

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON,  
AUGUST 20, 1922**

BY REV. M. F. HODGES

Subject—"The second return from exile." Ezra 7:10; 8:21-23; 8:31-32.  
Golden Text—"The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him."—Ezra 8:22.

Time—About 450 B. C.  
Places—Babylon and Jerusalem.

A pitiable condition existed among the Jews after their return from Babylon under Zerubbabel. There was some prosperity at first; but soon their enemies came against them and hindered the reconstruction of the temple for a period of about fifteen years. A new decree is issued by the king of Babylon and the work is again taken up; but they never finished the work of rebuilding the temple and city. They soon went into a state of careless living, and became mixed to a great extent with the heathen about them. About seventy-five years after the first 50,000 under Zerubbabel, Ezra the learned scribe led another 7,000 spoken of in today's study. About fifty years have elapsed since Zerubbabel had finished what he could do to restore the city and temple; what had been done had in large measure gone to ruin when Ahasuerus gave Ezra permission to lead the people back for the completion of the task. The one outstanding thought in the study of these lessons is the long suffering of Jehovah with these ever sinning people.

Every great work undertaken by God among men, requires a great man to lead the forces; in this undertaking Ezra is the man for the hour. Ezra was a man of sound piety, sound learning and unwavering integrity. He was a man upon whom God could depend, the greatest thing that can be said of any man. It was the task of Ezra to gather up the fragments of what had been done, and introduce again the worship of Jehovah, the true God among them. Persia was powerful and far reaching in splendor, Greece was far famed and had much glory, but none of these were as great as the little company of Jews marching from captivity back to the land of their nativity. All the campaigns of Greece were small and all the letters of Greece insignificant compared to the promises made and fulfilled in the Holy Scriptures to these exiled and returning Jews. In the Book lay the hope of the world and from this remnant of Jews was to come the Savior of men, the redeemer of the

world. A small number of priests had returned under Zerubbabel, Ezra now calls for a number of Levites. The number of Levites volunteering to go was small. When we inquire why only the small number willing to go, the answer does not come. They doubtless preferred to stay in Babylon rather than serve Jehovah in the holy city. Some folks in the world make the same choice today. They prefer the places of worldly amusements and what the world has to offer rather than the service of their God.

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Notice Ezra did not tell the people to do as he told them but he set the example by the doing himself. The preacher must live his own preaching or else become a laughing stock among those with whom he mingles. The world will never excuse inconsistent living on the part of the preacher. His life must be that of doing along with the telling of others how they must do.

Ezra makes a wise beginning. "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a right way for us, and for our little ones; and for all our substance." Ezra says he is ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers, knowing that they had been disobedient, so he resorts to humility and prayer and the Lord hears and answers them. A proud and haughty spirit never gets an audience with the King of Kings. Some times the preacher looks for the posture of the folks during prayer and finds them treating the hour with all indifference, some times sitting erect, not even bowing or closing the eyes. Often the prayer is disturbed by turning leaves in hymn books. This indifference is often observed when some one leads prayer for whom we happen to have no special liking. Meekness and humility will insure a hearing at a throne of grace. When we know what prayer really is, we will hide the things that hinder, be they what they may.

Ezra had some convictions and was not afraid to stand by them. God will always honor the man who has some backbone. When our convictions are right and we have the moral courage to stand by them, God will stand by us. There is no class of men under the sun who need to have right convictions and then the courage to

stand by them as does the prophet of God. The world may not like them and often the church will not; but God will honor the man who has them just the same. Every man who does the right, need have no fear of being on God's side. Ezra was undertaking a great task. They carried, as has been computed about \$5,000,000 in treasures. A band of armed guards would have served well from the human standpoint for protection against robbers; but the watch care of Jehovah was worth more than an army of a million men.

They have received an answer to their prayers and start on the long journey. They could have made the trip in a few days by automobile and truck. They had none of these modern conveniences and therefore had to travel in pilgrim style, taking four months to make the trip. Read the thirty-first verse and see that they had war on the road. Somehow the devil knows when the hosts of God are marching to victory and always has his imps on the lookout for them. Let one of the devil's imps come to town on the morning or afternoon train dressed in silks and satins and somehow it is known before the train arrives. Let the revival begin and see how the devil turns his hell hounds loose to destroy if possible every good impulse. God's people were protected by the heavenly host on this march. His church today has the same protection when she goes from her knees in humble prayer. Ezra and his band reached the old Jerusalem in safety, so millions of the faithful of earth will reach the new Jerusalem in safety. Though the enemy is on the alert to destroy, yet the church is marching on to victory. Thank God for the assurance of safe arrival!

**MAN SERIOUSLY HURT  
WHEN HIS AXE SLIPS**

J. W. Burns, a young man of Pittsboro, was perhaps fatally injured Friday morning while working on a bridge in that county. The young man was using an axe in cutting some timbers overhead. The axe slipped from the handle and struck him on the head, splitting his skull open. Mr. Burns was immediately taken to a nearby hospital where he was given medical attention. It was found that his skull was fractured and a portion of his brain was taken out. The young man's recovery is doubtful. He is about 25 years of age.

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