

Making Bad Times Good.

Scripture Lesson:- Zechariah 7: 8-8: 1.

Text:- Zechariah 7: 14.

Introduction:- Israel was a lesson to us of the 20th century. Her history was to a great extent like the history of modern nations. She had her ups and downs as a nation. Good times followed bad times. Israel went through a period of nearly 100 years of bad times in one period of her history. The bad times that come to any nation are brought about by sin. A long line of prophets had foretold the impending doom of Israel, unless she repented and turned from her idolatries and worshipped the true and the living God.

But the people turned a deaf ear to these mighty men of God with their clear and pungent warnings. They pursued the downward course of sinful degradation. One of two things must always happen to sin. It must either be forgiven or punished. The prophets showed Israel a way of escape, but Israel refused to heed the voice of the prophets.

I.

They did not repent of their sin. They were taken captive by Babylon. The captivity in Babylon lasted seventy long and weary years. Seventy years is long enough for a new generation to take the place of the old. After seventy years a remnant returned to their native land, and found it in desolation. The temple had been destroyed, the walls of the city had been laid low, and the whole country was in a state of waste and destruction.

But in the face of the desolation of the land there was gladness and rejoicing, as described by Nehemiah: "And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."

They made the bad times good. They rejoiced, "because" they had understood the word that was declared unto

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them". Certain words had made them glad. What words were sufficient to make them rejoice in the presence of the destruction of their home city? The answer is given in the eighth chapter of Nehemiah where we read that a solemn assembly of people was gathered together in the streets, and Ezra the scribe brought books out of the law of Moses, and read it to the people. Hear him, Ezra, as he reads to the people. Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read therein before the street that was before the water gate from morning until midday, before all men and women, those that could understand; and the ears of all people were attentive unto the book of the law". "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. And the Levites, caused the people to understand the law; and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

The bad times were made good by the people turning again to the book of God's law. God's law set forth the fundamental principles of peace and happiness, and of economic prosperity. With the law of God written in their hearts they went singing and rejoicing, and the bad times were made good. Do you think that if our people turned again to the law, to the word of God, they would cure the bad times that exist at the present time. I verily believe they would. I still believe that "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land".

II.

History furnishes many illustrations of how a con-

quering faith rooted in the Word of God has gone forth with singing and gladness to meet seemingly insurmountable opposition. In the history of America we find many notable examples. Our fathers who braved the storms of unknown seas, and settled in the virgin wilderness and forests of an unconquered continent, faced starvation and hardships that were appalling for us to contemplate in our day of ease and luxury. These sturdy pioneers came to settle a land where many unfriendly forces were arrayed against them. The cold winters in the north, and malaria in the south, and savage Indians that lined the whole of the Atlantic seaboard, laid a heavy toll in human lives. Our fathers who came to face these hardships came in quest of God and of religious freedom. They came with open Bibles. The name of God was written into every institution which they established.

The bad times which confronted those early American pioneers were changed into good times through their faith in God and the divine revelation in the Bible, which gave to them an integrity of purpose, a daring and courage, that enabled them to transform a continent infested with deadly diseases and foes into a Canaanland, flowing with milk and honey.

From the Atlantic seaboard civilization started on its long westward trek across this great continent. There flowed into that stream in its westward movement the circuit rider, the Bible, the log meeting house, the family altar, and the camp meeting. These were mighty leavening influences in that westward trek of the long moving caravans over mountain, hill, dale, plain and stream, that transformed the vast continent, with its hardships for the pioneers, into a land of bounty and plenty, unexcelled by any other land on the face of the earth.

Conclusion: - Open Bibles in the homes and the schools, mighty spiritual awakenings through revivals, kindled flames of religious zeal, patriotism, courage, loyalty and fidelity which formed the foundation stone upon which rests the great superstructure of our present American civilization, and which made bad times good, hard times prosperous, and turned times threatened with utter defeat to times of triumph and victory.