowding to the Courtyard, that Baruch went down to read the book. To such a crowd as that, Baruch felt he would never make himself heard.
Over the new entrance gate were two or three rooms. One belonged to the King and one to his scribe. The King’s present scribe was Shaphan’s son, Gemariah. He let Baruch come up to this room to read Jeremiah’s book “in the ears of all the people.” It was a splendid place, over everybody’s head.

Somewhere within listening range was Gemariah’s young son Micaiah. Probably he had often heard Jeremiah saying just what Baruch was reading, but on this day the words struck him as they never had before. It all seemed very real and terrible and urgent, with Nebuchadnezzar so near. Why didn’t someone tell the King? Surely someone ought to warn him?

Perhaps Micaiah did not know that God had really said that Nebuchadnezzar was going to conquer them, destroy their land, and take them all captive to Babylon for seventy years. Well, one thing was certain —the King must be told. His father was the one to do that.

In deadly earnest, Shaphan’s grandson made his way through the crowd to the scribes’ chamber in the Palace. And lo, all the statesmen were gathered together there.

Paying attention to nothing but the message still ringing in his ears, Micaiah poured out all he had just heard. The Princes were much impressed and interested in what he had to say. “We will hear the book for ourselves,” they said. They sent a messenger off to Gemariah’s room over the gate, and stopped Baruch in his reading. “Bring the book with you, and come,” said the messenger.

Wonderingly, Baruch took the roll in his hand and followed his guide.

“Sit down now,” cried all the Princes at once, as soon as Baruch arrived, “and read it in our ears.”

So, Baruch read —and as he read, these Princes looked at one another and fear was on every face. As the reading ended, with
one accord they spoke again: “We will surely tell the King.”

Then question followed question, and Baruch told how, though they were shut up, Jeremiah was really but shut in with his Heavenly Teacher, who had told him what to write, just as He used to tell him what to preach. And this thing is true in all ages. God’s work often prospers amazingly when His workers are shut up. (Think about that, for there is more in it than appears.)

“Whatever do you think, Jeremiah?” said Baruch, as he went back to Jeremiah’s house. “King Jehoiakim is going to be told about your book. It is going to be read to him—but you and I have to hide for our lives.”

We do not know their hiding-place. Only God knew that, for He hid them.
The Torn Bible

King Jehoiakim sat by the fire in the Red House. It was the same Jehoiakim whose temper and selfishness distressed Josiah when he was a boy.

Time had neither improved his expression nor his temper. People had learned to keep out of his way when a frown was on his royal brow. Saul’s were not the only servants who grew clever in dodging missiles thrown across the room.

The Princes fully realized the fury of his temper when they advised Jeremiah to hid, before the book was produced —and they also hid the book itself until they saw how their monarch took the news of its existence.

On this day, Jehoiakim was quite pleasant. He allowed the Princes to tell him of Jeremiah’s book and what it said. Then he made the same remark the Princes had previously made: “I will hear it for myself.” Jehudi was sent to fetch the roll, and Jehudi read it to the King.

The good humor left Jehoiakim’s face before the first page was even turned. A scowl appeared by the second, and at the third page, his hand stole out and tightened around a scribe’s penknife. At the fourth page, his anger blazed.

Snatching the parchment from Jehudi’s hand, he thrust the penknife viciously through and through the parchment.

Three of the audience around the hearth, seeing the destination of the book, begged the King not to burn the roll. But their pleading fell on deaf ears, for Jehoiakim’s whole heart was set on cutting up and burning —and he never stopped until all the roll was consumed in the fire.

When the last page was burned to ashes, in a storming rage he ordered Baruch and Jeremiah to be killed, for daring to say that
the King of Babylon was going to conquer his kingdom.

But all of Jehoiakim’s power and all of his fury could not really destroy the book or its writers.

God hid Jeremiah, and told him in his hiding-place how to write the book over again. And Baruch, who was hidden too, wrote again all the words of the Book which Jehoiakim, King of Judah, had burned in the fire. This book was longer than the last, and God took care of it after it was written.

Jehoiakim never got his knife into the new book, though there is no doubt he set the fashion for cutting up and trying to destroy the Bible — and men have tried to follow his example ever since.

They have tried — but that is all. God Himself has preserved His Own Word, and not one word or syllable can ever pass away.

No terrible punishment fell from Heaven upon Jehoiakim for his awful deed. He sat there by the fireside as though nothing had happened. Neither was he afraid, nor any of his servants.

We cannot suppose that he cared very much either when Jeremiah told him that God would punish him unless he repented.

The terrible flood from the overturned Cauldron was almost within sight — yet Jehoiakim hearkened not.
The Servant Who Said Why?

Among God’s little band of faithful servants at this time was Habakkuk, the Prophet.

Jeremiah hardly ever asked questions. He did just what he was told. But this man was quite different. He could not help saying “Why?” He saw Jehoiakim’s workmen going home at night unpaid. He saw the law of the land disregarded. He saw the miserable people unjustly taxed, and his soul cried out: “Why is it? O Lord, how long shall these things be?”

God, who always answers heart questions for those who will listen, answered his perplexed servant.

The answer puzzled Habakkuk more than ever. Something worse than Jehoiakim’s tyranny was going to be sent to Jerusalem. A terrible and dreadful foe, with fierce faces and swift horses would sweep through the land and gather up captives like sand by the sea. Why, it was just what Jeremiah had so often preached.

Habakkuk trembled when he heard of the invader and his troops, and he said “Wherefore?” He quite understood that Jerusalem must be punished, but why did God use a heathen nation to do it?

It was all so mysterious, that at last, worn out with all his confusion, he stopped asking questions—and instead waited to hear what God would say to him, which is always the better plan.

So God spoke to Habakkuk again. This time He showed him in a picture or vision what was going to happen.

We are not told exactly what he saw.

But whatever it was, it was for a settled time—a time that
would surely come, and that before very long.

After the vision, Habakkuk prayed very earnestly that in the coming years God’s work might be preserved alive, and in the time of punishment that He would remember mercy.

Putting these two verses together, doesn’t it look as if the picture Habakkuk saw was of the seventy years’ captivity?

It may be. In any case, the vision was of such importance that Habakkuk was told to go and get a large clay tablet, and write on it in plain letters what he had seen.

Perhaps the people who had refused to listen to Jeremiah would have their eye caught by Habakkuk’s poster.

Among other things that God made clear to Habakkuk that day was one thing that he could not understand before: How could God look on men who dealt treacherously without interfering?

And in order to teach His servant that the wicked do NOT go on unnoticed and unpunished, God spoke to him of one particular man.

Habakkuk knew the person’s name. Perhaps you can give him one too, though the Bible does not. Listen to the description of him:

He was someone in a position of power, who apparently knew what was right —but deliberately turned himself to do what was wrong. He was a man who was proud, fond of wine, with a home too small for his large desire, and who would not be satisfied with anything less than a worldwide dominion. He was a worshipper of idols, full of covetousness, and cutting off many people for his own gain. He was one who tried to establish a city by iniquity, and who ruled by violence, that did not hesitate to take people’s labor for nothing, and tempted his friends to drink.
Now, who was this man God knew so well, and described so exactly?

Was it King Jehoiakim?

Habakkuk knew the man, even if we do not, and he learned this—though sinners against their own soul may prosper for a time, _woe_ awaits them in the end.

He also found that a better plan than asking questions was to _keep silence_ before God, and let Him speak. The end of Habakkuk’s listening was that he sat down and wrote a beautiful song of faith. The song was sung in the Temple, and it has been sung ever since in the hearts of men and women and little children who have learned, like Habakkuk, to stop saying “why,” and “when,” and “how long,” and to trust their Heavenly Father with the affairs of the world and their own lives.

**THE SONG OF FAITH**

“For though the fig-tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines;
The labor of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls:
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my Salvation.
The Lord God is my strength,
And He will make my feet like hinds’ feet,
And He will make me to walk upon mine high places.”

Habakkuk wrote the song in a book and the vision on the tablet. But we do not read that the King or the people took any more notice of Habakkuk’s written warning than they did of Jeremiah’s spoken message.
And Nebuchadnezzar came up to Jerusalem and Jehoiakim found himself bound in fetters, ready to be carried off to Babylon.

He was all ready to go—but he never went.

Nobody knows what happened to him. Remembering his violent temper, and the fact that his body was to be thrown outside the gates of the city, as a dead ass would be, it looks as if he must have taken his own life rather than be taken to Babylon.

And Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead.
Jehoiachin

The Coronation was a poor affair. With little heart can the people have cried “Long live King Jehoiachin.” It was almost a mockery making him King at all.

Affairs were hopeless. His father had taken his own life rather than go to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar — owing possibly to some rebellious act of the young King’s — was besieging the city with renewed energy. There was really nothing for it but to give in. Yet, for three months and ten days Jehoiachin held on to his throne before he was forced to surrender.

He was King for one hundred days, and then thirty-seven years a prisoner.

It was a humiliating procession that passed through Jerusalem when Jehoiachin, King of Judah, went out to give himself up to the King of Babylon. He, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers. But it was the best day’s work Jehoiachin did in his short and evil reign.

Jeremiah learned this the next time he went to God’s school....
A Mournful Procession

It was well indeed for Josiah that he was taken away before this day of sorrow came. No wonder Jeremiah was told not to weep for Josiah; not to bemoan him, but rather to weep for Jehoahaz, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country again.

Josiah is going back. He will return to his native country. One day he will see Jerusalem, with the Glorious Lord for its Judge, Lawgiver and King. Songs, joy and gladness will be everywhere, while sickness, sorrow and sighing shall be unknown.

Meantime, another stroke of God’s Rod had fallen. Jeremiah had proved not to be a false prophet. Long had he foreseen all this, and long had he spoken of it. Yet, as he stood on this sorrowful day beside the Temple to watch the long procession of prisoners pass out of Jerusalem on the way to Babylon, he could hardly see for tears.

Here they come — let us stand and watch them, too.

The King, surly and cast down, strictly guarded by fierce soldiers; the remaining Princes of the Royal House beside him. Following the Princes comes Queen Nehushta. Where is her pride now? What are her thoughts? Only God knows. She wrings her chain-bound hands, and cries with a bitter lament.

Soon, a thoughtful young face, bearing the unmistakable family likeness of the Household of Faith, smiled up at Jeremiah. It is Ezekiel the Priest, whose interest in the House of God, and in Jeremiah’s preaching, must have made him a dear friend to the lonely Prophet.

It was hard to see Ezekiel, with his marvelous genius and simple faith, driven out of the city he would have died for.

Daniel had been eight years or more in Babylon now. What
messages Jeremiah must have sent to him by Ezekiel! Knowing what a great man he had become, and how Nebuchadnezzar was under his influence, no doubt Ezekiel was cheered to think that Daniel could do much to lessen the hardships of their captivity. He and Jeremiah would speak of this, and commend each other to God’s loving care and protection.

Next, a mighty chariot rumbled out of the Temple Court, piled high with sacred treasures. Nearly all the goodly vessels of the House of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had left last time were being taken now to adorn his idol temple.

Now and then, a group of old men shook their fists fiercely at Jeremiah, pouring curses on his head, and accusing him of all their woes. Even mothers urged their little ones to throw mud and stones in his direction, uttering cries of reproach—for wrong-doers always want to blame someone else for their misfortune.

Here and there, a kindly face was turned to Jeremiah, as one of God’s faithful servants walked by—bound in ropes and chains, it is true, but with calm face and unfaltering step. Little brown hands stretched out or waved, as one child after another spied out the man who loved them.

Oh, there were many among that long, long procession of captives who were dear to Jeremiah’s heart—Mordecai, Gemariah, Michaiah and Ahikam. Everyone who had ever befriended him was there, right along with those who had insulted and persecuted him.

Amongst these, Pashur shuffled past, white to the lips, his chains clinking as he shivered in terror. Even his frightened family in that moment wished he could show a little more spirit. He turned his face away to avoid Jeremiah’s eye—how unnecessary! Jeremiah looked at him, as on all the others, with tender compassion.

So the procession of prisoners passed out of sight—everyone
in the city who was of any use at all. All the Carpenters, Soldiers, Craftsmen and Smiths — TEN THOUSAND captives, without counting the women and children. None remained in Jerusalem, except the poorest sort of people.

Through a mist of tears, Jeremiah watched Israel’s departing glory.

Five hundred years later, that One whom some of the Jews believed to be Jeremiah come back from the grave, stood and gazed at this same city, and cried:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... how often would I have gathered thy children together... and ye would not!”

And Jeremiah, as he looked on the desolated city, cried: “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow. My people have gone into captivity. God longed to gather them around Him. They chose to be scattered. O Jerusalem, if thou had only known the things which belong unto thy peace, the Cauldron would never have overturned — this sorrowful day would never have dawned!”
After the last captive had passed out of sight, God took Jeremiah into the desolated Temple to give him an object lesson on Comfort.

Jeremiah looked up, and he seemed to see before him two baskets of figs.

One basket had very good figs, each one purple and tempting in its ripeness.

"Figs," said Jeremiah, "good figs, very good figs."

When he said that, he had learned the first bit of his lesson on comfort. Not a very hard one, was it? Just as simple as the lessons he had when he was a boy.

"Now what do you see, Jeremiah?" asked his Teacher.

"A basket of bad figs," answered God’s pupil. "Very naught figs, which cannot be eaten, so bad and rotten are they."

That was a little bit more of the easy lesson. Then Jeremiah sat and looked at the two baskets, and tried to find out the meaning of both together.

Soon God spoke again —for He always makes His lessons clear and plain to those who listen.

"These good figs are like the long procession of captives you are grieving for whom I have sent out of this place... for their good," said He.

Why, that was exactly what Jeremiah already knew about Josiah being taken to heaven, away from the evil. What a good a pleasant fig Josiah had been all of his short, faithful life. And God took him for his own good.
So it was with these captives. God had taken them away for their good. He was going to teach them His ways in a new place, and give them a fresh opportunity to learn His love and to understand His lessons. Then, after seventy years at school in Babylon, He would bring them again to this land.

Jeremiah’s heart was comforted. However sorely he would miss his friends, it was for their good and happiness. He was more than content, now that he knew what the basket of good figs meant. God was with the captives in their chains. And God in Heaven was at work, bringing to pass His own plan, of which Zephaniah used to sing.

This was the comforting part of the lesson. The sad part was to come, about the bad figs.

The basket of useless, rotten figs, that were only fit to be thrown away, was like Zedekiah... and his princes, and the people that still remained in the land. They were to be sent troubles, enemies, and pestilence, until none were left. Rotten to the core, they must be thrown away.

The prophet went home, glad and sad after his lesson.

He sat down and read in the Book he had written. It was about the good figs. He read: “Thus saith the Lord, refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy work (all of his unappreciated preaching) shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.”

He read that the captives were to set up waymarks or signposts to mark the road back again, so certain was it that their children should come again to their own land, and build again the City of God’s joy.

That night, Jeremiah’s sleep was sweet to him. God had satisfied his weary soul, and turned his sorrow into joy.
Zedekiah the Waverer

Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin away and made Zedekiah king in his place.

Zedekiah, or Mattaniah as his father called him, was the baby of Josiah’s nursery. He was ten years old at the time of Megiddo, and unlike Jehoiakim, he was terribly sad on that terribly sad day. Zedekiah was born with a tender heart, but then he was born without any determination or persistence to carry through his kind intentions.

He would never have knocked down a single heathen temple, or stamped an idol to powder like his father. No, instead he would have stood and looked at it, with hammer in hand, and said, “Shall I, or shall I not?” And after he had said “Shall I?” a dozen times, he would have dropped the hammer, murmuring, “Better not today.” Yet that would still not have decided the matter, for as he tossed on his bed at night, he would have wondered whether he had been wise to leave it, and in the morning he would go over it all again and again until his brain was in a whirl.

For Zedekiah was like a leaf driven with the wind, and tossed first one way and then the other. He hated to decide anything himself, yet never asked the Lord to be his Wonderful Counselor.

Poor Zedekiah! We find people like him still, in every habitation of men.
The Six Yokes

Submission to Babylon became more than ever now the focus of Jeremiah’s preaching.

Nebuchadnezzar was God’s servant. By him you are to be punished—nothing can alter it. God had given him this land, and other lands, just as seemed meet to the Creator and Owner of the earth. All nations would serve Nebuchadnezzar, and his son after him, and his grandson after him. Those who refused to serve Babylon would sorely regret it. Submission to him would be the only thing that could help you.

And in order that there should be no means lost to make the people understand this, Jeremiah had been down to the carpenter’s shop for some pieces of wood.

“What do you want, Jeremiah? Wood to make yokes with?”

Did the mad prophet want yokes because he was going to start farming?

The people wondered, and Jeremiah sat on the ground and worked. He made six yokes. Then he got up, and tying one firmly together, put it around his neck and walked off with the other five under his arm.

He walked as far as the Red House. Then he waited outside.

Inside, Zedekiah was deep in council. For Ambassadors had come to him from five surrounding Kings, who had united together and were inviting Zedekiah to join them. Before Nebuchadnezzar became so formidable a foe, these nations had always been fighting against Jehoiakim. But now they wanted to make friends with Israel. Together, they thought they might crush the dreaded Babylonian monarch. Separately, each must surely be overcome.
Soon, the assembled officials and advisors would be coming out. Jeremiah with his yokes awaited them.

With much ceremony and bowing and scraping, the foreign Messengers at last were ushered out of the Red House’s gates. The Prophet stepped forward, a striking figure in his plain, dark garments among all the fancy dresses and royal splendor.

“Here is a gift for your masters,” he said, handing out his yokes. “Here is one for the King of Edom, one for the King of Moab, one for the King of Ammonites, one for the King of Tyrus, and one for the King of Zidon. Take them with you and say to your Kings:

‘Put the yoke around your neck and know this: If you will submit to Nebuchadnezzar, all will be well —for the Nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the King of Babylon and serve him, THOSE WILL I LET REMAIN still in their own land, saith the Lord.’ If you will not put your neck under the yoke of the King of Babylon, then woe be unto you!”

Jeremiah wore that wooden yoke wherever he went, and never ceased to urge all of his hearers to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.
The Man Who Broke the Yoke

Just after this, Jeremiah noticed one day a great crowd gathered in the Temple Court. In the distance, he could hear the sound of preaching, and quickly hurried to find out what new prophet had arisen.

Hananiah, a man well known to Jeremiah, was the speaker. He was a character who loved popularity — but he did not hesitate to tell half-truths and lies to gain it. Yet he said them so pleasantly that no one thought bad of Hananiah.

Jeremiah took his place in the crowd, and heard the words, “Thus speaketh the Lord.”

Had God spoken to this man, who told lies so smoothly?

Anyone could say that God had sent him — but God does not send everyone who says so, even in these days.

It was not long before the self-appointed preacher noticed Jeremiah. Pointing his finger scornfully at the yoke around his neck, he called out: “Take that thing off! Listen to my message! Within two years from now, all the Temple vessels that were taken to Babylon, and all the captives that went there with Jehoiachin, will be back again in Jerusalem!”

Smiles were on every face. This was much better news than Jeremiah’s seventy years.

Sorrowfully, the true prophet looked from the satisfied face of the false preacher to the crowd who delighted to have their ears tickled so.

“Would to God that Hananiah was right,” he said.

“Nevertheless, time will show which of us two is speaking the truth.”
As Jeremiah finished speaking, Hananiah, with angry frowns, walked up to him, seized the yoke, tore it from the prophet’s neck and brake it.

In the silence that followed he then cried excitedly, ‘So within two years God says He will break the yoke which Nebuchadnezzar has put on you!’

Puzzled and disheartened, Jeremiah went his way. As he walked and wondered, feeling how useless his years of preaching had been, God came down and spoke to his dejected heart.

“Go back and tell Hananiah,” He said, “though wooden yokes are easily destroyed, My Word can never be broken. Israel shall serve Nebuchadnezzar under a yoke of iron.”

Jeremiah hurried back. The people were still gathered around their new prophet.

“Hear now, Hananiah,” said Jeremiah, and there was a ring of certainty in his voice: “The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie. Because thou hast taught rebellion against the Lord, this year thou shalt die.”

Two months later, Hananiah, the untrue prophet — died.

So the people had not a shadow of an excuse for believing anything he had pretended to foretell that day when he broke the yoke, and had said “two” instead of “seventy.”
The Letter to the Good Figs

Jeremiah knew that men like Hananiah would be in Babylon too, and that they would make it their business to try and deceive the captives there by telling them God would soon bring them back to Jerusalem.

His heart was often in Babylon, and he longed to warn the good figs not to listen to anyone who said they would be there less than seventy years.

One day, an opportunity came to send a letter. Zedekiah was sending Elasah and Gemariah with a request to Nebuchadnezzar. Now, Elasah was a son of Shaphan, and Gemariah was probably Jeremiah’s brother.

Zedekiah was smart enough to know if these two men went on his errand — both of them recommending Jeremiah’s policy of submission — that Nebuchadnezzar would be the more readily influenced by them. For of course Nebuchadnezzar knew all about Jeremiah’s advice and warnings.

So Jeremiah sat down and wrote a letter to the captives.

With his heart full of Hananiah and his lies, he wrote: “Do not listen to the prophets who tell you not to settle down in your exile. Instead, see to it that you build yourselves houses, and make gardens and plant fruit trees, and do all you can for the good of the land where God has put you. Pray... for it, and in its peace shall ye have peace. Babylon is to be your home for seventy years — but at the end of that time, God will surely cause you to return to this place. Not one day sooner will you come, whatever anyone tells you.”

Jeremiah finished the letter, dated it from Jerusalem, and addressed it to the good figs. Off it went to Babylon.

We may be sure that the very first person to read that letter was
Prince Daniel. About twelve years had passed since he had left Jerusalem. What a welcome he would give his two old friends, and what questions and messages he would send back to Jeremiah!

But Daniel’s joy in the letter was not shared by all the captives.

Shemaiah, a person with a strong likeness to Hananiah, received it in great indignation. Here he was already telling the people not to content themselves in their exile, since they were going back home directly. Now, Jeremiah dares to write a letter and tell them exactly the opposite! Well, he could write letters as well as Jeremiah —so down he sat and addressed an epistle to the High Priest for all the people that are at Jerusalem.

His letter said: “What is the good of you being the High Priest, Zephaniah, if you leave every mad prophet at large? It is your business to put such people in prison and in the stocks!

‘Do you know that Jeremiah of Anathoth has sent unto us a crazy letter, saying that we are to stay in Babylon seventy years, and we are to build houses and plant gardens here? Now, why do you allow him to say these things? It will have a bad effect on the people. They will lose all interest in Jerusalem, and we shall never stir them up to try and get back at all!’

Shemaiah sealed the letter with joy, thinking he was sealing Jeremiah’s lips forever. Gemariah carried it back to Jerusalem.

The High Priest received the letter in due time —but the people for whom it was written never even heard what it said. For Zephaniah took it straight to Jeremiah, and instead of putting him into prison, read this letter in his ears.

It did not take long for Jeremiah to write his answer to Shemaiah. Neither was there any uncertainty about its meaning. It ran like this: “Thus saith the Lord, I will punish Shemaiah; he and all his family shall die before the seventy years are over, and not a child or grandchild of his shall ever
Jer. 29:__ come back to Jerusalem again.”

Shemaiah had become one of the *vile figs*, worthless and only fit to be thrown away.
Ezekiel: A Very Good Fig

Although there were men who tried to teach what was wrong in Babylon, God did not leave the Captives without a preacher of Righteousness.

Ezekiel was a man after God’s own heart, and in order that he should learn and have time to study the Bible, God inclined King Nebuchadnezzar to treat him well, and give him a house of his own on the banks of the river.

Daniel may have asked this favor. Perhaps it was one of the things he prayed for three times a day.

After Ezekiel had been five years in his riverside house, God spoke to him, just like He did to Jeremiah, and told him he was to go and preach to the Captives.

Ezekiel must have often listened to Jeremiah, and must have seen his object lessons in Jerusalem. He was to teach the captives in the same way.

One of the first things God wanted them to hear about was the coming siege of Jerusalem. Surely if the horrors of that time were shown them, their hearts would feel a spark of gratitude at being taken away before it came. It was no use just telling them of it. Jeremiah had done that already, and they did not listen. So Ezekiel was made to get a large flat tile or clay tablet, and draw a picture on it.

The picture was to be of Jerusalem — Jerusalem besieged. This was easy to Ezekiel, for plans, measurements and buildings were his delight. So he made a splendid picture of the city, with the Temple in the middle and the wall around. You could see the forts of the enemy outside, and the earth mounds, and Nebuchadnezzar’s battering rams quite clearly, and then their camp beyond.
After he had made the clay picture, he was to act the object lesson of the siege, and pretend he was a prisoner inside Jerusalem.

Accordingly, during four hundred and thirty nights Ezekiel lay on the ground beside his picture. Through four hundred and thirty days he ate bread and drank water in small, measured portions, just as the people had to six years later in the actual siege.

Not a child could have failed to understand the Picture Sermon on Gratitude for Deliverance.

And this was only one of many such lessons.

Another day, Ezekiel was told to shave off all his hair with a barber’s razor and weigh it and divide it. Part he was to burn, part cut up with a knife, part throw away, and a very little part was to be carefully tied up in a corner of his cloak.

All of this was to show what would happen to the people left in Jerusalem. Some would die, some would be killed, some would be scattered, and a very few taken special care of.

Still another object lesson was given to the Captives concerning their fellow countrymen. But they were very slow to learn, and only took in here a little and there a little, and had to be taught line upon line over and over, like little children.

So Ezekiel was sent to act house-moving. In broad daylight, in sight of everyone, he was told to make preparations for going on a journey, and to bring out all his belongings ready for removing. When this was done, as darkness began to fall, he was to dig a hole in the wall of his house. Secretly and quickly he must do this, as a man hiding for his life. Then in the twilight, with covered face and laden shoulders, he was to creep through the hole he had made, and escape away.

All this Ezekiel did, and the Captives watched in wonder,
Ezekiel could not tell them at once, for he himself did not know what it all meant — until the next morning, when God explained it all.

The object lesson concerned Zedekiah. Just as Ezekiel had done, so should Zedekiah do. A night was coming when he should dig a hole in a wall and secretly steal away through it. Furthermore, to disguise his Royalty, he face should be covered, and a burden be upon his shoulder, like any ordinary person.

Yes in spite of the secrecy, in spite of the darkness, and in spite of the disguise, Zedekiah would be caught and brought to Babylon.

And then God told Ezekiel something very puzzling: “Zedekiah shall not see Babylon, though he shall die there.”

Ezekiel did not ask “How?” as Habakkuk would have done. He went straight out to the Captives and told them all God had told him. No doubt they asked “How?” — and added, “We are wise, and do not believe what we cannot understand.”
Was Jeremiah Wrong After All?

Six years later, the real siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar began in earnest.

Zedekiah, being a man of impulses, one day had a sudden idea. He sent for Jeremiah and asked him to pray that God would by some wondrous miracle do away with the Fierce Foe that had invaded their land.

Jeremiah knew what answer Zedekiah would get. Nevertheless, he prayed.

The King did not like getting the same message over and over again. This time, he was told in the plainest words possible that Nebuchadnezzar would enter the city — and that he would find no mercy or pity at his enemy’s hands. There was only ONE way of escape for the king and his people. The way of life was to surrender at once. The way of death was to remain in the city.

Sometimes, Zedekiah wished to choose the way of life — but most times, he preferred to go his own way.

Still, Jeremiah never ceased to beg Zedekiah to submit to Nebuchadnezzar’s yoke — but neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land took any notice of what he said.

Instead, they sent secret ambassadors down to Egypt to ask Pharaoh-Hophra to help them — which Zedekiah had faithfully promised he would not do when Nebuchadnezzar had made him King. But Zedekiah’s promises did not count for more than his principles.

Great hopes were raised in the threatened city when news came that Egypt had risen to the occasion. Pharaoh’s Army was on its way to help them.
“Well, Jeremiah,” asked the King, “what do you say to this? Things are looking better! Surely you believe that God is going to help us now!” Jeremiah must have felt perplexed.

But God looked back to the day when Zedekiah had sworn to Nebuchadnezzar, and had given his hand in token of his promise never to seek help or horses from Egypt.

Shall he prosper? Shall he escape that doeth such things? “No,” said the Lord, “Pharaoh’s army which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt, into their own land, and the Fierce Foe shall take Jerusalem.”

Jeremiah repeated all this to the King.

For a moment, Zedekiah’s face fell. But he then looked out the window at his soldiers, and thought of the great army on its way to his aid. He made up his mind that he would not be frightened into surrender by the mad prophet.

And then, one of Jeremiah’s greatest trials came to pass.

After all he had said to the contrary, the very thing that Zedekiah was looking for DID happen: Pharaoh-Hophra did come! Nebuchadnezzar retreated from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh’s Army.

What could Jeremiah say now? Still only the same old warning — “Deceive not yourselves; Nebuchadnezzar shall return, and will burn this city with fire.”

But Jeremiah’s declaration was only met with jeers and ridicule. The city settled down again as if no judgment was near it at all.
In Prison

Sore at heart, wearied by Satan’s suggestions, discouraged beyond words, and longing for the country, Jeremiah walked down the narrow streets towards the Gate of Benjamin.

Perhaps he meant to wander in the fields and speak to God, away from the taunts and jeers. He wanted to be alone, to separate himself—and perhaps also take the opportunity to stock up his provisions.

In the gateway, on duty, was Captain Irijah, the grandson of Hananiah. The prophet, suspecting nothing, walked slowly toward the gate.

Suddenly a rough hand grabbed him by the shoulder as he stepped beneath the archway. “You are caught now, Jeremiah!” said the young Captain. “Caught slipping away to the enemy—you traitor!”

“It is false,” Jeremiah replied hotly. “I am no such thing.”

But all his protesting, all his explanations were useless. The Captain hearkened not to any. He only hurried his prisoner back to judgment—and Jeremiah, without a friend to stand beside him, was cruelly beaten and cast into prison.

“Evil figs” Jeremiah had called the people who were left. He was now bitterly proving it for himself.

The King could have intervened, but Zedekiah hated to take any responsibility. Besides, Jeremiah was down just then. Zedekiah liked to side with those who were on top. So, when the Princes said, “We beseech thee let this man be put to death,” he weakly answered: “He is in your hand. You do what you like.”

The Princes did not wait for their changeable King to change his mind. They hastened their victim off to a dreadful dungeon.
The dungeon was an old well in the court of the prison — deep, dark and damp. Hurriedly, ropes were fetched and tied around the helpless prophet. Jeremiah found himself being lowered into the well with cords. There was no water at the bottom — only thick, black slime and mud.

Jeremiah sank into the mire, and his heart sank with him. He grew hungry and called for food. A stone rattled down the well in answer to his request. He was ready to die with thirst — and a bucket of water was poured over his head. He met it with a bitter cry. And the cry reached up from the depths of the low dungeon up to the very heights of heaven.

God heard Jeremiah's voice, and drew near at his call. "Fear not," He spoke to Jeremiah's heart. And the prophet forgot his misery and the mud and the darkness, and began to count his blessings.

Now, in the King's house there was at this time a black servant named Ebed-Melech. Often he had listened to Jeremiah's warnings. As he heard, he shivered at the very thought of the Boiling Cauldron and its scalding flood.

Ebed-Melech did not stop his ears and say, "I do not believe." He was sure God's words would come to pass. Moreover, he learned that although the Ethiopian can no more change his nature than his skin, that God would give him a new heart and a new spirit, and would count him as one of His children. Ebed-Melech put his whole trust in God's Word, and thanked God every day for sending Jeremiah with the good tidings. He could hardly believe his ears when he heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon.

The King was out when Ebed-Melech learned of his friend's fate. Hot with indignation, he hurried to find Zedekiah, and when he had found him, pleaded for his life. Jeremiah was dying, and every moment was important. He must impress the weak King while he had him alone.
So, just as Zedekiah had previously been influenced by the men who wished to imprison the prophet, again he was swayed — like a wind-tossed leaf — by the man who longed to release him.

Jer. 38:

“Take thirty men, Ebed-Melech, and get Jeremiah out of the dungeon,” whispered the King hoarsely, looking round him with shifty eyes.

Before he could change his mind, the Ethiopian servant was off gathering his rescue party. Thirty men were quickly commandeered, and the King’s lumber-rooms were searched for old clothes and old rotten rags.

Jeremiah, deep down in the mire and muck, was surprised by two bundles of tattered and soiled clothes swinging down the sides of the well. Looking up, he saw a pair of hands holding the cords which bound them — and then Ebed-Melech’s face appeared over the edge.

“Jeremiah!” he called in an anxious voice. “Are you still alive? Then put now these old cast clouts and rotten rags under thine armholes under the cords so that we may pull you up!”

Jeremiah did so. Then the signal was given, the thirty men braced themselves, and pulled hard — and the next moment, the dungeon and its horrors were left behind, and the prophet was out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay.

Jeremiah was glad to be out in the sunshine, and glad to feel the warm grasp of his friend’s hand. But he was glad too that he was put into the pit in the first place, for there he had learned some lessons he could never have learned anywhere else. If Jeremiah came across a child — or an adult too, perhaps — left alone and afraid of the dark, he could comfort that one with the comfort with which he himself was comforted of God.

After this Jeremiah was still kept a prisoner — but he was allowed to walk about and have visitors in the court of the prison.
The next time Ebed-Melech came into the court to visit his friend the Prophet, he found that God had been talking to Jeremiah about him.

Now probably nobody in the world had any idea that Ebed-melech lived in terror of being taken prisoner by the King of Babylon—or that his dreams at night were full of swords and spears and horrible tortures. But God knew. That is why He sent him a special message from Heaven, and the message was this:

“Tell Ebed-Melech, Thus saith the Lord... thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid, for I will surely deliver thee... because thou hast put thy trust in Me.”

That promise ought to have stopped all the Ethiopian man’s nightmares, all his doubts and fears. But grown-ups are very likely to worry their minds about what might happen, even after God has faithfully promised to take care of them and never leave them.

Ebed-Melech was a grown-up.
The Secret Interview

It was not long before Nebuchadnezzar—who, you will remember, had withdrawn his army to meet that of Pharaoh-Hophra’s—was back again, besieging the city.

The people had been very glad for the short respite and the chance to get outside for fresh provisions. No doubt, this enabled them to hold out for as long as eighteen months.

Zedekiah’s day of triumph had been a very short one. He was again worried beyond words. He lay down, but no sleep came to his troubled brain. ‘Shall I surrender?’ he asked himself, tossing to the right. ‘Or shall I hold out?’ he questioned, turning to the left. And thus he tossed and turned, wondered and supposed, until he could stand it no longer. He arose and dispatched a messenger to fetch Jeremiah secretly.

Jeremiah, on his prison floor, with his aching bones and injured head, slept the sleep of a clear conscience.

The King’s servant hastily and silently stole into the prison court. All was quiet in the moonlight. Jeremiah was in the land of happy dreams.

‘Wake up,’ the servant said under his breath. ‘You must come at once to the Red House. The King is uneasy. He cannot rest. He wishes to talk matters over with you.’

The Prophet groped about for his sandals, then followed his guide noiselessly into the Temple Court and through the door at the end that led into the palace.

They silently came into the room where the King awaited them. His limbs trembled and his voice shook as he asked hoarsely, ‘Is there any fresh message from the Lord, Jeremiah?’

“There is,” Jeremiah answered.
Zedekiah started at the sound of his voice, and glanced furtively around the room, as though an armed Nebuchadnezzar might lurk in every shadow.

“Not quite so loud, Jeremiah. I do not want anyone to know of this interview. Now tell me all, and hide nothing from me.”

“Yes,” said Jeremiah, “and when I tell you the truth, you will surely put me to death.”

“I promise,” answered Zedekiah, “that I will not.”

“Then,” Jeremiah said plainly, “God says again, just as He has done time after time, if only you will surrender to Nebuchadnezzar your soul shall live, and Jerusalem shall not be burned, and none of your family shall be killed.”

Zedekiah looked at the floor.

“But,” went on Jeremiah, “if you will not surrender, then Jerusalem will fall into the hands of the enemy, and you will not escape.”

The King lifted his shifty eyes. “I cannot do this, Jeremiah,” he said abjectly. “I am afraid to. If I did, those Jews who have taken your advice, and have gone over to the enemy already, would simply mock me, and might even kill me. Oh no, I cannot do it.”

Then, very earnestly and patiently, Jeremiah begged the wavering King to obey God’s voice — and all over again, he set before him the right path with its blessing, and the wrong path with its misery.

The King chose and re-chose, and decided and undecided, until the imagined ridicule and embarrassment frightened him into ending the interview.

“And Jeremiah — if it should come out that I have talked with
you, and you are questioned by the Princes, You need only tell
them that you asked me not to put you back in the dungeon.
Do not say any more.”

But Royalty can do little in secret, and of course the King’s
midnight interview was known all over the palace. And all
came out that was said that night, when Zedekiah lost his last
chance at saving his life.
What Jeremiah Bought in Prison

God had often told Jeremiah that the Captives in Babylon would come back to their own land at the end of seventy years. But telling had not impressed him sufficiently. He had to learn it by an object lesson.

Now as each day went by, affairs in Jerusalem looked darker and darker. Supplies diminished. Disease increased. The dreaded enemy had completely enclosed the city with a wall of earth as high as the stone wall of the city. On top of these earthen mounts, all the latest Babylonian artillery was hoisted, ready to pour down stones and arrows upon the helpless, starving Jews.

Nothing but a miracle could prevent Nebuchadnezzar from coming into the city to take it. But Jeremiah knew well that no miracle would come. He did not even pray that it might, for God had said: “Pray not thou for this people any more.” It was too late.

Jeremiah was still shut up in the court of the prison, because he persisted in what he had said all along — that Zedekiah would join the captives in Babylon, and Jerusalem would be burned. Zedekiah preferred to listen to the men who told him pleasant lies, instead of the man who told him the unpleasant truth. So, he kept Jeremiah a prisoner, living on one piece of bread a day.

This, then, was the state of affairs when God came and spoke to Jeremiah in prison, and told him to expect a visitor. His cousin Hanameel was coming to ask him to buy a field in Anathoth.

It was a curious errand indeed for Hanameel to set out on at such a time, and Jeremiah was terribly puzzled when God said to him, “Buy... the field.”

Jeremiah thought on it all, and pictured the conquering enemy who, at that very moment, was camped upon the field in
Anathoth which he was told to purchase. As he puzzled over this, steps came nearer and nearer to the prison door, and lo and behold — Hanameel himself arrived.

‘It is about my field, Jeremiah,’ he began — ‘buy it, I pray thee, buy it for thyself.’

Then Jeremiah knew without a doubt what he was meant to do, and he did not say ‘Why?’ for that was seldom his way. He bought the field right then and there for seventeen shekels of silver.

Now, making a purchase at that time was a lengthy affair. Papers or ‘deeds’ had to be drawn up, witnesses found, and the price fixed. Baruch the Scribe was fetched to write the agreement, and you can be sure that long before that deed was made out, the news of Jeremiah’s strange purchase was the talk of the town. What would be next? To think — after all his gloomy talk about defeat and captivity, that he should buy a field in the condemned city, just as if nothing was going to happen. If he had wished to buy some property in Babylon, no one would have been surprised.

Meanwhile, Baruch wrote out two copies of the purchase deeds. Jeremiah signed them, and the witnesses signed them. Then one was sealed up securely. No one but the owner might break that seal. The other paper was left open, so that at any time Jeremiah could prove, by showing it, that the field was his own.

Then both documents were safely stored away in an earthen vessel, and put in the place where legal documents were kept.

So, Jeremiah bought his cousin’s field according to the law and custom. The witnesses and the little crowd that had collected strolled away, and Jeremiah was left alone. And he was just as perplexed as ever he could be.

‘O Lord God,’ he prayed, ‘all that Thou hast spoken has come to pass. We are in the hand of the enemy now — and, behold, Thou seest it, and Thou hast said unto me, O Lord God, Buy thee the
field for money and take witnesses; for the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.”

Then God spoke to his much-tried servant, and made everything clear. “I am the God of all,” He said. “Is there anything too hard for me?”

Jeremiah could answer that question, for had he not just said the same, “There is nothing too hard for Thee”?

And then God told him He had made him buy the field to teach His People how sure it was that they were to come back from Babylon. “I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely... and fields shall be bought in this land... for I will cause their Captivity to return, saith the Lord.”

Jeremiah knew that day was years and years away, but by faith he saw it, and was glad.
In the Dark

The siege wore on, with indescribable misery. Little children, too young to understand, pleaded with their parents to give them bread. They cried to their mothers, “Where is corn and wine?” But their mothers could not help them—and the children died in the streets.

Every place was full of dead and dying — the young and the old lying together on the ground —while those who died of hunger envied the shorter sufferings of those who died by the sword. The famine was sore in the city.

For eighteen months, Zedekiah held out. Then, on the tenth day of the tenth month, at the dead of night, the dreaded Foe entered Jerusalem.

Away in the land of captivity, on this very same day, God told Ezekiel that Jerusalem had fallen, and he was to write down the name of the day, and the date, then and there. So Ezekiel did so by faith —although no actual news of the calamity could possibly come for weeks.

How Ezekiel and Daniel must have wept together on that day as they pictured Nebuchadnezzar triumphantly marching with torches and shouting, taking possession of the Holy City.

So, the Boiling Cauldron had overturned at last. Zedekiah saw its destroying flood pouring through the condemned city, yet he still refused to give up hope.

Before the conquering army could reach the palace, he and his soldiers crept out in the darkness —through the palace garden, into a secret passage (which he had no doubt prepared for just such an emergency) which led down to the city wall.

So far, their escape was easy. The danger began at the end of the passage. Trusting to the darkness, or to the carelessness of
the sentries, the fugitives made a dash for the Gate.

Zedekiah, like most weak and cowardly minds, could gather his courage up to attempt foolhardy exploits. Besides, he knew that this was his only chance, which accounts for his rash decision. But alas for his hopes! The Foe was on the alert. The runaways were seen, and the signal was given. In a short time, an army was pursuing the ill-fated King.

Out in the plains of Jericho, forsaken by his soldiers, Zedekiah was overtaken. He was marched like an ordinary prisoner, with his sons, to Nebuchadnezzar’s camp in Riblah. On that dreadful journey, Zedekiah wished he had listened to Jeremiah’s advice. All the stories he had heard of Babylonian cruelty surged through his mind, as each step brought him nearer to his fate.

Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Fierce countenance, sat in judgment on the prisoners of war. His face was fierce indeed that day, for Zedekiah’s rebellion and persistence had cost him greatly. The unfortunate King shrank before that cruel eye. He never had been one to look a man straight in the face.

“Look up!” cried Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah looked up—and saw the most terrible sight he had ever seen. His ears heard the saddest cry they had ever heard. It was the dying cries of his own sons, put to death before his eyes.

And all the remainder of his life, that cry rang in his ears and that cruel sight haunted his mind. It was the last thing he ever saw on earth—for as he covered his face with his hands, he too was seized and thrown to the ground—and by Nebuchadnezzar’s orders, his eyes were put out.

The rest of his story is this. His hands were bound in chains. He was marched to Babylon, and there was left in prison, with his blindness and regrets, until the day of his death. So Zedekiah came to Babylon just as God had said, though he never did see it with his eyes.
Jeremiah’s Choice

Jeremiah did not see all the dreadful sights of those terrible days, as he was still shut up in his prison.

Before long, a deputation of Babylonian Princes found him out, and went to call on him there.

A special message came through the Chief Captain, from Nebuchadnezzar himself, about Jeremiah. In all this strenuous time, the Fierce King had remembered the prophet. No doubt Daniel’s last word to his monarch as he set out for Jerusalem was to implore him to befriend Jeremiah.

Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the man who had always urged the people to submit should be well cared for, and allowed to go wherever he liked. And though we read that by some mistake, after all, Jeremiah was placed among the captives with manacles on his arms — the Chief Captain, Nebuzar-adan soon found it out and took the chains off. He had a kind talk with him about his future. He asked Jeremiah to come to Babylon, gave him food and money, and let him go.

If Jeremiah had been obliged to choose what he wanted to do most, no doubt he would have been tempted to choose to end his days with the good figs in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar had promised to look well after him if he did. Many dear friends — including Daniel and Ezekiel — would welcome him.

If he stayed behind, there would be no one but the poorest of the peasants left — and they were so ignorant and superstitious. It would not be easy to go on preaching to them after forty years of reproach and indifference.

But Jeremiah did not choose what was easiest. He knew that God wanted him to stay at his post, and he stayed.

Meanwhile, a Governor was chosen to rule over the few poor
people still left in the land. Gedaliah, Shaphan’s grandson, was the man picked out by Nebuchadnezzar for this — and a splendid choice he was.

Gedaliah was glad, indeed, to welcome Jeremiah to his home — and in the terrible days that came soon after, these two men after God’s own heart must have found comfort in being together. Morning by morning, perhaps, they walked to the House of God in each other’s company...

...until the never-to-be-forgotten day when Nebuchadnezzar’s soldiers surged through the length and breadth of the Holy City, and set fire to every building.

As Jeremiah watched the beautiful Temple he loved so dearly perish in flames, his grief overwhelmed him.

“What shall I do? What can I say?” he cried. ‘Can these charred and blackened ruins really be the city that the world has called ‘The perfection of beauty?’ No one would have believed that the enemy would enter the gates of Jerusalem. Oh, why did my people never seek help from God? Why were their eyes ever turned away from Him to a nation that could not save? For these things I weep. My sorrow is greater than I can bear, while the Comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me.”

So wept the broken-hearted preacher, forgetting everything but the flames and the dreadful punishment.

But The Comforter was near all the time, and soon He brought back to Jeremiah’s mind the remembrance of God’s faithfulness:

“Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion... for He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men,” said Jeremiah, drying his tears. ‘Jerusalem has departed, but Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever.”
Thinketh No Evil

Gedaliah was a man greatly beloved. No one dared backbite or abuse his neighbor in Gedaliah’s hearing, for Gedaliah never listened to slander, and tried hard to extract the “chip” out of his own eye, and left the other men’s “beams” alone.

Those people who esteem others better than themselves are always the most beloved. And Jews who had taken refuge in other countries, hearing of Gedaliah’s promotion, gradually came back again to the land of Judah.

It was summertime — the sun shone, the fruit ripened, and there was plenty to do in the fields and vineyards.

“Gather the fruit,” said the kindly Governor, “and serve and obey the King of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.”

With Gedaliah to rule, and Jeremiah to teach, prospects began to look peaceful for those who could make the best of things.

Then, just when all looked quiet, a thunderbolt fell. A fresh sorrow came upon the people who would not listen — all through the jealousy of one man.

Now, among the refugees in the land of the Ammonites was a Royal Prince named Ishmael. Ishmael had been glad enough to run away from Jerusalem when captivity or death threatened him — and no doubt he had made himself very useful to the King of the Ammonites, who thought highly of the clever young man. All Ishmael’s life, he had been thought clever — and, alas, he had such a high opinion of himself that he could not bear anyone to be considered better or greater than he. Jealousy, cruel as death, lived in Ishmael’s heart, and ruled him with a rod of iron.

It was no joy to Ishmael to hear that Gedaliah had been made
ruler of the land. When he heard this, his one thought was, ‘I should be the governor, not he! I am a Prince, and he is a nobody!’

The King of the Ammonites saw Ishmael’s gloomy countenance, and before long determined its cause. He saw, too, that the jealousy of Ishmael might be used for his own ends. So he patted the sulking Prince on the back, and encouraged him in his evil thoughts — until Ishmael listened to the King of the Ammonites, and made up his mind to MURDER the man who was greater than he.

One morning, when his plans had all been made, Ishmael and ten men set out to Mizpah to find an opportunity to do the shameful deed. But hardly ever has a conspiracy been carried through without someone letting the secret out, and such was the case this time. Whether Ishmael talked too loud in Mizpah, or whether one of the ten men had pity on their intended victim, we are not told. We only know that in some way or other, Johanan, a smart young soldier, heard of the horrible treachery, and went with haste to warn Gedaliah. His friends accompanied him.

‘Do you know, Gedaliah, that Prince Ishmael has come?’ asked Johanan.

Yes, Gedaliah had already seen him. He had welcomed him back to his old country, advised him to serve the King of Babylon, and had ended the interview by inviting him to dinner that night.

Johanan looked in horror from one face to another. ‘How dreadful,’ he said, ‘for Ishmael has come here with one purpose — to kill you!’

Poor Johanan could hardly speak for horror at the thought of what he was saying. He looked up at the Governor, expecting to see him shaking with terror.
But Gedaliah just smiled peacefully.

“Have you not learned that we cannot believe half of what we hear, Johanan?” he said. “We must not think so badly of Ishmael as all that.”

And whatever Johanan and his friends could say after that only went in one ear and out the other, for Gedaliah... believed them not. Johanan and his friends went away at last in despair. He and his friends talked together of the horrible deed that was threatened, and of the kind character of their beloved Gedaliah.

“What will happen to us if he is killed,” they moaned, “just as all the Jews are coming back, and everything looks brighter for us?”

Johanan could not bear it. “It shall not be done!” he said, clenching his hands. He slipped away, unnoticed, from the consultation and stole into the Governor’s presence.

“Please, Gedaliah,” he pleaded with his whole heart. “What I say really is true — you must believe it! Ishmael is determined to kill you, and you must let me go and kill him first! No one need ever know I did it. Just say the word and let me go.”

But Gedaliah’s eyes shone with indignation as he looked on Johanan.

“Thou shalt not do this thing,” he said, “for thou speakest falsely of Ishmael.”

You might as well have tried to turn a worm into a canary, as make Gedaliah think evil of his worst enemy.

So, Ishmael the jealous Prince did come to dinner after all with the Governor, who believed him to be all that he seemed.

Johanan did not go.
At the appointed hour, the guests arrived. The unsuspicuous Gedaliah welcomed them without a pang of fear. Talking pleasantly, they sat and ate together.

Suddenly, at a planned signal, Ishmael rose to his feet. His ten men arose also—and not a man came away from that feast except Ishmael and the ten murderers.

‘Dead men tell no tales,’ said Ishmael. ‘Do not let one escape to tell on us.’

When it was quite dark, the dead body of Gedaliah and those who died with him were dragged outside the house to a deep pit. No one saw, no man knew.

The whole of the next day went by. Nothing happened. Ishmael settled himself in the Governor’s headquarters, and waited.

On the second day, Ishmael looked out of the window. A long, sorrowful procession met his view. Eighty men with torn garments and bowed heads were bringing offerings and incense to the House of God in Mizpah, moaning with bitter wails the fate of their glorious Temple.

In a moment, Ishmael decided what to do. Putting a mournful look on his face, he, too, covered his head—and swaying as if in grief, went out to meet the mournful procession, pretending to weep all along as he went.

“Come,” he said, with a hypocritical sniff, “Come to Gedaliah.” And turning, he led the procession on to the middle of the city to the field at the back of Gedaliah’s house.

Then, suddenly throwing off his mourning, he and his ten men fell upon the unsuspecting eighty and slew them one by one—all, except ten of them—and he cast their dead bodies into the pit where Gedaliah’s had already lain for two days.
And that is how they came to Gedaliah. And in their death, they were not divided.

Ishmael did not stop at this. He made prisoners of all the people that remained in Mizpah, and started to take them over to his friend, the King of the Ammonites. What price Ishmael expected to receive for all his treacherous deeds, we are not told. But we may be sure that all the pieces of silver in the world would never give him a moment’s satisfaction. So Ishmael, with his sin and his captives, departed for the land of the Ammonites.

But his plans for the return journey were somewhat altered.

Johanan knew nothing of the calamity at the time. All had been accomplished secretly and hastily. Neither did the news reach him until Ishmael had travelled several miles on his way. But when word came to him of the brutal doings, without losing a moment, Johanan gathered all his remaining forces together and set forth in hot pursuit.

The rescue party overtook the captives by the waters of Gibeon. When the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan, they were glad. They knew he had come to save them, and with one accord, rushed to his protection.

Ishmael, without a moment’s hesitation, took to his heels and fled along with the eight men who were still with him, back to the land of the Ammonites. And none of them was ever heard from again.

No one pursued —yet Ishmael must surely have felt, all the rest of his days, as if an enemy was behind him, for the wicked flee when no man pursueth.
Was There Room in the Inn?

All the rescued men and women and children went back with Johanan to an inn near Bethlehem, on the Egyptian road. There was a wayside inn at Bethlehem too, five hundred years later, where some Other Travellers came and found no room. For the dear sake of One of those Other Travellers, our hearts dwell on this habitation of Chimham with interest. Was there room in there for the King of Glory? For Him who waited outside the door, ready to save, just as He waits outside closed hearts today?

Jeremiah, still hopeful, and still looking out for signs of repentance, came down to the inn.

“Pray for us, Jeremiah,” said the people, coming out to meet him. “Ask God to show us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.”

Gladly Jeremiah promised to ask God to direct their next move, and show them where to go.

“We will do whatever He tells us this time, whether we want to or not,” they said glibly, with their faces and feet towards Egypt, and their minds made up to go there in any case.

For ten days God kept the pretenders waiting for an answer. Then He told them to stay in their own land, and not go into Egypt.

And the men who just before had said, “We will obey the voice of the Lord,” at all costs, now cried: “No... we will go into the land of Egypt... and there will we dwell.”

There was no room for the King of Kings in the Bethlehem Inn on the road to Egypt either.
The Place Where Two Ways Met

And so Israel, consistent to their character, stood in the place where two ways met—and deliberately chose the forbidden road. They came into the land of Egypt, for they obeyed not the Voice of the Lord.

Jeremiah, consistent to the last in his faithful obedience to his Heavenly Father, went with them.

And the God of Love, who never changes, spoke to them in Egypt with words tender and touching enough to melt any but hearts of stone.

“My people,” He said, “have forsaken Me. They are just like a foolish family leaving a beautiful home by the side of a fountain, where cool, refreshing springing waters run day and night. They are leaving just for the sake of change to go to a land where they must hew out cisterns in rock that cracks at every blow. Rain cisterns that leak, and can hold no water. A land where the little ones suffer and die of thirst, through their fathers’ disobedience.

“O My people, My special treasure — what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt? Why should thou be drinking the muddy water of the Nile?

‘Why are you outcasts from My land, which flows with milk and honey? But hast thou not procured this unto thyself in forsaking Me, the Fountain of Living Waters? And thou sayest still, each one of you, ‘It is not MY fault, I am innocent.’

‘Listen to My voice, My people. It is because thou dost not know, because thou dost not consider, because thou sayest persistently ‘I have not sinned,’ that I yet plead with thee to return again to Me.

‘Though thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou coudest...
wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, ‘My Father, Thou art the guide of my youth’?”
Written for OUR Learning

So even to the very last, after all the deafness and deliberate disobedience, God still followed these foolish people with messages of love. Still Jeremiah pleaded with them to “return”. Even then, God was ready to forget and forgive, and supply all their need.

Our story began with love.

It ends with love.

And the best part of it all is that God’s love is just the same today. He never changes. All these “Never Old Stories” of long ago were written on purpose for our learning.

Each sermon and object lesson Jeremiah gave is just as much for us as it was for those who actually heard them.

Everything God did for Jeremiah, He will do for all His servants still.

The patience and longsuffering of God, with the people who would not hear or care, only shows us how He is waiting today for us to begin to call Him our Father, and look to Him to guide our lives.

Let us ask for the Holy Spirit now to make us hear His voice, see His face, and teach us from this time forward to call Him...

FATHER.