

Sunday School Teacher.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON II.

THE DEDICATION.

Jan. 17, 1879.

Ezra vi. 14-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."—Hag. ii. 9.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Ezra iv. 1-24..... The work hindered.
- T. Hag. i. 1-15..... The prophet's reproof.
- W. Ezra v. 1-17..... Tattenai's letter.
- Th. Ezra vi. 1-13..... The new decree.
- F. Hag. ii. 1-23..... The people encouraged.
- S. Zech. iv. 1-14..... Success foretold.
- S. Ezra vi. 14-22..... The dedication.

HELPS TO STUDY.

I. THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE—Vers. 14, 15.

In our last lesson, we saw the zeal and eagerness with which the returned Jews began the great work of the restoration of God's house. But they were not allowed to proceed in peace. As soon as the Samaritans heard of it, they desired to take part in the work, and thus identify themselves religiously and nationally with the Jews. They asserted that they sought God, even as did His people. This was plausible, but completely untrue. For their religion was in reality idolatry, with a whitewash of Judaism, 2nd Kings, xvii. 33. Besides, the chosen race, of whom was to come the Promised Seed, must be preserved from all admixture. The Jews, therefore, with just indignation repelled their proffers of assistance. This repulse made the Samaritans bitter enemies. In every way they endeavored to trouble the workers and to thwart the work. They wrote letters to the king of Persia to excite his suspicions and jealousy. But as long as Cyrus and his son, who were in sympathy with the Jews, reigned, their efforts were vain. As soon, however, as the usurper, Artaxerxes sat upon the throne, the Samaritans obtained from him a decree prohibiting the work at Jerusalem. (Note 1). But Artaxerxes was overthrown by Darius, who, like Cyrus and Cambyses, was a disciple of Zoroaster, and in sympathy with the monotheism of the Jews. These, therefore, took courage, and stirred up by the appeals of the prophets (Note 2), resumed the work. But opposition again arose, this time it was from the Persian satraps, or governors, over Syria and Palestine (Ezra v. 3), but they were not so bitter, and more candid, than the Samaritans. When they demanded of the elders the authority for rebuilding, they were referred to the decree of Cyrus. Accordingly, the letter of complaint which the governors sent to Darius carried with it its own answer. The annals of the reign of Cyrus were examined, and the decree found. Darius, therefore, commanded the governors not only to desist from hindering the Jews, but to assist them in every way, both with money and supplies.

Thus encouraged, the Jews builded and finished the house, which was completed on the third of Adar, just 70 years after the destruction of the first temple, in the sixth year of Darius, and therefore in the spring of B.C. 515, twenty years after it was commenced.

God's temple in the heart and in the world is built slowly in the midst of great opposition and discouragements.

Nothing can hinder the upbuilding of God's temple, and nothing, therefore, should discourage the builders.

In the upbuilding of our own Christian character, and in carrying on the work of God against others, let us never weary. Faithful continuance in well-doing will be at last crowned with success.

The kingdoms of this world and their rulers are used by God in the establishment of the kingdom not of this world. Every policy and decree of men is overruled by the King of kings, for the perfecting of this great purpose of love for men.

II. THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE—Vers. 16-18.

As soon as the temple was finished, they proceeded to solemnly dedicate it to the service for which it had been built. All united in this festival. Among the people there were representatives of all the tribes. Many had in past times been attracted towards Judah from Israel. These were no doubt increased, when Israel was laid waste; and shared the exile and return of Judah. Seven hundred victims were offered—a small number compared with those offered at the dedication of the first temple, 2nd Chron. vii. 5. Twelve he-goats were offered for a sin-offering, one for each tribe. The returned children of the captivity evidently therefore considered themselves as representatives of all Israel. The priests and Levites were arranged in their several divisions and courses. Moses had assigned to them their various duties and privileges, Num. iii. 6-10; viii. 9-14; although David had divided them into courses, 2nd Chron. xxiii. 6-24, xxiv. 1-19.

The temple is consecrated, that is, separated from all that is profane, for God's service and presence. So the heart, which by a true divine indwelling, is made a temple of God, is to be consecrated from all sin and dedicated to the service of God. Every power, every faculty is to be consecrated. Dedication is grounded in sacrifice. The sin offering was typical of one great sacrifice which alone takes away sin. The heart and life must be sprinkled with the blood of that sacrifice before they can be accepted. Redeemed by Christ's blood, we are consecrated to His service.

The orderly arrangements of the workers and their services is essential to all progress. There are manifold gifts and powers in the Church. The One Spirit divideth to each man severally as He will. Each has his own place and work, and it is important that he ascertain what it is, and occupy it faithfully.

III. THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER—Vers. 19-22.

The dedication of the second temple took place as soon as the building was finished. The Jews did not wait, as did the builders of the first temple, for the great autumn festival of tabernacles. However, there was an appropriateness in the time, for it was just upon the eve of the national festival of the Passover, which was now celebrated.

The passover was held at the beginning of the sacred year. It commemorated the Exodus and the birthday of Israel as a nation, while it also foreshadowed the one event for the sake of which Israel had been chosen and called and made a nation, namely, the death of Jesus. There was, therefore, a peculiar fitness in the dedication of the second temple taking place upon this festival. The restoration from Babylon was a second Exodus. All made ready keep the feast. All legal and ceremonial defilements were put away. The priests and Levites killed the Paschal lambs for the people. Originally each head of a household performed this office, but on account of the danger and frequency of legal defilement, it came in course of time to be delegated to the Levites, who acted, also, even for the priests.

With the returned Jews there united in this solemn service all such as had separated themselves from the filthiness of the heathen of the land. There were descendants of Jews who had remained in the land when the rest of the nation had been carried away captive. They had no doubt, intermarried with the heathen and violated the laws of Moses as to food and purifications, and worse than legal defilement would be the moral pollution which they could not fail to have contracted. But now, having separated themselves altogether from the heathen, they did eat the Passover with their brethren. For it was the feast of unleavened bread. All leaven was forbidden. This very prohibition symbolized the removing of the leaven of sin and impurity from the heart and life.—Exod. xii. 15; xiii. 6; 2 Chron. xxx. 21; xxxv. 17; 1 Cor. v. 7, 9. For seven days, the allotted number, they kept the feast with joy. God had made them joyful by the deliverance which He had wrought them. He turned towards them the heart of the King of Assyria, so that, instead of hindering, as did his predecessors, he had helped them in their work. Thus the hearts of kings and all rulers are in the hands of the Great King.—Prov. xxi. 1. Their hearts overflowed with joy, which gave utterance to itself in those glad psalms, the cxlvi.—cl.

It is remarkable that during this festive season a deputation from Bethel came to inquire whether the few days of fasting and mourning established during the captivity were still to be observed—Zech. vii. 2-5. The prophet indignantly repudiates the observance of fast-days in a time of joy. Even during the exile, after the first burst of sorrow was over, except to a faithful few, they had possessed little reality. But now they would have been altogether meaningless. The prophet, therefore, bade them make them holy feasts of joy and gladness.

There is a very weighty lesson here for us. A religious observance, a ceremony, a day of fasting, whose meaning and spirit are gone, is worse than useless. Let us beware of unreality in religion. The outward act should correspond to the inward spirit. Our Lord taught the same truth to those who asked why his disciples did not fast.—Matt. ix. 14, 15.

Christ our Passover is slain for us. We have been redeemed from the bondage of sin and death, and are pilgrims from the Egypt of worldliness and sin to the Canaan of love and peace, the Divine presence and glory. We must put away all leaven, separating ourselves from all sin and selfishness. We should serve the Lord with gladness. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and should characterize the Christian life. Rejoice in the Lord.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. For the better understanding of the place in Persian history of the present and several following lessons, the true list of Persian kings is here given from William Smith:—

	Beginning of each reign,	Length of reign,
	B.C.	of reign.
1. CYAXARES king of Media (<i>Ahasuerus</i> : Dan. ix. 1).....	634	40 years.
2. ASTYAGES, his son, last king of Media (<i>Darius the Mede</i>).....	594	44 years.
3. CYRUS, son of his daughter and Cambyses, a Persian noble, founder of the Persian Empire. (Rawlinson says 558).....	550	21 years.
<i>Cyrus begins to reign at Babylon, Jan. 5, 538</i>	538	
4. CAMBYSES, his son, (<i>Ahasuerus</i> : Ezra iv. 6).....	Jan. 5, 529	7½ years.
5. GOMATES, a Magian usurper, who personated Smerdis, the younger son of Cyrus (<i>Artaxerxes</i> : Ezra iv. 7, etc.), about Jan. 1.....	522	7 months
6. DARIUS, the son of Hystaspes. A Persian noble, raised to the throne on the overthrow of Gomates. <i>Darius</i> : Ezra iv. 5-24; chs. 5, 6.....	Jan 1, 521	36 years.
7. XERXES, his son (<i>Ahasuerus</i> : Esther), Dec. 23, 485.....	485	11 years.
8. ARTAXERXES LONGIMANUS, his son (<i>Artaxerxes</i> : Ezra vii., Nehemiah). End of his reign, Dec. 17, 423). Dec. 7,....	465	42 years.

2. Haggai.—With regard to his tribe and parentage, both history and tradition are alike silent. According to tradition he was born in Babylon, was a young man when he first came to Jerusalem, probably of priestly rank. He was an old man at this time, living long enough to see both the first and second temples.—*Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Zechariah. Son of Berechiah, and grandson of Iddo. He is called so because he was descendant of Iddo, as Jesus was Son of David; and because probably his father was dead, and he was the next representative of the family after his grandfather Iddo. He seems to have entered upon his office when quite young (Zech. ii. 4), and must have been born in Babylon, and returned with the first caravan of exiles under Zerubbabel.

PROPER USE OF TIME.

"Gather up the fragments" of time, "that nothing be lost." This can be addressed only to those who are employing the greater portion of their time in some earnest work. He who floats aimlessly and loosely in society, has no fragments of time as related to a whole. It is all fragments. He himself is a fragment lying useless, and his whole life requires to be recast. But whatever the great business of a man may be, however engrossing, there will always be some fragments of time that will remain; and with most men these are so considerable that the disposition made of them will greatly modify the results of life. The secret of doing much is to do a little at a time, and to persevere in doing it. Half an hour a day in the service of an earnest purpose has been sufficient for the acquisition of languages and the writing of books, and for laying the foundation of a lasting fame. Even the minute fragments required for drawing his waxen ends was employed by Roger Sherman in looking on his book before him; and it was thus he became a sage and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Let a professional man, or any man, when he starts in life have a side study, be it history, or a language, or poetry, or any branch of natural history, or geology, and let him give to it the fragments of his time, and he will be surprised at his own acquisitions. The whole tone of his thoughts and life will be elevated; the change of subject will be his best recreation. And what is thus true in literature and science is more so in religion, and in all that relates to duty. There is no time to brief for ejaculatory prayer. When the countenance of Nehemiah was sad for the desolations of Jerusalem, and the king asked him, "What is thy request?" there was time between the question and the answer for him to pray to the "God of heaven." If the objects of this world had been to furnish opportunities for doing good, it could hardly have been arranged better than it is; and whoever has a heart set upon that, will have no need that any fragments of time he may gather up will be lost.—*Mark Hopkins*.

WHAT STANLEY DID FOR GEOGRAPHY.

Stanley gave nine months to the exploration of the Luabala, or rather to the Livingstone, as he called it, and as it must be called for all time. Before he went out on this mission we knew there were two rivers—the Congo and the Luabala. We knew that the Congo ran into the Atlantic Ocean, but its source was lost in cataracts. The Portuguese were content to scatter a few settlements about its mouth, and trade for gums and ivory along its banks. But it was an unknown river beyond the cataracts. We knew there was a river in the middle of Africa called the Luabala; we knew it had a swift current, that it was a river of large volume. But beyond that we knew nothing. Some had one theory, others had another. Livingstone was convinced that it ran into the Nile, was really the source of the Nile; and who would question even the theory of so great a master? What Stanley did was to show that the Congo and Luabala were one and the same; that the Congo, instead of losing itself among the rapids, was to force itself into the very heart of the continent; that the Luabala, instead of going north and submitting to the usurping waters of the Nile, was to turn to the west and force its way to the sea; that these two rivers were to disappear from the map, and be known as one river—the Livingstone; that this river was to be 2900 miles in length; that for nearly ten degrees of longitude it was to be continuously navigable; that its volume was 1,800,000 feet a second; that the entire area it drains is 800,000 square miles—in other words, that here was an immense waterway 3000 miles into the centre of Africa, navigable with the exception of two breaks, which engineering science can easily surmount,—a waterway into a tropical empire, rich in woods and metals and gracious soil, in fruits and grains, the sure home of a civilized empire in the years to come. As Petermann, the eminent German geographer, puts it, Stanley's work was to unite the fragments of African exploration—the achievements of Livingstone, Burton, Speke, Du Chaillu, Baker, Cameron, of all the heroic men who had gone before him—into one consecutive whole, just as Bismarck united the fragments of the German people, lying about under various princes and dukes, into one grand and harmonious empire. Even as Bismarck had created imperial Germany, so Stanley created geographical Africa.—*John Russell Young, in Harper's Magazine for October*.

At a recent Missionary Conference at Yankton, Dakota, connected with the missions of the American and Presbyterian Boards, 227 Indians were present from abroad, the majority coming 200 miles, and as many of the Yankton Indians. Some of the questions discussed by Indian ministers and laymen were, "How to promote revivals," and "How to honor the marriage relation."