

The Sunday School

BIBLE LESSON

Abridged from Peloubets' Notes.

Fourth Quarter.

KEEPING THE SABBATH.

Lesson X. December 3. Neh. 13:15-22.

Compare Isa. 56:1-8; Jer. 17:19-27.

Read Nehemiah 13. Commit Verses 15-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, Ex. 20:8.

EXPLANATORY.

I. THE FLOOD-GATES OF EVIL ARE OPENED.—Vs. 1-5. The reforms of Nehemiah accomplished great things, and made an era in the progress of the kingdom of God. But as in all revivals and reforms, there followed a reaction, especially on the part of those who were carried along by the current of popular feeling, but were not really changed in heart. Doubtless the reaction began during the twelve years before Nehemiah was recalled to Persia; but doubtless in his absence, and after the death of Ezra, those who had been silenced and subdued by their presence took courage to return to their evil courses, so that a deluge of sins rushed in upon the nation like an overwhelming torrent, carrying away the barriers of law and religion, and covenants and promises.

II. NEHEMIAH SHUTS DOWN THE FLOOD-GATES.—Vs. 6-14. He himself, apparently taking part with his own hands, with great indignation drove Tobiah out of the temple, and restored it to its proper uses.

Nehemiah reinstated the priests and Levites, who had been compelled to go to their homes and earn their living, since the people refused to support them in their religious work. The services of the temple now went on according to law, and the tithes were brought in.

III. UNDERMINING THE KINGDOM OF GOD THROUGH SABBATH-BREAKING.—Vs. 15-17. 15. IN THOSE DAYS During Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem, while making the other reforms. SAW I. He did not depend on hearsay, but examined for himself, and found the facts.

Three Forms of Sabbath-Breaking. 1. "Working on their farms and keeping their laborers at work." IN JUDAH. In the country around Jerusalem. TREADING WINEPRESSSES ON THE SABBATH. The winepresses were large vats into which the grapes were placed, and the juice trodden out by the feet of men. BRINGING IN SHEAVES. Gathering their harvests and bringing them into the city.

2. "By transporting their goods." AND BRINGING IN SHEAVES. Into the city, and into the other walled towns. In the East the farmers all live in villages and towns, and "go forth" to cultivate the surrounding country. It is not unusual, therefore, for them to bring their harvest home to thresh it. The farmers brought their grain within the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah, to secure it against robbers, for the country was then in an unsettled and unsafe condition. WINE, GRAPES AND FIGS. For storage and sale. This required a large working force, and tempted the people to buy and trade on the Sabbath. By working thus on the Sabbath, they were ready for business as soon as the Sabbath was over.

3. "By the ordinary business and traffic through foreigners," who had no care for the Sabbath.

16. THERE DWELT MEN OF TYRE ALSO THEREIN. That is, in the city, Jerusalem. Devoted to commerce, they had formed a little settlement in Judea for the sale of their merchandise, "fish" (they were a maritime people) and other things.

SOLD ON THE SABBATH UNTO THE CHILDREN OF JUDAH, who were so contaminated by their heathen neighbors as to yield to the temptation to buy.

"The evil effects of Sabbath-breaking." 17. WHAT EVIL THING IS THIS THAT YE DO? What they did was evil for themselves and for their children.

1. It was squarely contrary to God's command, which, as God's people, they had covenanted to obey. It was deliberate disobedience, and no one can break down the wall of the Ten Commandments to let in one form of disobedience without opening the way for the entrance of all sins.

2. It destroyed the strongest influences for the upbuilding of their characters as children of God. A Sabbath full of business, work and trade leaves no time for the higher things,—for church going, for Bible study, for religious thought, and thus enslaves the soul to the body. So long as the spirit is worth more than physical comfort, so long as there is an immortal life beyond this, so long as men need every help to be good and strong and pure, so long is a religious Sabbath necessary to the highest good of man.

Man needs it as a day for moral training and instruction; a day for teaching men

about their duties, for looking at life from a moral standpoint. It is of great value as a means of improving the mind. The study of the highest themes, the social discussion of them in the Sabbath School, the instruction from the pulpit, the expression of religious truth in the prayer meeting, give an ordinary person more mental training in the course of his life than all his school days give.

IV. NEHEMIAH MAKES A SABBATH REFORM.—Vs. 17-22. First. He Reproved the Leaders. He did not reprove the weak and let the rich and strong do as they would.

17. I CONTENDED. Argued and used his official authority. WITH THE NOBLES. The higher classes, the people of prominence and influence, who were the most to blame, since they had better knowledge, and fuller control of their time, and who could have the most influence in favoring or opposing the reform. Those who have influence, whether of rank, or wealth, or character, or office, should be doubly careful as to their conduct. "A city set upon a hill cannot be hid." Those who own factories and stores, who control railroads and horse-car lines, who are in high office, have a large responsibility in the matter of Sabbath-keeping.

Second. He Warns them from their Own Past History. 18. DID NOT YOUR FATHERS THUS? Why was Jerusalem destroyed? Where had the nation been carried into captivity? Why were they now weak, and poor, and scattered? Let the prophets answer. One reason was that their fathers had refused to obey God's Sabbath laws. A broken Sabbath was the answer (Jer. 17:27; Ezek. 20:13. See also Isa. 58:13, 14).

Third. He Exercises His Authority. 19. BEGAN TO BE DARK BEFORE THE SABBATH. At sunset of the previous day, because their Sabbath began then. THE GATES SHOULD BE SHUT as usual, only they should NOT BE OPENED TILL AFTER THE SABBATH. MY SERVANTS SET I AT THE GATES. His own armed body guard, whom he could trust. THAT THERE SHOULD NO BURDEN BE BROUGHT IN. "Foot passengers were, no doubt, allowed to enter and leave the city on the Sabbath."

20. SO THE MERCHANTS. Not believing that the command would be strictly enforced. LODGED. Camped outside the walls, waiting for the gates to be opened on Sabbath morning, as formerly.

21. I TESTIFIED AGAINST THEM. Rebuking, commanding. "The merchants could not leave their wares unguarded; and the wares not being admitted into the town, they were obliged to camp out. Thus a crowd was collected about the gates, and a disturbance and excitement caused, which was unsuitable for the Sabbath. To prevent this, Nehemiah threatened to arrest the merchants. I WILL LAY HANDS ON YOU. Whereupon the practise was given up."

22. I COMMANDED THE LEVITES. The "Levites" would be more appropriate keepers of the city gates on the Sabbath day than his servants, for whom he, no doubt, had other uses. The Levites were therefore ordered to CLEANSE THEMSELVES, that is, to purify themselves from ceremonial uncleanness, and come and attend to guarding the gates on the Sabbath as a righteous duty. as indeed it was; for it was "to sanctify the Sabbath day," to keep it sacred, to save it from violation and profanation by the trafficking of the people.

Sunday is just as really a seventh day and the "Sabbath" day as is the Saturday Sabbath of the Jews. All the difference lies in beginning the count from a different point.

By keeping one day set apart for special uses, all days are made holy. To treat all days alike is to lower the spiritual value of all.

Set times of prayer help us to make all hours prayerful. Set times for study aid the education for all times. Definite times for meals cause the food to be useful all the day long.

It is not right to make laws compelling a religious Sabbath, but it is right to make such Sabbath laws as will enable all men to have a Sabbath rest, and to enforce these laws by State authority.

Sunday School Normal Notes.

No. II.—PIVOTAL WORDS.

Names applied to Deity in the Bible. Definition: "God is the infinite and perfect Spirit in whom all things have their source, support and end."—Dr. Strong.

1. Names applied to Deity in the Hebrew:

(a) Elohim, expresses the might of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

(b) Elyon. His sublimity. Gen. 14:22, the "Most High."

(c) Shaddai, the "Almighty." His all-sufficiency. Gen. 17:1; Phil. 4:19; 2 Cor. 13:5; 12:9.

(d) Jehovah. His unchangeable faith-

fulness to his covenanted promises to his people; see Exodus 3:15; Psalms 135:13; Hos. 12:5.

(e) Adonai. Expresses his lordship, which being delegated to others as also is his might as Elohim. Adonai and Elohim are used occasionally of his creatures, angels and men in authority, judges, etc. See Ps. 8:5; 97:7; 82:1, 6 and 7.

Elyon, Shaddai and Jehovah are never used but of GOD; Jehovah, the personal God of the Jews, and of the church in particular.

2. Names as translated and printed in authorized version:

(a) Lord in small letters stands for Hebrew Adonai; in capitals, LORD, for Jehovah.

(b) GOD in capitals also represents Jehovah, Gen. 15:2. Adonai Jehovah—LORD GOD, as printed.

(c) God in small letters with initial capital represents Elohim, which is plural in form and is the word most generally used for God, and expresses that he combines in himself, all the fullness of divine perfections in their manifold powers and operations; these the heathen divided among a variety of gods. Elohim concentrates all the divine attributes assigned to the idols severally, and, besides those, others which corrupt man never of himself imagined, infinite love, goodness, wisdom, creative power, inexhaustible riches of excellence, unity, self existence, grace, and providence are especially dwelt on. Exod. 3:13-15; 15:11; 34:6 and 7.

3. Trinity. The plural forms of the names in "Hebrew," hints at the plurality of Persons in the singular verb, implies the unity of the Godhead.

The distinctness of the Persons is also seen by the person-1 mention made and ascribed (a) To the Son, John 1:3; Psa. 33:6; mention made Prov. 8:22-32; 30:4; Mal. 3:1. When God the Sender is distinguished from God the Sent who "suddenly comes."

(b) Holy Ghost. See Genesis 1:2; Psa. 104:30.

(c) Three in one is implied in the following, Num. 6:25-27, also in the repeated "Holy" in Isa. 6:3.

4. Names applied to the Son especially in the New Testament.

(a) Jesus, Jehovah, salvation, for he himself saves his people from their sins, Matt. 1:21. Not merely like Joshua, he was God's instrument to save. Jesus does the work himself, this is meant to be taught by the name Jesus as announced by the angel to Joseph.

(b) Christ, Greek; Messiah, Hebrew; Anointed see 1 Sam. 2:10, Psa. 2:6 margin, Dan. 9:25, 26. Prophets, priests and kings were anointed, being types of him who combines all three in himself, Exodus 30:30, 1 Kings 19:15, 16, also Dent. 18:18, Zach. 6:13.

The New Testament shows that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus is his personal name, Christ his title. "Christ" implies his consecration and qualification for the work he undertook, and refers to his being anointed with the Holy Spirit, of which the Old Testament anointings were the type, see Psa. 45:7, also Matt. 3:16, John 3:34. Let us seek not only to know his name but his person, and see John 17:3. S. H. CORNWALL.

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