

PRIMARY LESSONS.

Prepared by Mrs. J. C. Yale.

Feb. 2.—The Reading of the Law.—

Neh. 8: 1-8.

Golden Text—Ps 119: 180.

LESSON BASIS.

When?—Probably in the year 433, B.C. (See Smith's Bible Dictionary, article, "Book of Nehemiah.")

Where?—At Jerusalem.

Who?—Ezra, Nehemiah, the Levites, and the Jewish people.

What?—The public reading and explaining of the Law of God.

Why?—That the Jews might both know and understand their own laws.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

About thirteen years before Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, there was living in Babylon a very good and wise man named Ezra. He was a Scribe—that is, a writer, or copyist of the Law and Sacred Books—and also a seer. He must have been a great favorite with the King, for if you read the 7th chapter of Ezra, you will see how kind the King was to him, letting him go to Jerusalem, to look after the affairs of his own people, the Jews, and to see that they kept the law of their God and worshipped Him as He had commanded. You can read for yourselves the decree the King made; and see what rich presents he gave Ezra, and what more he commanded the keepers of his treasures to give him if he needed.

You will see, too, if you read the whole chapter, that Ezra did not, like many people we know of, take God's great kindness without thanking Him very heartily. So Ezra went to Jerusalem, and found the Jews were not as they should have been. They had fallen into all sorts of sinful ways; and he had great trouble indeed to set things right again, as you will see by reading what he himself says about it. After a while he got things settled, appointed Priests and others to see that God's laws were observed, and then he probably went back to the King of Persia, for we hear no more of him until the time of Nehemiah, when we find him at Jerusalem again.

LESSON TALK.

(1.) As one man—that is, as with one mind, one aim. Water-gate in the eastern part of the city and south of the Temple. They—that is, the people, asked to have the Law read to them. Some had disregarded it, some had forgotten it, some had never known it—a sad state of things for those to whom God had once given it, written with His own hand. Have we that same Law? Yes; and a great deal more, for we have the Gospel—the story of Jesus and His love. If we neglect, or forget, or do not learn it, are we very guilty? Read Hebrews 2: 3.

(2.) Congregation—men and women, and children old enough to understand. first day of the seventh month—a memorial Sabbath—kept, probably, in memory of the giving of the Law 1 Lev. 23: 24.

(3.) Read . . . from morning until mid-day. This was an out-door meeting lasting from morning until noon, and yet the people were attentive. Inattention to God's word is a sin. Does God command us to hearken to what He says? Read Mark 7: 14. What if we disobey? See Deut. 18: 18, 19.

(4.) Most, if not all of these were Levites.

(5.) The Book—the written Law. Above the people,—4th verse. Stood up,—the attitude of reverence—they were listening to God's own words.

(6.) Blessed the Lord. Spoke words of praise and honor—the very first thing the Saviour would

have us do when we pray—think first of God, last of ourselves. Luke 11: 2. Amen, amen,—a solemn form of assertion; as much as saying, "let God be witness that we agree to all that has been said." Lifting the hands—the usual attitude of blessing, showing that it is looked for from above. With bowed heads—the attitude of worship, implying reverence towards God and a deep sense of personal unworthiness. What the poor publican when he prayed? See Luke 18: 13, 7, 8. As Ezra read, the others explained, so that all the people could understand them. They did what your teachers do every Sabbath, children.

What does God say about those who do not try to understand? Ps. 82: 5. It is a grievous sin not to try to understand what God says to us. Notice what great pains God caused those men to take in order to have the Jews understand. Does He take even more pains to have you understand? What does He do for you that He did not do for them? Is God very anxious that everybody should understand what He says? Read Deut. 32: 29.

Dear children, have you ever thought much about God's Law? You know the ten commandments of that Law, and some of you remember that our Lord Jesus said that all of their requirements can be reduced to these two things—*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* This great Law is binding upon all the intelligent creatures God has made. But we are sinners, and in sinning have lost the power to keep it, for we sin in some way every hour we live. But, dear children, God isn't willing we should perish; so He has given us a Saviour who kept all that holy Law, and then bore the punishment it inflicts upon sin, and all that *we might be saved!* God loves poor sinners, and wants to save them, or He would never have given His precious Son to die for us. And now, because Jesus has kept this holy Law, and taken the punishment of sin upon Himself, He is able to save all that will come, and give themselves to Him. Dear boys and girls, and little children, have you done that? If not, do not delay, for Jesus calls you. Come to Him to-day—*this very day.*

To-day the Saviour's call
Sounds sweet, and full, and free,—
"Suffer the little children all
To come to Me!"

Feb. 9.—The Keeping of the Sabbath—
Nehemiah 13: 15-22.

Golden Text—Ex. 20: 8.

LESSON BASIS.

When?—433, B.C.

Where?—In Jerusalem.

Who?—Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, (Governor), and the Sabbath-breakers.

What?—The enforcing of God's Law against Sabbath-breaking.

Why?—That God's Law might be honored, and the people kept from sin.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

It is not easy to be sure we have the history of Nehemiah correct in all respects, for portions of the book that bears his name are found in Ezra, and there is reason to believe that a good deal of Nehemiah's life has been lost. If we put together certain things in the Books of Nehemiah and Ezra that evidently have a connection, it will appear probable that Nehemiah was obliged to return to Persia once or twice while his work was going on, in order to clear himself of charges brought against him by his enemies; and that he worked in Jerusalem, instead of being done in the incredibly short time which, at first sight, it seems to have taken, actually took about 12 years. But, from what we can learn of this great

and good man, we may be sure he was one worthy to be both honored and admired. His courage, his perseverance, his love of his own nation and country, but, above all, his *piety*, make him a safe model for our study and imitation. From the few glimpses of his history that we get, we may learn that God guides and protects those who trust in Him;—that the holiest men are ever the greatest men;—that he who fears God most fears man least;—and that, *"when a man's ways please the Lord He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."*

LESSON TALK.

(15.) In those days—that is, after Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem after having been for some time away. See verse 6. Did he see the people going up to the temple to worship God? A few, probably, but many more were openly breaking the Law of the Sabbath day. Read Ex. 20: 8, 9, 10, 11. Are you surprised that they should forget so soon? No doubt you are; but do you remember any better?—and you have a great deal better means of knowing God's will than they had. If they sinned in breaking God's law who knew so little, how will it be with you who know so much? Not better, surely, but *wiser*, if you do as they did. And I testified against them—that is, laid the facts before the rulers, that they might punish the Sabbath-breakers according to the law.

(16.) Men of Tyre—from the city of Tyre—who came to Jerusalem to trade. The Tyrians were heathen, worshippers of idols, and yet those wicked Jews traded with them on the Sabbath day—they not only broke God's law themselves, but by their example taught others to do so. They were worse than the heathen, for they knew God's will and did not do it. What does Jesus say of such people?—Luke 12: 47.

(17.) Nobles—Princes and Heads of Families. Nehemiah contended with them—rebelled them sharply. Why? Because they had prevented the Sabbath-breaking if they had pleased; but they not only allowed it, but many of them, probably, took part in it. They were more guilty than the common people.

(18.) Did not your fathers thus? Read Jeremiah 17: 19-23. *Yehovah, &c.*—as much as to say—It will be your fault if God's terrible wrath comes, for you might have prevented it.

(19.) The Sabbath commenced at six o'clock in the evening, and ended at the same hour the next day. So, just before six o'clock, Nehemiah had all the gates shut, and set some of his own trusty servants to watch that there were no burdens brought in on the Sabbath day.

(20.) Lodged without Jerusalem. Probably they exposed their goods there, in order to tempt the Jews to come out and trade with them. It is not likely, had they simply lodged there, and, moreover, that Nehemiah would have troubled

any of them. I will lay hands on you—you will surely have you punished. This threat alarmed those dolators. They came no more on the Sabbath.

(22.) Even the Levites had to be commanded to attend to the duties of their office! Nobles, Levites—common people, all unfaithful to the Law of the Lord! Is it any wonder Nehemiah was grieved? Nehemiah asked God to remember him for what he had done. We must not think of this good man as being proud of having served God so faithfully. He does not say *pay me!—reward me!* but he says *"spare me according to the greatness of thy MERCY!"*—as much as to say, I have tried to do thy will; I do not cut me off among the wicked, but show MERCY to me!

Children, do you know the meaning of MERCY? It means *piety to those who deserve punishment*. Sinners not only *deserve* punishment, but they are condemned already. Think of it—*condemned already!* Now Jesus bore on the cross the sins of all who believe on Him. If you know that you believe on Jesus, you know that your sins are