

What had been burned with fire? **The gates.**
 What did Nehemiah do when he heard this?
He wept and prayed.
 What did he confess to the Lord? **Sin.**
 Who had sinned against the Lord? **The Jews.**
 What did Nehemiah ask him to remember?
His promise of mercy.

Words with Little People.
 What to do when in trouble:
 Pray to the Lord.
 Confess your sin.
 Wait for his help.
 Expect him to help you.
Lesson Prayer.
 Lord, help me.

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

General Statement.

Our present lesson is taken from the Book of Nehemiah, which was written about B. C. 431. The book is largely a personal narrative, and is a natural sequel to the Book of Ezra. The two men thus named as authors were far more truly representative of the restored Judaism than were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and their colleagues, whose careers we studied last month, and whose piety and patriotism, while genuine, were sadly unenergetic and slow; heirs, respectively, of the ancient royalty and hierarchy, the springs of all their goodness were in the past. But neither Ezra nor Nehemiah had "hereditary rights;" at least, they did not base their authority on their great-grandfathers. They saw with clear vision the needs of the hour; they heard God's command; and with sublime faith and inexorable purpose they set themselves to the task of rebuilding their nation. Nehemiah was unmistakably "born king," though his father may have been a plebeian. As a Hebrew captive he was trained for the life of a Persian courtier. He became "cupbearer to the king," and so won his love that when the news of the desolation of Jerusalem caused him to look sad the king's sympathy led to the appointment of Nehemiah as governor of that city, with orders to rebuild and defend it, and with royal assistance to make possible the fulfillment of these orders. For at least thirteen years Nehemiah ruled over Judea with vigor and justice. He made Jerusalem the leading city of the land. But his greatest work was that of turning a little group of poverty-stricken and dejected Jews into a prosperous and well-organized nation of patriots, and exchanging their half-heathenish customs for unrivaled loyalty to the God of their fathers. Our lesson shows the very beginning of this great work.

Verse 1. Nehemiah the son of Hachabiah. His career is outlined in the General Statement. A sentence of Dr. Crosby's well describes it: "His administration of affairs was marked by patriotism, piety, prudence, perseverance, probity, and courage." **The month Chisleu.** The ninth month of the Jewish sacred year, corresponding nearly to our December. **The twentieth year.** Counting from the accession of the king, who has been identified with Artaxerxes Longimanus. This fixes the date near the close of B. C. 445, or ninety-one years after the return from captivity. **Shushan the palace.** A capital city of the Persian Empire, known to the ancient Greeks as Susa, and to the modern Bedouins as Shush; it was situated east of the Tigris and north of the Persian Gulf. The ruins of its palaces were discovered in 1852.

2. Hanani, one of my brethren. Probably, but not certainly, a brother in the fullest sense. He was afterward made a civic officer (Neh. 7. 2). **Men of Judah.** Rather, "men out of Judah." **I asked them.** In the midst of personal ease and honor Nehemiah's profound interest in his distressed compatriots is deeply impressive. (1) *We should ever have in our heart a love for God's people and an interest in God's cause.* **The Jews that had escaped.** Though ninety years had elapsed since the return

from exile, the Jews of Palestine were still known as "those who had escaped."

3. The remnant . . . are in great affliction. They had never prospered, and seemed now to be approaching a climax of suffering. Poor crops, alert and untiring enemies, and a pitiable lack of leadership had together brought on the hardest of hard times. Their nobles, selfish and unscrupulous, had made marital and political alliances with some of the worst enemies of the nation; the poorer classes were neglectful of the law of God. Vigorous patriotism and vigorous religion were unknown. **The wall . . . is broken down, and the gates . . . are burned with fire.** This breaking down and burning had been done by Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers one hundred and thirty-seven years before. The shattered and charred remains of walls and gates were the last sight these poor men of Judah could distinguish as their beloved city slowly faded in the distance behind them. An oriental city is utterly defenseless while un-walled. Besides, as a Persian courtier must know, there were at the present time threatening political convulsions. A serious revolt in Egypt had been barely quelled, and the Arab tribes from the desert were raiding in all directions. One fact was clear, the wall of Jerusalem must be promptly rebuilt if it was ever again to be the