

The Sunday School

BIBLE LESSON

Abridged from Peloubet's Notes.

Fourth Quarter.

REBUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

Lesson VII. November 12. Neh. 4: 7-18. Read Chapter 4. Commit Verses 15-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.

Watch and pray, Matt. 26: 41.

EXPLANATORY.

I. NEHEMIAH'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.—We see in this lesson how the divine worked through the human in answering the prayer of Nehemiah.

A gloomy face might mean disaffection against the king.

But in Nehemiah's case the king was favorable. He learned the cause of his sorrow, and gave him leave of absence, appointment as governor, with letters commanding the other governors in the neighborhood of Jerusalem to give him all needful aid, together with a military escort.

Thus Nehemiah went up to Jerusalem, starting about the first of April, and reaching the city after three or four months' travel, some time in July. (Compare 2: 1 with Ezra 7: 9).

II. THE MIDNIGHT TOUR OF INSPECTION.—2: 11-18. Three days after his arrival Nehemiah went out alone with a few servants in the night to investigate the truth of the reports that had reached him. He had not told to any one his purpose in coming to Jerusalem. When he had ridden around the city, and taken in the situation, he summoned the leaders of the Jews, told them his plans, and they all agreed heartily to enter upon the work.

"Nehemiah," says Professor Adeney, "brought no new laborers; but he brought what was better, the one essential requisite for every great enterprise—an inspiration. He brought what the world most needs in every age."

III. THE BUILDING OF THE WALL.—Chap. 3. "The wall was parcelled out among forty-four working parties," some of whom were women, the daughters of the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem (v. 12), some nobles, others priests, Levites, merchants, the son of a goldsmith and of a perfumer.

IV. WORKING AMID THE BITTEREST OPPOSITION.—Vs. 1-12. A city was of little value in those days without walls. Enemies on every side could rob or destroy the inhabitants, no treasure was safe. If Jerusalem was to become the power that it once had been and still wished to be, it must be defended. Its site was originally chosen because it was a natural fortress, with "its singularly valuable ready-made defenses."

1. "Ridicule" (2: 19; 4: 1-3). The leaders of the heathen mocked them and laughed them to scorn. "Are these poor Jews going to do in a day what had taken their fathers years to do?"

2. "Slender" (2: 19; 6: 6). Their enemies said that the Jews were planning to rebel, and that Nehemiah was leading in the work that he might become their king. How did they know? "Gashmu saith it"; there was a report to that effect, and they believed it because they wished it to be true. "Gossip is a sort of smoke that comes from the dirty tobacco pipes of those who diffuse it; it proves nothing but the bad taste of the smoker."

3. "A general conspiracy" (vs. 7, 8, 11). 7. SANBALLAT, "who appears to be the governor of the city of Samaria." "He was a native of Horonaim, beyond Jordan (Neh. 2: 10), and probably a Moabite chief." TOBIAH, "A chief of the little trans-Jordanic tribe of the AMMONITES," and probably viceroy or chief adviser to Sanballat. ARABIAN. The wandering Arabs of the desert. "The Arab would scent prey in the project of a war-like expedition." ASHDODITES. From Ashdod, a Philistine city near the Mediterranean coast. "The Philistines were always hostile to Israel." Thus "all the flotam and jetsam of humanity, the ragged edges of society swept up by the broom of the war god," were opposed to the rebuilding of the walls, and WERE VERY WROTE.

8. AND CONSPIRED ALL OF THEM TOGETHER, breathed together in unison, as in singing, whispered secretly. TO COME AND TO FIGHT AGAINST JERUSALEM. They planned to take Nehemiah and the city by surprise, capture and slay the workers, and thus put a stop to the work.

4. "Discouragement of the workers." 10. AND JUDAH SAID. The Jews from outside the city who had been in closer contact with the heathen element, and were tainted. THE STRENGTH OF THE BEARERS OF BURDENS IS DECAVED. "The work was hard, and the carriers had become worn. The novelty of it had passed,

The higher the wall rose, the harder it was to carry materials to the top. The more stone they used, the more difficult it became to get suitable stone from the rubbish."

5. "Bad advice from friends." 12. THE JEWS WHICH DWELT BY THEM. By Sanballat and the other adversaries. THEY SAID UNTO US TEN TIMES. Repeatedly, again and again. They either gave friendly notice to Nehemiah of the proposed attack, or tried to persuade their fellows from the surrounding towns to hasten home in order to escape the threatened danger.

V. PRAYING, AND WATCHING, AND WORKING.—Vs. 9, 13-18. 9. MADE OUR PRAYER. . . . SET A WATCH AGAINST THEM, opposite the places where they were proposing an attack, the lower, less finished places.

13. THEREFORE SET I IN THE LOWER PLACES BEHIND THE WALL, AND ON THE HIGHER PLACES. There is no "and" in the original. Nehemiah means that in the less elevated places, where the wall was least strong by nature, he had his men posted on conspicuous spots within the walls, where they could be seen from a distance, and so deterred the enemy from advancing. He drew them up AFTER THEIR FAMILIERS, that each man might feel he was fighting for his brethren, sons, etc.

14. AND I LOOKED. He saw the enemy coming. ROSE UP, to take command and give orders. AND SAID. He spoke a few words to encourage his men, telling them to remember whom they fought under,—namely, the Lord; and what they had to fight for—namely, their homes, and all they held dear.

V. 15. THE ATTACK WAS NOT MADE, however. Perhaps the attacking party received word from their allies within the walls; perhaps they saw for themselves that the surprise had failed, and the Jews were prepared. This was not the first nor the last time when thorough preparation for fighting removed the necessity of fighting.

16. HALF OF MY SERVANTS. His personal retainers, trained men, who had guarded him on his journey. They were divided into two companies, who alternately worked and acted as guard. They could not work in their armor. HABERGONS, Old English for coat-of-mail, from "halo" (neck) and "bergen" (to protect). THE RULERS, rather captains, WERE BEHIND, with the warriors, and in the best position to direct the work and lead the soldiers.

17. THEY THAT BARE BURDENS. The carriers who could steady their load with one hand and hold their weapon in the other.

18. THE BUILDERS required both hands in laying the wall, so that they carried their swords by their side, ready to be grasped at a moment's warning.

Practical. Faith and works went together. Watching and praying, weak when apart, are a Gibraltar of strength when united. Praying is not a substitute for the use of means, but the power that inspires zeal and activity, quickens the invention, sharpens the intellect. And on the other hand, as Dr. Crosby says, "All the natural means, whether of mind or matter, form channels through which God conveys his grace in answer to prayer. To stop these channels is to cancel prayer."

The work was completed in the brief time of fifty-two days—on the 25th of Elul (the last of September). The walls must have been three or four miles long.

The new cabinet for Ontario was sworn in by Lieut. Governor Mowatt as follows: Premier and provincial treasurer, G. W. Ross; attorney general, J. M. Gibson; minister of education, Richard Harcourt; minister of agriculture, John Dreden; commissioner of crown lands, E. J. Davis; provincial secretary, J. R. Stratton; minister of public works, F. R. Latchford; ministers without portfolio, J. T. Garraw and Wm. Hart. It is positively stated ex-Premier Hardy has declined a seat on the high court bench.

Mr. William Fitzhugh Whitehouse, of Newport, R. I., accompanied by several Englishmen, will leave England on October 24 with an exploring expedition for Abyssinia. The British Resident in Abyssinia is helping in the arrangements, and the Royal Geographical Society of London has lent the expedition a number of valuable instruments. The expedition will go to western Abyssinia by way of Adis Abeba, where Mr. Whitehouse will be received by Emperor Menelik. Mr. Whitehouse will take sixty armed men, eighty Somali and Abyssinian porters, and ninety camels.

Admiral Sampson was presented with a sword at Trenton on Wednesday by Governor Voorhose on behalf of the State of New Jersey, as a mark of appreciation of his services during the Spanish war.



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