

EZRA GOES TO JERUSALEM.

International Sunday School Lesson for October 23, 1898—Text, Ezra 8:21-32—Memory Verse, 21-22.

(Specially Arranged from Peloubet's Notes.) GOLDEN TEXT.—The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him.—Ezra 8:22.

READ Chapters 7 and 8: 15-22. TIME.—Ezra left Babylon in March, B. C. 458, and reached Jerusalem four months later, in July. It was 19 years after the first caravan of return, under Zerubbabel, and 15 years after the deliverance through Esther.

PLACE.—Babylonia and Jerusalem. RULERS.—Artaxerxes I., called Longimanus, the Longhanded, king of Persian empire, son of Xerxes. Ezra, the scribe, governor of Judea.

EXPLANATORY.

I. The General Condition of the Jews at Jerusalem when Ezra left Babylon on his mission.—Seventy-eight years had passed since the first caravan of the exiles had returned to the home land, 50,000 strong. The temple had been built, but the opposition had been so great that the walls had not been restored and the rubbish still arose in long-stretching mounds. The vision of sudden glory and greatness had faded away. Lazily, ignorance and indifference followed. The spiritual life declined, the ideals faded, the Sabbath was desecrated. Ezra needed three things—"men, money and authority." The king gave the latter two, and permitted the men to volunteer. His decree is given in Ezra 7:11-25.

II. The Journey to Jerusalem.—V. 21. "at the river Ahava." The place is unknown, but it was probably one of the canals near Babylon, flowing into the Euphrates. The assembly consisted of about 1,700 persons, including heads of families and their retainers (Ezra 8:1-14), priests, Levites, and 220 Nethinim, or the servants who assisted in the work about the temple, so that the Levites could assume the higher position as religious instructors of the people.

The Fast.—"Then I proclaimed a fast." Fasting, as a religious act, would seem to have its basis in (1) a grief over sin so deep and intense that all desire for food is taken away. (2) In the aid to devotion furnished by a body unburdened with food, so as to leave the mind and heart in their most active and free condition. (3) It is the natural expression of deep sorrow for sin. It is not enough for the heart to feel deeply; it needs to express its feelings, though the proof that the fasting is sincere lies in forsaking the sin repented of and doing deeds of righteousness.

The object was (1) "that we might afflict ourselves before our God." It was an expression of repentance for sin, of casting out all obstacles from wrong motives or disobedient hearts which would render it impossible for God to give them success in their journey. It meant submission, consecration and repentance. (2) "To seek of Him a right way." The fasting was accompanied by prayer (v. 23) and was used "as the means of intensifying religious fervor in prayer through the restraint laid upon physical appetite."—Prof. Davidson. It was also the natural means of clarifying their own minds so that they could receive and recognize the wisdom God would bestow upon them.

V. 22. "For I was ashamed to require of the king," etc. There were more dangers on that four months' journey, particularly from "the robbers and Bedouins of the desert, who might easily inflict damage upon a large caravan by robbing stragglers and harassing the line of march."—Davidson. For they had a large amount of treasure with them. Ezra had told the king that God was with his people, and against their enemies; and, therefore, to ask a guard of soldiers might seem to the king to contradict his assertions, and bring disgrace on God's cause.

V. 23. "And He was entreated of us." Ezra had the assurance that his prayer had been heard.

The Treasure.—V. 24. "I separated 12," etc. He committed the treasure into the hands of 22 persons, 12 chief priests and ten Levites, of whom the first two are named. These men would take special charge and be responsible for the safekeeping of the treasure. Besides, it would relieve Ezra of all possible scandal in regard to it.

V. 25. "And weighed unto them the silver," etc. We may gather from this that the silver and gold were in bars or ingots, and not in coined money. The Persians had coined money at this time, but the treasury kept the bulk of its stores in bars (Herod., III, 96.—Pulpit Com. The weighing implied accurate accounting, such as always should be secured for public money.

V. 26. "Six hundred and fifty talents of silver." A talent of silver was about \$1,600. "Of gold a hundred talents." Gold is usually worth about 16 times as much as silver. The whole treasure was worth \$4,000,000 or \$5,000,000.

V. 27. "Drams." Dracms, worth about an English sovereign, or five dollars.

V. 28. "A freewill offering unto the Lord God." The money was for religious purposes, and would be a great help to the people at Jerusalem as well as a smooth way of Ezra to the needed reforms.

The Journey.—V. 31. "Departed . . . on the twelfth day of the first month." Nisan, about the time of the Passover, or our Easter, in March or April. "The hand of our God." His power; His care.

V. 32. "And we came to Jerusalem." On the first day of the fifth month (7: 9) in July.

PRACTICAL.

The world progresses in morals and religion through hard work, persistent courage, untiring zeal, complete consecration, in spite of many obstacles.

There is more than one way of expressing our confidence in God. Ezra refused to ask for an armed guard for his journey. Nehemiah, with equal faith, did accept the convey. So Muller showed his faith in God for his orphanage; the great missionary boards show an equal faith by pursuing other measures.

A LUNATIC FIFTY YEARS AGO.

Adventure of a Merchant in the Days When Insane People Were Chained Up.

Within the memory of people now living lunatics and weak minded people in country districts were confined in the houses of their relatives, sometimes chained to the wall. A story involving a case of this kind 50 years ago is related by a New York merchant.

He made his start in life by traveling through the country districts of Pennsylvania taking orders for and delivering goods of various kinds from the cities. He is now over 70 years of age.

"One fine afternoon," he said, "I called at a farmhouse to look for orders for goods from stores in Philadelphia and knocked at the door. A voice said 'come in,' and I pressed the latch and found myself in the kitchen of the house. I was confronted by a strange-looking man, unkempt and unshorn, who came forward from a place partitioned off from the rest of the kitchen, which looked like a stall of some kind. He told me that the master of the house was not in and that he was the only person there just then. I had no idea that I was talking to a lunatic, as the man seemed perfectly rational in spite of his strange appearance, and before I started to go out I asked for a drink of water.

"Certainly," said the man, "but if you have no objection to cream you can have it."

"I accepted the proposal with thanks, and the man said: 'Please hand me the key of the dairy. It is on that nail above the door and you are taller than I.' Without suspecting anything I handed him the key, remarking that it was a very small one. He instantly brought into view a chain by which he was secured to the wall and released himself by unlocking the padlock in less time than it takes me to tell it. I had previously noticed that he kept his hands behind his back while he talked. Then I realized that I was in the presence of a madman. I began to back to the door, but he caught my arm saying: 'Come with me for the cream.'

"I first thought of breaking away, but on second thought decided that it was safer to humor him a little, especially as he was between me and the door. I went with him to the dairy, the door of which was open. There he filled a bowl with cream and desired me to drink it. I drank part of it and made a move to get away, but his grasp tightened, and muttering something about 'cream not being solid enough,' he brought me back to the kitchen, where he stirred some kind of meal into the cream and handing me a spoon told me to sup it. I hesitated, when he seized a cudgel, which I suppose had been provided to keep him in subjection and holding it up menacingly, said: 'Sup it.'

"I made an attempt to eat the stuff and after a few mouthfuls said I had enough. He raised the cudgel again and ordered me to finish it. A happy thought struck me.

"If you bring me more cream I can finish it," I said, without daring to look round at the door, as he was watching me.

"The madman was taken off his guard and went back to the dairy for the cream. I immediately darted out, and the lunatic, hearing me open the door, came after me with the cudgel. It was now a race for life with me. I ran my very hardest, not even daring to use my breath in shouting for help, but after I had gone about a quarter of a mile I saw that the lunatic was gaining on me. Not a soul could I see along the road and though I kept my wits about me I could not find any lane or think of any way of doubling on my pursuer. When he was within about 20 yards of me I saw he was bound to overtake me, and I gave a cry for help. Just at that moment several men appeared. They came up in time to intercept the lunatic. One of them happened to be his brother and the madman cowered and dropped the cudgel at the sight of him. The brother apologized to me for his carelessness and invited me to turn back to the house and get some refreshment, but I had enough of it and declined the invitation. After that while I continued at the business I was always chary of entering a house where there was only a single occupant.

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We all love birds, but few know how to care for them properly. Every one owning a bird will therefore be interested in a book containing over 150 engravings and a lithographic plate showing all the different kinds of fancy canaries in their natural colors. It gives full information in regard to some fancy canaries and how to breed them for profit. Hints on the treatment and breeding of all kinds of cage birds, with descriptions of their diseases and the remedies needed to cure them. All about parrots and how to teach them to talk. Instructions for building and stocking an aviary. The most complete book of the kind ever published, irrespective of price. Mailed to any address on receipt of 15c. by the "Associated fanciers," 490 N. Third street, Philadelphia, Pa.

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End of a Romance.


Aurelia (anxiously)—Have you seen George this evening, papa? He promised to call. Papa—Yes, he did call, and I entertained him for an hour before you came downstairs. Aurelia—You entertained him, papa? Papa—Yes. I gave him a list of all the new dresses you had last year, and the cost of each. I never saw a man more interested, yet he left very hurriedly.—Tit-Bits.

Cooling.

They were seated at the ice-cream table. "Oh, dear!" said the sweet girl, fanning her cheek, "I'm melting." The young man saw an opportunity. "I knew it was rather warm," he said, "but I didn't think it was as hot as that." "What do you mean?" "Why, hot enough to melt pure gold."—Chicago Daily News.

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