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The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter, Lesson 10, Dec. 3 '99

KEEPING THE SABBATH.—Nehemiah 13: 15-22.

Compare Isaiah 56: 1 8; Jeremiah 17: 19 27.

Read Nehemiah 13.

Commit Verses 15-17.

Golden Text.—Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.—Ex. 20: 8.

THE SECTION

includes the thirteenth chapter only.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—Probably about sixteen or eighteen years after the last lesson, summer or early autumn (13: 15) of B. C. 426 or 427.

The Interval.—Nehemiah remained at Jerusalem twelve years, from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (2: 1), B. C. 444, to the thirty-second year (13: 6), B. C. 433. Then he was recalled. He was in Persia some years, perhaps five, but returned before B. C. 425, the year Artaxerxes died, for he returned by permission of that king, (13: 6).

Place.—Jerusalem and vicinity.

Rulers. — Artaxerxes king of Persia, 465 425.

Malachi, the last of the prophets, belongs to this period. Professor Driver places him 'shortly before, or during Nehemiah's second visit.'

THE FLOOD GATES OF EVIL ARE OPENED.—Vs. 1 5. The reforms of Nehemiah accomplished great things, and made an era in the progress of the kingdom of God. But as in all revivals and reforms, there followed a reaction, on the part of those who were carried along by the popular feeling, but were not changed in heart. Doubtless the reaction began during the twelve years before Nehemiah was recalled to Persia; but in his absence, and after the death of Ezra, those who had been silenced by their presence took courage to return to their evil courses, so that a deluge of sins rushed in upon the nation.

1. The high priest Eliashib himself desecrated the temple by fitting up one of the temple chambers, built for the storage of tithes, as a dwelling place for the heathen Tobiah, the Ammonite, who was allied by marriage to him (13: 4, 5).

2. The tithes for the support of the priests and of the temple worship were withheld (v. 10), or the poorest of their flocks and herbs had been brought for sacrifice, (Mal. 1: 7, 8; 3: 9). Thus they had dishonored God, and robbed him, and the penalty had fallen upon them.

3. They had neglected the temple worship. The services had become wearisome to them (Mal. 1: 10), nothing was done except for good pay (Mal. 1: 10). People who refused to bring their promised dues, or brought mean sacrifices, would have little interest in public worship.

4. As a consequence, crimes and sins began to rapidly increase, especially was there a return to the custom of mixed marriages. The high priest's grandson, Manasseh, married the daughter of the great enemy of the Jews, Sanballat of Samaria (13: 28). Others not only married heathen wives, but put away their true Jewish wives in order to do it.

5. The sin of Sabbath-breaking was greatly increased through the action of the heathen traders breaking in upon the Sabbath rest.

NEHEMIAH SHUTS DOWN THE FLOOD GATES.—Vs. 6 14. 1. He with great indignation drove Tobiah out of the temple, and restored it to its proper uses.

2. Nehemiah reinstated the priests and Levites, who had been compelled to go to their homes and earn their living, the people having refused to support them in their religious work. The services of the temple now went on and the tithes were brought in.

3. Nehemiah, with great indignation and even with bodily punishment, compelled the people to cease from their heathen marriage alliances (13: 23-30)

4. As a result, the other crimes and oppressions would be greatly diminished.

Practical Suggestions &c. We are reminded of the cleansing of the temple twice by our Lord Jesus, once near the beginning (John 2: 13 17) and once near the close (Matt. 21: 12 13) of his ministry. This expulsion of evil from the temple was a type of God's moral cleansings: (1) Of the soul, which was made to be a temple of God, a house of prayer; (2) of the church, where everything which mars its purpose as the house of God for all people.

UNDERMINING THE KINGDOM OF GOD THROUGH SABBATH-BREAKING.—Vs. 15 17. *In those days.* During Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem. *Saw I.* He examined for himself, and found the facts.

Forms of Sabbath Breaking. 1. Working on their farms and keeping their laborers at work. *In Judah.* In the country around Jerusalem. *Treading winepresses on the Sabbath.* The winepresses were large vats into which the grapes were placed, and the juice trodden out by men. *Bringing in sheaves.* Gathering their harvests. *Wine, grapes, and figs.* This required a large working force, and tempted the people to buy and trade on the Sabbath.

2. By the ordinary business and traffic through foreigners, who had no care for the Sabbath. *There dwelt men of Tyre also therein.* That is, in the city, Jerusalem. Devoted to commerce, they had formed a little settlement in Judea for the sale of their merchandise. Tyre and Zidon were the two great cities on the coast of Phœnicia, northwest from Jerusalem. They were great and wicked cities (Matt. 11: 21), celebrated for their manufactures and commerce. Tyre was particularly famous for a peculiarly splendid dye with which its cloths were colored (Ezek. 27: 7); and Zidon, meaning 'fishery,' was noted for its fish. *Sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah,* who were so contaminated by their heathen neighbors as to yield to the temptation to buy. *What evil thing is this that ye do?* What they did was evil for themselves and for their children.

1. It was contrary to God's command, which they had covenanted to obey. It was deliberate disobedience.

2. It destroyed the strongest influences for the upbuilding of their characters as children of God. A Sabbath full of business, work, and traffic leaves no time for the higher things, for church going, for Bible study, for religious thought, and thus enslaves the soul to the body.

3. Sabbath desecration is the surest road to national ruin, for the prosperity of a people depends primarily on the character of the people.

4. Sabbath-breaking brought the people into a worldly atmosphere that was especially favorable of temptation.

5. Sabbath breaking deprives the working population of a large part of their rights and their hopes. The workingmen need the Sabbath rest to give them freedom and enlargement.

The temptation was very great. 1. Probably the desecration of the Sabbath had been greatly increased during the captivity, where, under foreign masters, the people were compelled to work on all the days of the week, and were the whole trend of fashion and of social usage was to obliterate Sabbath-keeping in the few poor foreigners.

NEHEMIAH MAKES A SABBATH REFORM.—Vs. 17-22. He reproved the Leaders. He did not reprove the weak and let the rich and strong do as they would. *I contended.* Argued and used his official authority. *With the nobles* The people of prominence and influence, who were the most to blame. Those who have influence, whether of rank, or wealth, or character, or office, should be doubly careful as to their conduct, &c. Those who own factories and stores, who control railroads who are in high office, have a large responsibility in the matter of Sabbath-keeping.

He Warns Them from Their Own Past History. *Did not your Fathers thus?* Why was Jerusalem destroyed? Why were they now weak, and poor, and scattered? One reason was that their father had refused to obey God's Sabbath laws. A broken Sabbath, was the answer (Jer. 17: 27; Ezek 20: 13. See, also, Isa 58: 13, 14).

He exercises His Authority. *Began to be dark before the Sabbath.* At sunset of the previous day, because their Sabbath began then. *The gates should be shut* as usual, only they *should not be opened till after the Sabbath. My servants set I at the gates.* His own armed body guard. *That there should no burden be brought in.* Foot passengers were, no doubt, allowed to enter and leave the city on the Sabbath. *So the merchants* Not believing that the command would be strictly enforced. *Lodged.* Camped outside the walls, waiting for the gates to be opened on Sabbath morning, as formerly. *I testified against them.* Rebuking, commanding. A crowd was collected about the gates, and a disturbance and excitement caused, which was unsuitable for the Sabbath. To prevent this, Nehemiah threatened to arrest the merchants. *I will lay hands on you.* Whereupon the practise was given up. *I commanded the Levites.* The "Levites" would be more appropriate keepers of the city gates on the Sabbath day than his servants. The Levites were therefore ordered to *cleanse themselves,* that is to purify themselves from ceremonial uncleanness, and come and attend to guarding the gates on the Sabbath day as a religious duty.

Nehemiah's Prayer. This prayer is repeated several times, each time after some hard fought battle. It is not a prayer of pride of selfishness, but, "the natural and proper desire of the soul for recognition by God." Nehemiah had made many enemies by his course. Men cursed him, but he would look for his blessings from God.

THE SABBATH OF TO DAY.—1 The command to keep the Sabbath is written by God's own hand (1) in the law of God, and (2) in the nature of man, and written in the law because it is written in nature. The Fourth Commandment is just as much in force to day as any other of the Ten Commandments. Jesus Christ in no way abolished the Sabbath law. He only interpreted it, and rescued it from Pharisaic tradition and slavery.

2. One of the surest marks and measures of the decay of religion in a people is their non-observance of the Lord's day. Of all divine institutions, the most divine is that which secures a day of rest for man.

3. Sunday is just as really a seventh day and the Sabbath day as is the Saturday Sabbath of the Jews. All the difference lies in beginning the count from a different point.

4. By keeping one day set apart for special uses, all days are made holy.

5. It is right to make such Sabbath laws as will enable all men to Sabbath rest, and to enforce these laws.

6. The only way to increase true Sabbath-keeping is by increasing the spirit of devotion and worship which requires such a day.

7. Jesus gives us the principle of Sabbath keeping. It must be for the whole of man, body and soul. It must be helpful to man. Whatever uplifts, comforts, enlarges man, is adapted to the Sabbath. There are times when this law of help is larger than the law of rest, as in the cases Jesus referred to. No recreation is right on the Lord's day which deprives others of the benefit of the Sabbath, either for body or soul. One of the first essentials of true humanity and brotherhood and true Sabbath keeping is to give others as well as ourselves the benefit of the Sabbath. Works of mercy are peculiarly fitting on the Sabbath. Seven of the recorded miracles of Jesus were performed on that day.

Habits of Speech.

Why do educated parents allow their children to contract habits of ungrammatical speech that will have to be conquered in after life? asked a spinster of a mother

Because they hate to worry the poor little things about such matters when they are young and should be care free. It seems cruel to be all the time correcting them and keeping them on their good behaviour. They will have to leaan the rules of our dreadful language all too soon as it is.

Yes, said the spinster, and in addition to learning to speak properly they will have to unlearn the tricks of speech in which they have been allowed to indulge all their lives. I know, laughingly, that there is much ridicule of old maids children, but I believe that my theory in this case is correct. It is a positive unkindness to let your child double in his negatives and say, ain't when several years from now he will be harshly reproved for such lapses. The child must learn to talk anyway, and is it not as easy to teach him to say, It is I, as It's me? And is it not as easy to teach him to say, I saw it, as I seen it? I love baby talk, and should not correct a child for his mispronunciation of hard words. As he grows older he will himself see his mistakes in that line and change them. But I insist that it is a parent's duty to make the difficult path to grammatical speech as easy as possible.—Watchman.

The Queen and Women Doctors

The Queen was for many years opposed to the medical women movement. A change, however, was wrought in her opinions through the lack of proper medical attendance to the women in India, which was brought to her notice. An American women doctor had successfully treated an Indian princess for a most painful and lingering disease. This princess, hearing that the doctor was about to pay a visit to England, sent for her and requested her to write a message to the Queen, telling her how much the service of women doctors was needed for her subjects in India. The physician did so, and the princess, placing the letter in a jewelled locket, which she took from her neck, gave it to the American woman to deliver. The fact came to the knowledge of the Queen through the medium of the Home Secretary, and the doctor was invited to Windsor to deliver the message. The Queen was touched by the plea, and from that time her objections to women in the medical profession were withdrawn.—Missionary Review.

Definition of Bible Terms.

A gerah was one cent.
A shekel of gold was $8.
A farthing was three cents.
A talent of gold was $13,809.
A talent of silver was $538 80.
A shekel of silver was about fifty cents.
A mite was less than a quarter of a cent.
A piece of silver, or a penny, was thirteen cents.
A cab was three pints.
A homer was six pints.
A firkin was seven pints.
A hin was one gallon and two pints.
An ephah, or bath, contains seven gallons and five pints.
Ezekiel's reed was nearly eleven feet.
A cubit was nearly twenty-two inches.
A finger's breadth is equal to one inch.
A Sabbath day's journey was about an English mile.
A day's journey was about twenty-three and one fifth miles.
The orchard of the Church will not be more fruitful till the plants in the nursery are more cared for.

Matrimonial Commandments.

Matrimony has ten commandments. They were studied out by Theodore Parker shortly before his wedding day. They took the form of ten beautiful resolutions, which he inscribed in his journal. They are as follows:

1. Never, except for the best reasons, to oppose my wife's will.
2. To discharge all duties for her sake freely.
3. Never to scold.
4. Never to look cross at her.
5. Never to worry her with commandments.
6. To promote her piety.
7. To bear her burdens.
8. To overlook her foibles.
9. To save, cherish, and forever defend her.
10. To remember her always in my prayers. Thus, God willing, we shall be blessed.—Exchange.

Is Your Boy in this Kind of a College?

But a more important inquiry still is as to whether there is any religious influence in the college to which parents send their sons. There are such in this country where there is little recognition of the Bible—little, if any, prayer offered, and much sceptical talk, even from professors. If religion is not opposed, it is ignored as unworthy of educated people and classed among the obsolute and old-fashioned notions of by-gone ages. What wonder if young men come out of such institutions lost in unconcern or deeply sunk in skepticism from which they never escape.—Presbyterian.

Know the Children Always.

The teacher who does not know her scholars on the street will be forgotten when they become men and women. Stop and chat a moment with them, even on the public street; children like it; they don't forget it; it makes men and women of them. Know them, and they'll know you.—M. P. Boynton.

Girls, don't be mannish. Don't wear men's ties to the exclusion of laces and ribbons. Don't swagger along the streets with your hands in your jacket pockets. Don't talk slang. Don't do anything that tends to make you appear boyish. Such things may give you a reputation for smartness, but such a reputation is not worth striving for. It is much easier to be smart than ladylike. A smart girl attracts a great deal of attention, but not always from those whose attention is desirable. Such a girl is frequently called fast, but seldom mentioned as sweet and lovable, and careful parents would a little rather that their daughters did not associate with her.

She is fun to talk to, but a fellow would never think of marrying her!

I can't tell how many times I have heard such remarks made about the smart girls of my acquaintance, for I am one of the women in whom young men always confide.

It is too late to change your character when it is put in the crucible.

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