

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, January 26th, 1879.—The Builders Interrupted.—Nehemiah iv. 7-18.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 15-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”—Nehemiah iv. 9.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Nehemiah ii. 9-20. Tuesday, Nehemiah iii. 4; i. 18. Wednesday, vs. 8; Acts xxiii. 12-22. Thursday, vs. 9; 2 Kings. xlix. 14-37. Friday, vs. 17; Matthew xxvi. 36-46. Saturday, vs. 18; Ephesians vi. 11-18. Sunday, vs. 19, 20; John xvii. 20-26.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. A conspiracy planned. Vss. 7, 8. II. Prayer and vigilance. Vs. 9. III. Discouragements. Vss. 10-12. IV. Working and warring. Vss. 13-18.

QUESTIONS.—What was the theme of the last lesson? How did he obtain it? After reaching Jerusalem, what ride did he take? Why? When his mission was known, what did the people do? What craftsmen helped? Chap. iii. 8, 32. What women? Chap. iii. 12; comp. Phil. iv. 3. What nobles refused? Chap. iii. 5. Who ridiculed the work? Chap. iv. 1, 3. How far, however, did it advance? Vs. 6.

I. Vss. 7, 8.—What conspiracy was now planned? With what design?

II. Vs. 9.—What was now done? Why is prayer, without watchfulness, sloth? Why is watchfulness, without prayer, pride?

III. Vss. 10-12.—Of what does Judah complain? What do the adversaries of Judah say? What word is brought into the city?

IV. Vss. 13-18.—What was Nehemiah's plan for conflict? What did he tell the people to fight for? How did he divide the people for work and for war? What care was taken to give tidings of danger?

Talk About.—Pious labor exciting opposition. Vss. 7, 8.—The time of insult and injury the time for prayer and watchfulness. Vss. 9.

NEHEMIAH'S OPPONENTS.—Nehemiah particularized the action of priests (chap. iii. 1); put an everlasting stigma on the nobles of Tekoa (chap. iii. 5); referred gratefully to the aid of various guilds of apothecaries, goldsmiths, and merchants; arranged that every one should build over against his own house, thereby blending personal with patriotic interests (chap. iii. 28); and made historic the hostility of the Moabites and Ammonites, who tried to prevent the new capital from rising again.

EXPOSITION.—Our lesson shows to us the people of God carrying to completion his work, in the face of determined opposition. We have (1), the forming conspiracy against them. Vss. 7-10. (2), The matured plot to destroy them. Vss. 11-14. (3), Their final success, and how it was achieved. Vss. 15-18.

I. THE FORMING CONSPIRACY.—(1), Its authors. (2), Its cause and aim. (3), Its effect on God's people—(a) moving to watchfulness and prayer; (b) yet disheartening.

II. THE MATURED PLOT.—To fall upon and overpower the builders by surprise. (1), Talked of among the conspirators. (2), Reported to the builders. (3), Preparations to resist. The forces (a) arrayed, (b) exhorted.

III. THE WALLS COMPLETED.—(1), The return to work—(a) because the plot was foiled, (b) by all the people. (2), Watching and working. “Ready for either.”

Verse 7.—Sanballat—See ii. 10, 19, and vi. 2, 14. He is called a “Haronite,” from Haronaim, in Moab. Thus as a Moabite he naturally was hostile to Israel; as allied, by marriage, to Eliashib, the high priest of Israel, he had a strong influence even within Israel; as a governor, or at least high civil officer, he had a large official influence outside of Israel; and as a man of great energy, and perhaps ability, he made the most of his advantages against God's people, being the leader and head of the opposition. Tobiah. An Ammonite (ii. 19), and hence the hereditary enemy of Israel—also “allied” [by marriage] to the high priest. xiii. 4, 7, 8. Doubtless the leader of the Ammonites. The Arabians. Headed by Geshem. ii. 19. Ashdodites. Ashdod was “one of the five confederate cities of the Philistines, situated about thirty miles from the southern frontier of Palestine, and three

from the Mediterranean Sea.” The Philistines were no friends of the Jews. That the walls of Jerusalem were made up. Literally, that a bandage was applied to the walls of Jerusalem. The figure is surgical—that of a wound dressed with bandages. The breaches in the walls were the wounds. Were very wroth. When the repairs began, they ridiculed the attempt as hopeless; and Tobiah was particularly witty in his sarcasms. ii. 19; iv. 3. They now see what earnest purpose is accomplishing, and merriment turns to hot wrath.

Verse 8.—Conspired all of them, etc.—It might seem strange that men holding office under Artaxerxes, should venture to do this against one just commissioned by Artaxerxes as governor, and sent for just this work. But we must remember the great distance from the Persian capital, the lawless character of the tribes, or parts of tribes, conspiring, the unprincipled character of the chief actors.

Verse 9.—Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God.—This implies that the conspiracy had become known to Nehemiah. He had evidence, at least, of a change in the spirit and purpose of their enemies. He turns first to God in prayer. He and those with him were conscious of being God's servants, engaged in doing God's work, and hence naturally and inevitably turned, first of all, to him in prayer. Faith goes before, and without sight. Set a watch, etc. To trust God truly, is also to use means diligently. The connection of causes and forces is God's ordination; and to look to God without looking to these, is at the best a defective piety—reprehensible, and to be dreaded and shunned.

Verse 10.—And Judah said, The strength, etc.—The extra labor of watching by night and day, was a tax on the strength of the builders, and a hindrance to their work, while doubtless they felt discouragement from fear. It seemed impossible to succeed—a hopeless undertaking—so great a work in the face of such opposition. How true to the experience of Christian workers in Christian enterprises of the present day!

Verse 11.—Our adversaries said.—In their hearts, and also to each other. Whether their words were spoken and reported, or whether the conduct of the enemy revealed the purpose and assurance expressed by them, it amounts to the same. The plan was to make a sudden attack, which should be also a surprise.

Verse 12.—The Jews which dwell by them.—By the adversaries, on the borders whence they came, and where they were making ready. That Judah is so constantly mentioned, instead of Israel, or the other tribes, is due merely to the prominence of Judah in the work—Nehemiah himself, as we saw, being of that tribe, and Jerusalem being regarded as especially belonging to Judah. Said unto us ten times. Often, urging the point. From all the places, etc. It will be noticed that, in the Common Version, the clause, “they will be upon you,” is in italics, showing that no words corresponding to them are in the original. The word translated “from which” should be rendered that, introducing the words of the messengers. Return ye unto us. An exhortation to the men engaged on the walls to quit work, and go home to their several cities, either to protect their families from violence, or, as is far more probable, to save their lives by abandoning Jerusalem and joining their families, before the threatened attack.

Verse 13.—In the lower places, etc.—The parts of the wall most inviting attack, and needing defence. On the bare, or exposed places behind the wall, at its lowest points, the men were stationed.

Verse 14.—Be ye not afraid of them.—Evidently there was need of such words, as vs. 10 and 12 show. Remember, etc. The courage of faith in God. The same principle as in vs. 9. Memory is a great help to the Christian—the memory of God's gracious help to him, and to all others of God's people. Fight for your brethren, etc. What more mighty appeal to all that is best and strongest in man! Piety strengthens these principles.

Verse 15.—When our enemies heard, etc.—Often does full preparation for war prevent war. Mark, how the glory is given to God. The Bible is happily

free from any sign of difficulty in ascribing to God results secured through human instrumentalities. We returned all of us to the wall, every one to the work. Nobody now cared to leave. God had taken away fear, and aroused hope and enthusiasm, by the wonderful, unexpected deliverance.

Verse 16.—From that time forth, etc.—The easy deliverance did not beget indifference and false security. Nehemiah knew that the enemy were vigilant and virulent, and would take the first favorable opportunity to fall upon the city. My servants. The connection seems to imply that all the builders under Nehemiah, as governor, are here intended, and not simply his personal servants. Habergeons. Coats of mail. The rulers were behind, etc. Having oversight of the work, and also ready to lead against the enemy, in case of sudden attack.

Verses 17, 18.—The following is the more approved translation: “They that builded at the wall, both they that bare burdens as they that labored, with one of their hands wrought in the work, and with the other held a weapon; and also they that builded [that is, the masons], each of them had his sword girded at his side, and so builded.” According to this translation, the verses begin by designating all as builders, and then divide them into two classes—the carriers and the masons, or builders proper—the former needing but one hand for work, and hence keeping a weapon in the other; the latter needing both hands, and hence having their swords girded on, thus being able to work, but ready also to fight. He that sounded the trumpet, etc. Nehemiah had the general oversight, and would, through his trumpeter, direct, in case of attack.

SUNDAY, February 2nd, 1879.—The Reading of the Law.—Neh. viii. 1-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”—Ps. cxix.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

WORD PICTURES.

First. The long journey from Babylon, with the soldiers whom Artaxerxes sent to guard Nehemiah and his servants. The quiet entrance into that city.

Second. The lonely ride around the ruined walls.

Third. The calling together of the elders, and the ringing resolve, “Let us rise up and build.”

Fourth. Each with a mind to the work of building nearest to his own house.

Fifth. The bitter mockeries of Sanballat and Tobiah.

Sixth. (Here begins the lesson proper). Verses 7-9. The enemies no longer content with boasting, determine to fight. The Jews pray and watch.

Seventh. Troubles from within. Vss. 10-12. The Jews from the country, whose homes were not in the city, were discouraged and tired. The enemy planned a surprise. The Jews who lived near the enemy, kept coming among the builders, and urged their neighbors to come home.

Eighth. Nehemiah's plans. Verses 13-15. The people armed. Nehemiah's speech, “Remember the Lord.” And now it is the enemies' turn to be afraid, for God brings all their plans to naught.

Ninth. The two companies working and watching by turns, all ready to fight if need be; a sword is in one hand, and a trowel in the other. Nehemiah has his trumpeter standing by him ready to sound the alarm. And so the work went on each day.

Talk of the enemies who want to stop us from every good work.

We must pray, “Lead me not into temptation, deliver me from evil;” but that is not enough. We must also watch, and when Satan finds that we are ready, are watching, then he draws back after all!

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

- No. 3. 1. Pili p Acts vi. 5; viii. 58. 2. Uzia h 2 Chron. xxvi. 3. Bere a Acts xvii. 10-12. 4. Ladde r Gen. xxviii. 12, 13. 5. I sh i Hosea ii. 16. 6. Christian s Acts xi. 26. 7. A ceptance e Ephes. i. 6. 8. Nil c Exodus vii. 17, 20.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 4.

- 1. One of an alien people—an ancestor of our Lord. 2. A people of whom it was foretold that they should be wanderers among the nations. 3. One who through want of perseverance missed a great blessing. 4. A man raised up of God to deliver his people. 5. One of the seed royal who treacherously destroyed the ruler of his people. 6. The place where the servant of God waited and watched for the answer to his prayer. 7. A ready scribe in the law of Moses. 8. A king who was beheaded by two of his servants. 9. A prophet sent to rebuke a servant of God. 10. One who tried to hinder the work of God's people. 11. A city which was destroyed by fire by the captain of the Lord's host. 12. The first-fruits of the church in Achaia. 13. One whose descendants were specially consecrated to God's service. 14. A prophet who foretold the destruction of Edom. 15. The place where God's power was shown forth in the destruction of his enemies. 16. One who had good report of all men. 17. A messenger sent of God to comfort and instruct one in great distress. 18. A kinsman of St. Paul who was a prophet and teacher. 19. That which is often used in Scripture as a type of God's swift judgment on his enemies. 20. One who was delivered into captivity for being a false prophet. 21. That which God commanded to be sent to five kings as a type of their future subjugation.

That which the servant of God is enabled to do even in the midst of the most adverse circumstances.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER IV.—The Home in Chicago.

It was with chastened and somewhat sadder hearts than they had anticipated that Edward and Mary were married and set their faces westward. It was with difficulty that Mr. Hammond undertook his labors while the feeling of pain and disappointment weighed so fresh upon his heart, and Mary felt that which is the hardest of all for a wife to feel—that she was the cause, however innocent. But time with its healing influence, and, yet better, consecration with its purifying power, drew this servant of God into an atmosphere of peace and willing service, and rich were the results for the seven short years which followed ere a voice called, “Son, come up higher.” Yet the years which were bringing chastened joys and usefulness to this household were tipped with poison and laden with sorrow and trouble in Mr. Stevens' home.

Mary's elder sister, who married the year before her, had returned with one child to her father's house, a broken-hearted woman. She had married a man of rare promise, as this world goes—that is, he possessed fine intellect, wealth, and position; but the demon of the wine-cup had turned the man into a fiend, and the poor young wife, in fear of her life, had fled in disgrace to her astonished and deeply-trying parents. A younger son, warm in his affections and noble in his nature, missing the bias of a religious life and maddened by hasty words of reproof from the stern father, fled to California, and in a few years died a felon's death. Yet another—the youngest, and the idol of the home—sank into a consumptive's grave. These last were too much for the mother's heart, the news concerning the elder son coming while the younger lay white and chill in burial-robos. After his funeral she said to her husband as they entered the deserted house: “Father this will kill me, and God meant it should. He has followed us with sorrows ever since we denied him our Mary. Oh should we not have known that it was like ‘keeping back a part of the price,’ and that God's displeasure would surely follow us? It is too late to retrieve our follies, but let us pray if haply we may be forgiven.”

With a groan the wretched father fell upon his knees, and there, by the side of a crushed and dying wife, we believe found pardon and grace. A few years later, after finding his “house left unto him desolate,” save for the sad-

hearted daughter, he wrote to Edward Hammond confessing his wrong and injustice. “It is not too late now, Edward; you are but little past thirty, and I will do all to further your wishes, though I am left a childless old man.”

Reader, believe me, this is no fiction. That letter reached him for whom it was designed too late—just as his happy spirit was winging its flight for the celestial city; and yet over the ashes of a hope so early buried, there has arisen a star of so bright a radiance that can say, “This good man's life was blighted.” Discouraging in some sweet nook of heaven's glory with the sainted mother gone before, he knows beyond a doubt the why and wherefore of the cross purposes of his life, and shouts a glad Te Deum:

“Joy, joy forever! my task is done.”

Will you pass with me, reader, over a period of something like twenty years and look into an elegantly-furnished apartment in one of the avenue residences of Chicago? A lady sits here of about forty-five years, and with her, her two daughters. Her face is an index of strong character, yet is alive with sensibility. You will not fail, either, to note the lines of grief and disappointment—those finger touches of God which are his chisels for carving hidden graces. If you are a close student of God's disciplinary lines, you will read that in this woman's face which will ever tell you that she never yields what God would take without a struggle, on account of which she is continually at war with herself. She is a good woman, though—you read that in the depths of her clear gray eyes; and one or two more strokes on “God's anvil” and draughts from the “fennel's bitter cup” will round out that strong soul “till it is a beautiful thing to see.”

The elder of the two girls, with a thoughtful brow, is absorbed in a book, while the younger, who is a hopeless invalid, reclines upon a low divan. Her face, with its dilated eye and quivering lips, denotes excessive susceptibility of feeling, indicating that highly-strung nervous system which in certain conditions support delicate health, and in others shatters it. Surrounded with wealth and tenderness, and, above all, usually at peace with her destiny, her invalid life has been comparatively easy; but yet she suffers. Her pastor says:

“I can hardly wish it otherwise, for then my church would be robbed of its brightest ornament. She is doing more there on her couch to ‘adorn the doctrine’ and win souls to Jesus than half my people in health. No, we would not rob Fleda of one of her stars by easing one of her pains. Fleda Hammond's sickness is the crowning jewel of the church.”

But Fleda is not perfect, and there are hours when pain and inactivity try her faith sadly. With a nature which never opens out fully save to God and her mother, she is not seldom out of harmony with many would-be friends, and finds herself sadly jarred and misapprehended in coming in contact with those who, through kindness or curiosity, are allowed a seat beside her couch. There was a time when she refused to see the outside world as it drifted toward her; but coming to feel that this was one of the ways in which the Father would use her, in answer to her prayer,

“Make use of me, my God,” she ceased to indulge this utter seclusion; and cheerfully bearing the cross, she was permitted to reap rich fruits from her self-sacrifice. The past day had been one of unusual strain to Fleda's organism, and like a lute-string roughly handled she lay quivering and throbbing.

“Mamma,” said she, “I am so weary; do come and sit beside me and put your cool hand on my temples; they throb to bursting!”

Mrs. Hammond—for she it is, reader—quickly rose, and going to the side of the sick girl, pressed a kiss upon cheek and brow; and asked:

“Do you feel more than usually weary to-night, dear one?”

“Oh, I don't know, mamma,” was answered, with a sigh; I have been thinking so hard.”

“What about, daughter?”

“Of the work to be done in this world, and how I want to do it—my share of it, I mean.”

“Your share, my dear Fleda, seems to be patiently to suffer God's will and forcibly illustrate the power of his grace.”