

Sabbath School Department.

International Bible Lessons.

Lesson II. January 12.

THE DEDICATION.

Ezra vi: 14-22.

GOLDEN TEXT: "The glory of the 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." Hagai 2: 9.

Time. B. C. 575, Spring; 20 years after the beginning recorded in last lesson.

Place. Jerusalem (then partly rebuilt.)

Introduction.

The Building. Twenty years elapsed between the commencement of the rebuilding of the Temple and its completion. This interval was not taken up with the work of building. It is calculated that for sixteen years the work went on more or less steadily, and was then brought to a stand-still for three years through the machinations of the adversaries of the Jews. They were in this instance a neighbouring people, the Samaritans. After the work was resumed, opposition was offered by high officials of Syria and Palestine—Tatnai and others, and in Nehemiah's time, when the city wall was re-building, Sanballat and others conspired against the Jews. But it will be borne in mind that it was the Samaritans that caused the Temple work to cease.

Samaritans. How this people was composed may be seen from Ezra x: 9, where we are told of a mixture of Assyrians, Persians, and others who were brought in by Assnapper to inhabit Samaria, after the ten tribes were carried away. It is probable that no Israelites, or very few, were found among them; for when Shalmaneser "carried Israel away into Assyria" it is likely that he emptied Samaria of its inhabitants. After the newly-imported people had taken possession of Samaria "the Lord sent lions among them," 2 Kings xvii: 25, and they, thinking that the God of the land was angry because they had neglected his worship, petitioned for one of His priests to instruct them. The king of Assyria sent one to them, who taught them "how they should fear the Lord." But they accepted God only as a necessary addition to their already large circle of gods. "They feared the Lord and served their own gods," 2 Kings xvii: 23. When the Jews suddenly appeared in Judea, to the south of them, and began preparations for the temple, the Samaritans, jealous of them and angry at their own expulsion from any share in Jewish worship, wrote letters to the Persian king, and succeeded in alarming him concerning the intentions the Jews had in building; so that he ordered the work to stop. The Samaritans afterwards welcomed among them Manasses, a man of priestly lineage, expelled (B. C. 409) from Jerusalem by Nehemiah for an unlawful marriage, and with his aid obtained permission from Darius Nothus to set up a temple on Mount Gerizim. By degrees, idolatry was abandoned, the Law—the five books of Moses—was adopted as their sole code, and direct descent from Abraham was boldly asserted. For instance, the woman at the well said to Christ, "Art thou greater than our father Jacob?" We may be sure that religious rivalry did not increase the friendship of the Samaritans for the Jews.

Resumption of the work. Although the Jews were forced to give up the Temple building for a time, yet they seemed to have remained idle in the matter longer than was necessary, and to have given their time and attention to the making of comfortable houses for themselves. It is easy for us to acquiesce in a state of things which suits our own selfish nature, even when it is a state we ought not to be in. One moment longer than we are compelled. People who have been prevented from attending the services of God's house often find it convenient to believe it still impossible to attend, when really the difficulties have diminished. But the Jews were not long allowed to defer their duty. Hagai and Zechariah appeared to reprove their carelessness, and inspire them with fresh enthusiasm for the work.

Exposition.

14. The elders, i. e., the chiefs or leaders, viz., Joshua and Zerubbabel, see chap. v: 2. Builded, urged on the work without further interruption, on account of the decree of Darius; see first verses of the chapter. Prophecy. Not merely the fore-telling of future events, but acting as God's spokesman, delivering God's message to the people, whatever that message may be. To understand the influence of these prophets just read the book of Hagai and some of Zechariah. What stirring words the old prophets used to utter, e. g., Hagai, i: 1-11; ii: 8-9. Always "Thus saith the Lord." Think of them first receiving from God their message and then going to the people and delivering it with the earnestness which God's presence had given them. Commandments of Cyrus, chap. i: Rom. 1: 5; 15: 6; 13. Darius, ch. 6: 1-2. Artaxerxes. What he did was done more than half a century later than this lesson, by gifts, he sent to Jerusalem (Ezra 7: 15-19); but he is included in the general statement of this verse. The Artaxerxes of Ezra 4: 7, cannot be meant, for he opposed and did not keep the building. Peloubet.

15. Adar, last month of Jewish year, i. e., end of our February, and beginning of March, sixth year etc., B. C. 515. Temple 20 years in building.

16. Children of Israel. No doubt a good many individual members of the dispersed ten tribes had come and joined themselves to the children of Judah and Benjamin. With joy. There were many things to cause sorrow, if they thought of former times. Comparatively how small their number now was; they were in subjection to a foreign power; their city, Jerusalem, was still partially in ruins; and what was this temple to Solomon's? Still, when they thought of their captivity, and of all the opposition to the building of the temple, they might well rejoice now that it was finished; and especially if they understood Hagai's glorious prophecy. Hag. ii: 7-9.

17. Compare with offering at dedication of former temple, 1 Kings viii: 63. Two classes of offerings, the first mentioned signifying the giving of themselves in entire consecration to God, the sin-offering denoting that they had sinned and that a sacrifice must be offered to meet the claims of the righteous law.

18. Establishment of the temple services as they had been in former times. "The priests and Levites were divided into 24 courses, some were officers, some porters, some musicians, some aided the priests in the sanctuary, some had charge of the tabernacle (1 Chron. xxiii: 24.) Although David arranged the priests and Levites according to their families, it was Moses who assigned to the priests and Levites their rights and privileges, their station and several duties."—Peloubet.

19. The Jewish month Nisan, end of March and beginning of April. The passover was their greatest feast, commemorating as it did their deliverance from Egypt, Exodus xii. They must have felt their national life returning when they were able to observe the passover again.

20. Read thus: "And the priests were purified, and the Levites, all of them as one man were pure." The external and legal purifications (Lev. xxii) were symbolical of the purity of heart necessary in order to serve God aright. The Levites killed the paschal lambs for all the people. In later times the ordinary practice was for each head of a family to slay for himself.

21. All such as had separated, etc. "These must either have been Israelites who had remained in Palestine through the period of the captivity, or proselytes from the heathen, who were now received into the Jewish state." Uncleaness, sins as well as legal defilements.

22. Feast of unleavened bread, etc. According to Exodus xii: 15. Unleavened i. e., made without yeast. The putting away of leaven at this feast is generally understood to symbolize the putting away of sin from the heart and life. King of Assyria. Darius, king of the Persian Empire which included Assyria. The Lord made them joyful. See their joy expressed in Psalms cxlvi-c, which were probably composed and used about this time.

Remarks.

1. The opposition they met in rebuilding the temple. There never was the time or the place in which God could be served faithfully, but opposition had to be met and overcome. If you are waiting until you see a perfectly smooth road before you, to enter upon God's service, you will never enter. Give yourself to God now, though a thousand things seem to stand in the way, and God helping you, you can surmount these difficulties as fast as you come to them. The obstacles we see before us are mere reasons for hesitating about serving God. See Matt. v: 29, 30. That is the principle for a Christian to act on.

They prospered through the prophesying, etc. To obey God's message is the way to prosper in God's work. Whatever you do, trifle not when you know God is speaking to you; hearken, ponder, act, and no equivocation or excuses about it. Do what God tells you and He will keep Tatnai, Shethar-bozai and the rest from harming you.

3. The work crowned with success, because it was God's work. And so of the gospel, and so of the spiritual life in the soul. See Isaiah liii: 11. Acts v: 35, 39. Phil. i: 6.

4. Kept the dedication with joy. "We have reason to think it the fairest day that ever shone forth to us wherein the building of God's house is raised up in our soul. How we should shout at the laying of this foundation, and feast at the laying on of the roof."—Hall.

5. V. 17. Consecration of ourselves to God, and reliance on Him who vicariously suffered for us: this is the whole of experimental religion. This self-consecration and the substitution of Christ symbolized in the sacrifices of the O. T.

6. V. 20, 22. God is pure and God is good. Hence we must worship Him with pure hearts, and to serve Him in joyous.

Rich Men's Sons.

The President of one of our largest banks said to us a day or two since, that a rich man's son had just left his place, and that he was the last man of the kind he should ever employ. The man was faithful, honest, and fulfilled intelligently and well all the duties required of him; but just as he had become accustomed to his work, he found out that it was too confining, and a raw clerk had to be put in his place. A bad look this for rich young men; but it is the old story repeated for the thousandth time. If rich men's sons will not endure the drudgery by which nearly all their fathers secured money and position, they must take a secondary place in the next generation; and oftener they drop out of sight amid the idle, worthless herd, if, indeed, they escape an association with loafers and criminals. What say the labor reformers to facts like these, for facts they are beyond question? Nearly every man in any leading position in the community began life poor. Let the sons of our rich men take warning and go to work honestly and faithfully every day, if they hope to fill the positions honorably held by their fathers.—N. Y. Tribune.

Fire Low.

Mr. Hill always wished to be considered the apostle of the common people, in resemblance of Him whom the common people heard gladly, and in whose teaching "the poor had the gospel preached unto them." But he who undertakes this work of faith and labor of love will find that he has not to address angels, or sometimes hardly men. He will need to learn the advice which the philosopher was wont to give his pupils, "Study the people," or that which Cromwell gave to his soldiers, "Fire low." Had his men fired high, they would have done no more execution than some of our preachers, who shoot over their hearers' heads.—Rowland Hill.

The Fatal Slumber.

There is a little story that has gone the rounds of the American press, that made a great impression on me as a father. A father took his little child out into the field one Sabbath and, it being a hot day, he lay down under a beautiful shady tree. The child ran about gathering wild flowers and little blades of grass, and coming to his father and saying, "Pretty, pretty." At last the father fell asleep, and while he was sleeping the little child wandered away. When he awoke his first thought was "Where is my child?" He looked all around, but he could not see him. He shouted at the top of his voice, but all he heard was the echo of his own voice. Running to a little hill, he looked around and shouted again. No response. Then, going to a precipice at some distance, he looked down; and there, upon the rocks and briars, he saw the mangled form of his loved child. While he was sleeping his child had wandered over the precipice. I thought as I heard that, what a picture of the church of God! How many fathers and mothers, how many Christian men are sleeping now, while their children wander over the terrible precipice, right into the bottomless pit? Father, where is your boy to-night?—D. L. Moody.

What the Voice Betrays.

A writer in the New York Tribune, discoursing upon tones, says, "The shrill-tongued scold has the same vocal organs which in Nilsson charm the world, and the difference between the notes of the two is largely a difference of adjustment of temper and of culture." The writer continues: "There are voices that diffuse balm and sweetness and love in every vibration; there are others that irritate and exasperate; there is the voice of command, of entreaty, of expostulation. As the muscles of the face acquire at length a fixed and settled position, and give permanent expression to the face, so the muscles which are concerned in the production of voice acquire at length a fixed and settled position and give permanent expression to the voice.

Persons habitually ill-tempered stamp the expression of ill-temper on their faces and in their voices; persons habitually amiable, refined, cultivated, show these qualities in their faces, in their voices; and there is no mistaking them.

The voice often betrays what the face conceals, and is a surer index of character to those who can interpret its modulations than even the face.

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