

Sunday School Lesson

Golden Text: Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of Hosts, Mal. 3:7.

SCRIPTURE READINGS Monday, June 16—Ezra 10:7-12; Tuesday—Neh. 3:1-5; Wednesday—Neh. 5:9-13; Thursday—Neh. 8:1-8; Friday—Neh. 8:9-18; Saturday—Neh. 13:15-22; Sunday—Hosea 14:1-8.

THOUGHTS FOR THINKERS FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 22ND.

The Jews were finally saved of their iniquities for idolatry... They have never since been guilty of that particular sin. But while they have acknowledged God's claim upon them as a people, they have not been loyal to Him as individuals. Of course, it must be remembered that there are always exceptions, and sometimes quite numerous exceptions, to any sweeping statement of that sort. There were, no doubt, many individuals among the Jews both in Jerusalem and in the east who did love God and tried to please Him.

When Cyrus gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem it was expressly for the purpose of building the Temple, yet it was not built during his reign. The returned exiles had first to find homes for themselves and get settled down in their new quarters, and by the time they had done that their enthusiasm for the building of the temple seems to have subsided.

And when they did get to work in earnest, their enemies sent a complaint against them to the new king Cambyses, son of Cyrus, who is called Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:6, 8, and he forbade them to go on with it. But after his death and that of his successor Smerdis (who was a usurper, and only reigned one year) the Jews were urged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to begin again. And when their neighbors complained to the new king Darius I, he commanded them to help the Jews, instead of hindering them. Then the work went on smartly and the Temple was finished in four years more.

Here endeth the sixth chapter of Ezra, and the seventh chapter begins fifty-eight years later. We have no account of these fifty-eight years, but it is evident from what follows that the people generally had become so absorbed by the pursuit of happiness that religion had to a great extent lost its hold on them. Bad things had got into a very discouraging condition another great man appeared on the scene.

There was a diligent student of the law of Moses, named Ezra at Shushan (Susa) who was in high favor with Artaxerxes King of Persia. He obtained from the king permission to go to Jerusalem, taking with him many Jews as wanted to go. He also received a large sum of money from the king and his princes and permission to collect as much as he could from others, and a large order on the king's treasurers for whatever he might need for sacrifices. The king also gave him authority to appoint magistrates, and generally to act as governor of Judah, and to punish any who refused to obey the law of God.

Ezra found himself in a difficult position when he was ready to start. It was a three-month journey up the Euphrates valley and then down through Syria to Jerusalem. He was known to have a great deal of gold and silver and therefore he was liable to be attacked by robbers at any place where the population was scarce. He knew he could get a guard of soldiers if he asked the king for it, but he had been telling the king of the greatness of Israel's God, and of His power to protect those who put their trust in Him. If he had asked for a guard the king would have thought that he had not much faith in the God about whose power he had boasted. Therefore he felt that he must depend entirely upon God's protection.

In the circumstances Ezra was fully justified in committing himself and his companions and the treasure to God's care without seeking any other protection, because the heathen king would not have understood the truth that God requires us to do what we can toward answering our own prayers. The Devil told Jesus that he could safely throw himself down from a pinnacle of the Temple because God had promised to give His angels charge to protect him against accident, but Jesus answered: "It is written: Thou shalt not tempt (test) the Lord thy God." It is a sin to incur danger unnecessarily and ask God to protect us. Cromwell's motto: "Trust in God and keep your powder"

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dry," shows that he was no faultless. He knew that the issue of every battle depended upon God, and he was convinced that he had a right to expect God's help in answer to prayer, but he knew also that God works through instruments, and preferably through the instrumentality of those who seek His aid. David was quite sure God would give him victory over the giant, but he knew he could not fight the giant with Saul's armor because he did not know how to use it. He prepared for the combat as if he had been depending entirely on his own strength and skill.

At Jerusalem Ezra learned that many of the people had become demoralized through marriage with heathen wives, and he was very greatly distressed. He says: "I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished."

Then, when the people had come to the Temple for the evening sacrifice, Ezra fell on his knees before them all and prayed aloud confessing the sin of the people with tears, and seeking forgiveness; although he seems to have felt that he had almost no right to expect God to forgive in view of the base ingratitude of the people after all God had done for them.

Then a proclamation was sent out commanding all the people to come to Jerusalem within three days, and when they came all those who had married heathen women were compelled to confess their sin and put away their wives. There was a general confession of sin and revival of religion at that time but evidently the revival did not last very long, for we find later that all the work had to be done over again. Ezra seems to have gone back to Persia for a time, and when fresh from his overcast and the stimulation of his zeal for God, the people gradually lost interest in religion, and devoted themselves to the business of making money and enjoying life.

But there was another great Jew at the court of Artaxerxes. His name was Nehemiah and he was the King's cupbearer. That was a very high office, for eastern kings were always afraid of being poisoned in their wine, and they tried to secure for the office of cupbearer a man whom they could trust implicitly.

Some men who had come from Jerusalem told Nehemiah that the city was in a very dilapidated condition and the people were in great affliction and reproach, and this news grieved him exceedingly.

His first action was to pray over the matter very earnestly, confessing the sin of the people as if it was his own sin, and pleading God's promise to forgive the people if they repented. Then he found a suitable opportunity to ask the King for permission to go to Jerusalem and build the wall, and the King gave him permission and also gave him an order for the supplies that he would need.

Nehemiah had the toughest kind of a time building the wall of Jerusalem on account of the malicious hostility of the people about him, but he proved himself a very brave and determined patriot. He was as hard as well as brave, and at last got the wall finished.

Then Ezra turned up again and read the law of Moses to the people, and they were ashamed of themselves and afraid of the penalties which the law pronounced against the conduct of which they had been guilty. Then there was another great revival of religion, accompanied with great rejoicing, but as usual, because of guilt passed away and the multitude went back again to their ordinary condition of worldliness.

"On our way eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. Neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh. 8:10.) "All the is your strength." (Neh. 8:10.) "All the is your strength." (Neh. 8:10.) "All the is your strength." (Neh. 8:10.)

Every genuine revival among the Israelites was an occasion of great rejoicing, and that is true of all revivals still. Jerry McAuley, the father of city missions in New York, was instrumental in saving many who had been far down in degradation, and he made a point of encouraging a spirit of laughter in his meetings. The present writer when at one of his meetings down in Water street, took occasion to warn the converts against what seemed to him a tendency to frivolity in their manner of testifying to the grace which they had received, but Jerry jumped up at once and said: "He doesn't know anything about it. When I used to walk my cell in the Tombs (prison) I had my face as long as today and tomorrow, but since I was saved I can do nothing but laugh. Laugh away, boys." He understood his cross, for he had been one of them. Religion should always be a source of joy, and these poor fellows were showing their joy in the way that was most natural to them.

QUESTIONS IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON.

How did God open the way for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem according to His promise? (See Jer. 29: 10, 11 and Isa. 44:28, 45:4.)

What reason did Cyrus give for allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem? (Ezra 1:2)

Who were the leaders of the Jews who returned?

How were they hindered from building the Temple for a time? What prophets urged them to begin again?

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Bible Thoughts For Today

June 21. A NEW COMMANDMENT I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.—John 13:34, 35.

June 22. HE WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH IN VICTORY; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall He take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it.—Isaiah 25:8.

June 23. IS IT NOT to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?—Isaiah 58:7.

June 24. PURE RELIGION is undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.—James 1:27.

June 25. THOU ART MY LAMP, O Lord: and the Lord will lighten my darkness. For by thee I have run through a troop; by my God have I leaped over a wall.—2 Samuel 22:29, 30.

June 26. BE KINDLY AFFECTIONED one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another; recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.—Romans 12:10, 17, 21.

June 27. SEEK YE THE LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.—Isaiah 55:3, 7.

What did Haggai say about the glory of this second Temple? (See Hag. 1:3-9.)

What change came over Joshua the High Priest in Zechariah's vision? (Zech. 3:1-5.)

What real change did that vision represent? (See Isa. 64:3; Luke 15:14, 22; James 1:12, and 1 John 3:2.)

As a kitchen disinfectant salt has no equal. Also it cleans iron, makes a good dentifrice, brightens the carpets, removes egg stains from silver spoons, will cause fruit stains to be more easily removed from linen, will clean brass.



CORN ERED

JOHN BULL. "Think we've got him at last, my dear." (Herr Marx, the leader of the German Centre Party, is forming a new Government which must inevitably ask the Reichstag to accept the report of the Experts on Reparations. Rejection would mean political and economic ruin for Germany.) —News of the World.

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