

some from his counselors and lords, some from God-fearing Hebrews; it all became sacred when devoted to sacred uses.

111. *Prosperity* (verses 31, 32).

(a) Earthly astuteness and heavenly mindedness were beautifully united in the leadership of the people across the desert. (b) Ezra

planned to avoid the Bedouin and others who lay in wait to steal the treasure, and trusted in God for ability to carry out his plans. (c) The entire caravan reached Jerusalem without loss of life or treasure, a consummation due to faith in God and adherence to business principles.

The Lesson Word Studies

NOTE—These Word Studies for this lesson are based on the text of the Revised Version.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE—The first company of Jewish captives returning from Babylonia came to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in the year 538 B.C., the first year of the reign of Cyrus. Two years later was begun the rebuilding of the temple, which, after many hindrances and delays, was finally completed about 516 B. C. (comp. lessons for October 15, 22, and 29). Nearly sixty years elapsed after this time before Ezra led the second and larger company of returning captives from Babylonia to Jerusalem. This entire period of almost sixty years is passed over in silence by the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, save for two short references to events of the period found in Ezra 4. 6 and Neh. 12. 26 respectively. The events connected with the story of Esther (comp. lesson for November 5) belong to the reign of Ahasuerus or Xerxes toward the close of this long period. For an analysis of the contents of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah the student is referred to the Introductory Note to the Word Studies for the next lesson.

Verse 21. Then—After having gathered a great company of approximately eight thousand souls, preparatory to leading them back to Jerusalem.

I proclaimed—Ezra, the patriotic leader of the company, is himself relating the story of the events.

A fast—A time of abstinence from food. It is to be thought of, however, as a spiritual exercise, expressing humility and emphasizing absolute dependence of those participating upon Jehovah, and also as a time of special prayer and supplication to God. The pagan notion of propitiating God's favor by voluntary physical suffering is entirely absent.

At the river Ahava—Probably an artificial canal near Babylon. There were many such canals commonly designated as rivers (comp. Psa. 137. 1, "By the rivers of Babylon"). In Acts 16. 13 a reference is made to a place of prayer "without the gate by a river side."

A straight way for us—A direct road. The intended meaning may include also the thought of a road free from dangers, from robbers or enemies, as well as a level road without obstacles or inequalities (comp. Isa. 40. 3, "Make straight in the desert a highway for our God").

22. A band of soldiers and horsemen—A military escort such as was granted to Nehemiah a little later.

The enemy in the way—Bedouin bandit hordes such as have always been common in this part of the Orient. These might easily harass the stragglers and rear guard of such a large company and cause serious delay and even loss of treasure and life.

The hand of our God—The merciful favor of Jehovah. The use of the same expression in

verse 31 brings out plainer its meaning: "The hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us."

Against all them that forsake him—

Implying that Ezra and his companions, if they had asked an escort of the king and relied upon its protection even in part, would have been forsaking Jehovah and doubting his power to protect them.

24. Twelve of the chiefs of the priests, even Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them—In Neh. 12. 24, Sherebiah and Hashabiah are mentioned in a list of Levites, and as such would be distinguished from the priests proper who were higher in rank and authority. It is, therefore, probable that the optional reading suggested by the marginal note in the Revised Version which substitutes the word *besides* for the word *even* is the more correct. We have, then, to think of two companies, one consisting of "twelve of the chiefs of the priests" and another of twelve Levites, namely, "Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them." That there were these two companies seems to be implied in verse 30, "So the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and the gold."

25. The offering—Wherein the offering consisted is shown in 7. 15-20.

26. Six hundred and fifty talents of silver—The silver talent referred to was worth about \$1,875, so that the total amount of silver was approximately \$1,218,750.

Silver vessels a hundred talents—Worth about \$187,500.

Gold a hundred talents—The gold talent was worth about \$33,750, a hundred talents would therefore be worth approximately \$3,375,000. Money, especially in large quantities,