

Sabbath School Lessons.

Feb. 12. NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER. B. C. 445.

Lesson Nehemiah 1: 1-11. Gol. Text, Ps. 30: 10.
Memory vs. 8-9. Catechism. Q. 47.

Persia—About 30 years before the date of this lesson, Esther had become queen of Persia, wife of Xerxes the Great, and Ezra, a man of 24 years, and Nehemiah, a lad, were at the time in Shushan.

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, are the history of Israel both in Persia and in Palestine, the century after the captivity. First come chapters 1 to 6 of Ezra, written by him, but recording events previous to his birth. Then between chaps. 6 and 7 is a gap of 57 years, of which the book of Esther is the only glimpse we have of the condition of the Jews who had not come back to Jerusalem. Then come the last chapters of Ezra, while Nehemiah continues the story for about 11 years.

The prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, covering the same period as the three histories, show the moral and religious condition of the people.

As told in previous lessons, Zereubabel at the end of the 70 years captivity, 538 B. C., and by the command of Cyrus, led back a band of exiles to Jerusalem. They settled in the land, and laid the foundation of the temple. For 16 years, the work, from opposition, ceased entirely. Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets, then aroused the people once more, the temple was finished and dedicated some 20 years after it had been begun.

57 years pass, the first enthusiasm has died out. Ezra 458 B. C., leads up another band of the many Jews, who, as we learn from the book of Esther, still remained in the land.

13 years more come and go, and a young Jew, Nehemiah, an officer in the Persian Court learns their sad state. It lies a burden on his heart, and he carries his burden to the Lord in the prayer of the lesson.

I. *The sad state of Jerusalem* vs. 1-4. *Nehemiah*—a Jew, the king's cupbearer, vs. 11, not a menial, a high and trusted officer. *Shushan*—the scene of Esther's story some 30 years before. *Reproach*—The tribes in the land were their enemies, be cause not allowed a part in the temple building, and later, because Ezra had made the Jews give up their heathen wives. *Fasted*—like Daniel 9:3; Esther 4:16; Ezra 10:6.

II. *Confession of Israel's sin* vs. 5-7. *Terrible*—to His enemies. What awe and reverence! *Covenant*—God keeps His agreements. *Day and Night*—Prayer without ceasing. *Confess*—It was Israel's sin that had brought upon them all this trouble.

III. *Pleading God's promises* vs. 3-11—God loves to be reminded of His promises. It shows faith in Him. *Transgress*—They had done so and He had fulfilled his word. *Turn—gather*—Let that promise also come true. God has more delight in fulfilling His promises than His threats. *Prosper*—a definite prayer. After long thought he had decided to ask the king to let him go to Jerusalem and help. What a prayer, so full of faith in the promises?

1. The ills of the church grieve true hearts.
2. When ills come, pray.
3. Pray in a spirit of penitence.
4. Pray for a definite thing.
5. Plead the promises, keep them ever in mind to strengthen faith.

REBUILDING THE WALL.

Feb. 19.

B. C. 444.

Lesson, Neh. 4: 9-21.
Memory vs. 11-21.Golden Text, Neh. 4: 9.
Catechism, Q. 48.

Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the king of Persia, who was the son of the king that married Esther some 30 years before. If the king drank wine the cup-bearer had to taste it first to show that he believed it not to be poisoned. Then he had to guard the entrance to the royal apartments. He could allow others to enter or keep them out as he might choose. His position was thus one of great trust and influence. He was nearer the king than any other officer.

This lesson shows the difficulties of rebuilding the wall and how these were met.

I. *Prayer and watching*, vs. 9-12. These must go together. Pray as if all depended upon God; watch as if all depended upon self. *Judah said*—The Jews who had been living outside the city; among the heathen, and were not very zealous. *Bearers of burdens*—The method of removing rubbish instead of by wheelbarrow or cart, was, and is yet in the East, by baskets. *Adversaries*—These planned to fall upon them unawares and slay them. *Jews*—Who were living among the adversaries or heathen round about, and were not joining in the wall building. These were half friendly and told the builders they had better stop or their enemies would be sure to be upon them.

II. *Trusting and watching*, vs. 13-15. *Swords*—Nehemiah prepared for the worst and then encouraged them to fight for their homes by the assurance that the Lord was with them, vs. 15. *Returned*—The enemy found that they could not steal a march upon the builders and gave up the attempt. The latter returned to their works.

III. *Trusting and watching*, vs. 16-21. *Half*—He would not let the work cease nor would he run the risk of surprise, so half wrought and half stood guard. v. 17, *Laded*—Every one that bare burdens laded themselves, and all, both builders and burden-bearers, had weapons by their side ready to fight at a moments' notice. v. 20, *Trumpet*—To summon all to fight, and so, armed, watching, ready, they rebuilt the wall, some four miles in length in 52 days.

What a complete piece of organization and work, showing what one man of energy and wisdom can do, especially when God is with him.

Four things are prominent in Nehemiah. (1) His skill in the management of men. He divides them into families and sets each man to build over against his own house, thus making the most of their family interests and ambitions, and making them feel that the work was their own. (2) His power over men; he infuses into them his own spirit. (3) His determination in carrying on the work in spite of all obstacles. (4) His implicit trust in God.

1. We have a wall building in our individual lives, in our homes, in our communities and churches.

2. Along many lines of individual Christian life, home life, church life, the walls are sadly broken down.

3. How much one earnest, whole-hearted, God-fearing, consecrated man may accomplish in building up Zion's walls in a congregation or community.

4. The enemies of God and truth are ever active, seeking to discredit Christianity and the Church and Christians.

5. Watch and pray must be the motto of every Christian.

6. Our wall building can't be done in 52 days. It is a life-long work.