

Sabbath School Lessons.

Jan. 1. RETURNING FROM EXILE. B.C. 536.
Lesson Ezra 1 : 1-11. Golden Text, Deut. 30 : 3.
Memory vs. 5-6. Catechism, Q. 1, 2.

There are a few outstanding dates in the history of Israel, that all should remember.

1492 B.C. *The Exodus*—A great nation was born 1492 years before Christ ; like as a great country, America, was discovered 1492 A.D.

1095 B.C. *The first King*—Judges had ruled the people for 400 years. Then they want a king, and Saul, David, and Solomon, reign 40 years each, in all 120 years, over a united Kingdom.

975 B.C. *The Kingdom divided*—At Solomon's death the ten Northern tribes, tired of heavy taxation, rebelled against Rehoboam his son, and formed a separate kingdom.

720 B.C. *The captivity of Israel*—The ten tribes continued after their separation, for about 2½ centuries, having in all 19 kings. Then wearied out with their persistent idolatry and sin, God gave them over to their enemies, and 720 B.C., they were carried captive by Shalmaneser, King of Assyria, never to return.

605 B.C. *The captivity of Judah*—After the division of the kingdom at Solomon's death, Judah continued for nearly 3½ centuries, more than a century after Israel's captivity, having in all 19 kings and one queen, until 606 B.C., when they too, failing to take warning by Israel's doom, were, for their sin, given into the hands of their enemies, and in three successive sieges by the army of Nebuchednezzar, in 606, 598, and 588 B.C., they too were carried captive, and in the last siege the temple was utterly destroyed.

536 B.C. *The return of Judah from exile*—Seventy years after the first siege, according to prophecy, Jer. 25 : 12, Cyrus gave order to rebuild Jerusalem, and allowed the exiles to return.

From the first return, 536 B.C., to the close of Old Testament prophecy with Malachi, about 400 B.C., nearly 140 years, is the period covered by the lessons of this quarter. Ezra and Nehemiah give us something of the history of this period, and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the prophets, give an idea of the state of religion.

I. The King's glad proclamation, vs. 1-4.

II. The people preparing to leave, vs. 5-6.

IV. The vessels of the temple restored, vs. 7-11

I. Vs. 1-4. *First year*—Cyrus had been a king for 20 years, gradually extending his sway, conquering Media and Persia, and then Babylon. Two years before this, Darius had taken Babylon for Cyrus, on that awful night, and ruled it for him. But now Cyrus himself reigned there. *Lord Stirred up*—God moved holy prophets to write ; He moved heathen kings to fulfill. God reigns. *Given me*—Even a heathen king confesses that his blessings came from God ; much more should we. *Charged me*—Perhaps Daniel, now a very aged man, had shewn him the prophecy in Isaiah, 45 : 28 ; 45 : 1-3, and he, though a heathen, is moved to obey. *Help him*—Like the Egyptians loading them with gifts nearly one thousand years before.

II. Vs. 5, 6. Preparing to leave.

III. Vs. 7-11. *Vessels*—What changes these vessels had seen in their long history.

1. What God hath spoken He will fulfill.

2. When He needs men He raises them up.

3. When the purposes of affliction are completed He gives deliverance.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE.

Jan. 8.

536-555 B.C.

Lesson Ezra 3 : 1-13.
Memory vs. 10, 11.

Golden Text, Ezra 3 : 11.
Catechism, Q. 3.

The first chapter of Ezra tells of the decree of Cyrus and the preparation for the return.

The second gives a list of the families that returned, and shews the great care with which they kept their family records, even in captivity, and it closes with telling how they came back and settled in the land of their fathers. More than two hundred thousand had been carried away captive, scarce fifty thousand returned.

The third chapter, the lesson for to-day, tells of the rebuilding of the temple. The exiles were probably two or three months on the return journey, and when they came back the first thing was to get "settled." A few of the older ones, who, 70, or 62, or 52 years before had been carried into captivity, would now search out their old homes that had long lain waste, others would seek the homes of their fathers, and then, as soon as settled, they gathered "as one man" to rebuild the temple.

1. Setting up the old worship, vs. 1-6.

2. Preparing for the temple, vs. 7-9.

3. Laying the corner stone, vs. 10-13.

I. Vs. 1-6. "As one man." Like the disciples in the early chapters of the Acts "of one accord ;" the right spirit for all Christian work. *Builded the Altar*—This was the first step. For idolatry they had been exiled. The first thing when they return is to set up the worship of God. For a list of the offerings see the first chapters of Lev. *Fear*—The people who had strayed into the land in their absence were not willing to have Israel return and rebuild. *Tabernacles*—See Neh. viii, 14-17 ; Lev. 23 : 34 ; Deut. 16 : 13.

II. Vs. 7-9. Verse 7 is like the description of the preparation for the first temple, getting timber from Lebanon, etc., nearly five centuries before. See 1 Ki. 5. The money granted by Cyrus, paid for the material. *Second year*—More than a year was spent in getting material, and now, with Levites for foremen, the work begins.

III. Vs. 10-13. "Laying the foundation stone" of churches, etc., with appropriate ceremonies, now so common, has here its origin.

Singing by course. Probably Ps. 106, 107, 136, 137, and perhaps others, were sung.

Shouting. "Three times three" cheers would be given with a will. With what heart they would shout ! How much it meant to them ; freedom ; God's favor restored ; their own loved temple restored ; their bright future once more in view.

Weeping ! What made the old men weep ? They thought of the former temple with its long history, its golden glory, its brighter glory of the bright cloud over the mercy seat. They thought of the sins that had wrought such ruin.

1. Where God's spirit guides all, congregations will come together, and, such united action is necessary to the highest success.

2. They put the altar before the temple. It is more important to have a family altar than a fine house ; more important to have true worship in your church than fine architecture ; goodness is more important than "show" in the pulpit.

3. Where the right spirit is, there will be joy in the progress of God's cause, and in helping to upbuild it.