



LESSON III.—OCTOBER 15, 1905.

Returning From Captivity.

Ezra i., 1-11.

Golden Text.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Ps. cxv., 3.

Home Readings.

Monday, Oct. 9.—Ezra i., 1-11.
 Tuesday, Oct. 10.—Ezra ii., 61-70.
 Wednesday, Oct. 11.—Ps. 126.
 Thursday, Oct. 12.—Jer. xxv., 1-14.
 Friday, Oct. 13.—Jer. xxix., 8-19.
 Saturday, Oct. 14.—Jer. xxx., 15-24.
 Sunday, Oct. 15.—Jer. xxxi., 1-14.

(R. M. Kurtz.)

INTRODUCTION.

Our studies in the history of the Hebrew people have shown their downward trend toward the extinction of their national life. True, there were periods when revivals occurred, when the nation showed a disposition to turn away from idolatry to God. But, taking a view of the whole history, we see several distinct steps marking the downward way.

You will remember, in the first place, that the people persisted in wanting a king, until God granted the wish, though warning them of the consequences.

Then, after three kings had ruled, a foolish young man came to the throne, and by his rashness so angered his subjects that ten tribes revolted and set up a kingdom of their own.

After a troubled history, this northern kingdom of Israel was swept away and the fate of the ten tribes is one of the mysteries of history, which men ponder to this day.

At last came the Babylonian captivity, which marked the close of Judah's independent existence also, as a kingdom.

But the history of the Jews reveals a very striking fact; God might destroy the nation as such, but the people were still the objects of his love and care. Away to Babylon went the best that were left of the nation, there to undergo severe discipline in the land of their captivity for seventy years. Yet God was preparing them to return to their own land again.

Physical captivity meant spiritual liberty, for by this means were the people to learn the emptiness of idolatry. The prophets had foretold this return; even before the captivity mention had been made of the time we are now studying. See Isa. xl.-xli.; Jer. xxv., 12; xxix., 10, and Ezek. xl., 20, 36, 37. A study of these prophets reveals the promise not only of the return, but of the preparation of the hearts of the people for it.

GOD IN HISTORY.

1. Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying:

The great lessons of history are not learned by the study of separate events, but by taking them together and observing their relation and meaning. For example, there are many things in the history of the times just before the birth of Christ, which, studied separately, have no apparent bearing on that event or its consequences. If they are all considered together, however, they delight and amaze us as they reveal the great scheme of events and progress whereby the world was

prepared for the advent of Christ and the rapid spread of his Gospel.

So in the history of the captivity. We find, for instance, that the king who took Judah captive followed the policy of taking inhabitants of conquered nations from their homes. This afforded the means whereby Judah was punished in Babylon.

Again the new King Cyrus, who conquered Babylon, reversed this policy, and thus supplied the human means for the return of the Jews, at the close of the seventy years.

In this verse we find God's influence more immediately, as he 'stirred up the spirit' of Cyrus to send the people home.

THE KING'S PROCLAMATION.

2. Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, The Lord God of Heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God), which is in Jerusalem.

4. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

The remarkable utterance of Cyrus in verse second is in striking accord with the words of Isaiah, uttered several generations before the exile began:

'That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

'Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him;

'I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron:

'For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect. I have even called thee by thy name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.'

After giving free and full permission to the Jews to return, we notice that he commands that offerings for the temple were to be given to the returning Jews by their neighbors in Babylon. This carrying of gifts back to the Holy Land recalls the departure from Egypt: Exodus xii., 35, 36.

THE TREASURE CARRIED BACK.

5. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

6. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

8. Even these did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

9. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives.

10. Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand.

11. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

The remaining verses of the lesson deal mainly with the treasure that was given the people for the temple they were to build when Jerusalem was again reached. Beasts of burden for the journey were also supplied.

Cyrus also brought from the heathen temple of his idols the many vessels which had been taken from the temple at Jerusalem when the city fell, and restored them to the Jews.

The items given in verses 9 and 10 amount

to 2,499, while verse 11 speaks of 5,400. It is probable that the more important only were thus classified while all sorts of vessels, together amounted to the latter number.

'Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah,' this was the Persian name of Zerubbabel, who laid the foundation of the new temple later.

The lesson for Oct. 22 is 'Rebuilding the Temple.' Ezra iii., 10; iv., 5.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Oct. 15.—Topic—Better work our society should do. Heb. vi., 7-12, 13, 20, 21.

Junior C. E. Topic.**TEMPERANCE MEETING.**

Monday, Oct. 9.—'Nor drunkards.' I. Cor. vi., 9, 10.

Tuesday, Oct. 10.—'Woe unto them.' Isa. v., 11.

Wednesday, Oct. 11.—'Erred through wine.' Isa. xxviii., 7.

Thursday, Oct. 12.—'Rioting and drunkenness.' Rom. xiii., 12-14.

Friday, Oct. 13.—'Take heed to yourselves.' Luke xxi., 34.

Saturday, Oct. 14.—'Watch and be sober.' I. Thess. v., 6-8.

Sunday, Oct. 15.—Topic—A strong argument against drinking. Gal. v., 21. (Temperance Meeting.)

Did You ?

Did you ever waste an opportunity
 To say a kind word?
 To do a kind deed?
 To help some one?
 To learn something useful?
 To go to Sunday school?
 To ask some one who doesn't go to Sunday school to go?
 To encourage speaking well of others?
 To discourage speaking ill of others?
 To show your disapproval of all unladylike and ungentlemanly words and acts?
 To stand up for the right?
 To fight against the wrong?
 To use your pennies where they will do good?

Did you ever waste a penny, a minute, a word, or an act?

If you ever did, what are you going to do about it?

A suggestion: Sometimes it happens when you have lost a thing and can't find it again, if you try hard you can find another just like it; and the second one is taken much more care of and put to better use than the first.—The 'Myrtle.'

Curse cards are being used in Switzerland and Germany to check profanity. People go about with the cards in their pockets and whenever they hear bad language present one to the swearer to sign. The card has printed on it a pledge to abstain from swearing for a specified time, or to pay a small fine for each oath to some charity. Nearly 40,000 of these cards have been distributed in Switzerland alone.—'Ram's Horn.'

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