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The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter, Lesson 7, Nov. 12, '99

REBUILDING THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM —Nehemiah 4: 7-18.

Read Chapter 4.

Commit Verses 15 18.

Golden Text.—Watch and pray. Matt. 26: 41.

HISTORICAL SETTING.

Time.—The summer and early autumn of B. C. 444. Nehemiah left Susa about the first of April, and it would require three or four months to make the journey (Ezra 7: 9). Nehemiah therefore reached Jerusalem about July 1, and the walls were finished in September.

Place.—Jerusalem and vicinity.

Kings.—Artaxerxes, king of the Persian Empire. Nehemiah, the pasha of Judea. Ezra, the scribe and chief man religiously.

NEHEMIAH'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.—We see in this lesson how the divine worked through the human in answering the prayer of Nehemiah.

The answer came (1) through an arbitrary, self-willed, and passionate king, who a few years before had issued an edict against Jerusalem, and put a stop to the building of its walls (Ezra 4: 8 24). (2) It came through Nehemiah himself, and the feelings which prompted his prayer. The burden on his spirit, and the earnestness of his fasting and praying, left their mark on his countenance.

He learned the cause of his sorrow, and gave him leave of absence, appointment as governor, with letters commanding the other governors in the neighborhood of Jerusalem to give him aid, &c. So Nehemiah went up to Jerusalem, starting about the first of April, and reaching the city after three or four months' travel, sometime in July.

THE MIDNIGHT TOUR OF INSPECTION.—2: 11 18. Three days after his arrival Nehemiah went out alone with a few servants in the night to investigate. He had not told to anyone his purpose in coming to Jerusalem. When he had ridden aroud the city, he summoned the leaders of the Jews, told them his plans, and they all agreed to enter upon the work.

THE BUILDING OF THE WALL.—Chap. 3 The wall was parcelled out among forty four working parties; some of whom were women, some nobles, other priests, Levites, merchants, &c. Every class of society took part in it.

1. There was great progress made because the people had a mind to work, they were interested in it, and earnest to have it done.

2. Each one built over against his own house (3: 28). He "did the next thing."

3. The work was done by families.

4. That those who lived in the country and the towns around the city joined in the work. It was a national affair.

5. They used the material at hand, the remains of the old wall.

6. The building was done by piece-work. Every man's name was attached to his work, and affected his credit and his influence.

WORKING AMID THE BITTEREST OPPOSITION.—Vs. 1 12. A city was of little value in those days without walls. If Jerusalem was to become the power that it once had been and still wished to be, it must be defended.

The enemies of the Jews bitterly opposed the restoration of the walls.

1. Ridicule (2: 19; 4: 1 2). The leaders of the heathen laughed them to scorn. Ridicule is stinging to those who are not hardened to it. But Nehemiah was not so foolish as to succumb to ill-natured jokes.

Slander (2: 19; 6: 6). Their enemies said that the Jews were planning to rebel, and that Nehemiah was leading in the work that he might become their king. A general conspiracy (vs. 7, 8, 11). *Sanballat*, who appears to be the governor of the city of Samaria. *Tobiah.* A chief of the little tran-Jordanic tribe of the *Ammonites*, probably chief advisor to Sanballat. *Arabians.* The wandering Arabs of the desert. *Ashdodites* From Ashdod, a Philistine city near the Mediterranean coast The Philistines were always hostile to Israel. These were opposed to the rebuilding of the walls, and *were very wroth. And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem.* They planned to take Nehemiah and the city by surprise, capture and slay the workers, and thus put a stop to the work.

Why? (1) Because the Jews had slighted them in the past. (2) They were rivals, and it pained them to see their rivals flourish (3) For the Jews to prosper under God would be a slur upon their religion. (4) The building of the walls would prevent them from plundering the inhabitants in various ways. It took away a source of gain. *And Judah said.* The Jews from outside the city who had been in closer contact with the heathen element, and were tainted. *The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed.* The work was hard, and the carriers had become worn. The higher the wall rose, the harder it was to carry material to the top.

Bad advice from friends. *The Jews which dwelt by them.* By Sanballat and the other adversaries. *They said unto us ten times.* Repeatedly. They tried to persuade their fellows from the surrounding towns to hasten home in order to escape the threatened danger.

The bad and oppressive conduct of some of the richer Jews (chap. 5) No wages were paid, so that many were reduced to straits to support themselves and their families, and pay the taxes exacted by the Persian government. There were rich men in Jerusalem, and a fund might have been raised by these for the maintenance of their brethren, toiling for the common good. But, instead, the wealthy seized the chance of driving shameful bargains with the starving workers, taking away their farms, and even selling their children into slavery. When Nehemiah heard of these things he indignantly summoned the oppressors, made them promise to restore the property thus taken, and shaking out his robe, declared that God would "shake out from his house" every one who did not keep this promise.

Treachery (6: 1 9). Sanballat next tried to get Nehemiah to go out to Ono on the borders of Benjamin, twenty-five or thirty miles from Jerusalem, to hold a conference with him, hoping thus to get him into his power. This request was sent four times, and each time Nehemiah replied that he was too busy building the wall.

An appeal to fear (6: 10 13). Sanballat then hired two seeming prophets to persuade Nehemiah to shut himself up in the temple, as a refuge from the dangers that were threatening him. This was too base an appeal Nehemiah indignantly exclaimed, 'Should such a man as I flee?' What, a man entrusted with God's work skulk into the temple merely to save his life! I will not go in.

PRAYING, AND WATCHING, AND WORKING.—Vs. 9, 13-18. *Made our prayer....set a watch against them*, opposite the places where they were proposing an attack. *Therefore set I* in the lower places behind *the wall, and on higher places.* Nehemiah had his men posted on conspicuous spots within the walls, where they could be seen from a distance, and so deterred the enemy from advancing. He drew them up *after their families*, that each man might feel he was fighting for his brethren, sons, etc. *And I looked* He saw the enemy coming. *Rose up*, to take command and give orders. *And said.* He spoke a few words to encourage his men, telling them to remember whom they fought under,—namely, the Lord; and what they had to fight for—namely, their homes, and all they held dear. The attack was not made. *Half of my servants.* His personal retainers, trained men, who had guarded him on his journey. They were divided into two companies, who alternately worked and and acted as guard. *Habergeons.* Old English for coat-of-mail. *The rulers*, rather captains, *were behind*, with the warriors, to direct the work and lead the soldiers. *They that bare burdens.* The carriers who could steady their load with one hand and hold their weapon in the other. *The builders* required both hands in laying the wall; they carried their swords by their side, ready to be grasped at a moment's warning.

Practical. Faith and works went together. Praying is not a substitute for the use of means, but the power that inspires zeal and activity, quickens the invention, sharpens the intellect.

The work was completed in the brief time of fifty two days. The walls must have been three or four miles long.

PRACTICAL HINTS &C.

The principles underlying the story of this lesson may be applied to the building of a soul, and the building of the church of God.

The kingdom of God is likened in Revelation to a walled city.

The walls are salvation; that is forgiveness, a new heart and life, the character, principles, qualities, which entrench the soul and the people of God in righteousness, keeping out the evil and protecting the good; a defense against the fiery darts of the wicked one. The gates in the wall permit all good to enter.

The Need. Both in the soul and in the church there are ruins to be restored and rubbish to be removed. There are imperfections, faults, worldiness, ignorance, to be removed. These needs should burden every Christian heart

Seeking Help. They that seek earnestly praying with his soul, giving up all that interferes with a holy life, willing to go and do as God bids them, will find a way to realize their desires and build up the city of Mansoul.

Personal Investigation. As Nehemiah made a personal investigation of the situation, so should we examine ourselves; see clearly what ought to be done, the errors to be corrected, the places to be renewed, the forces with which we can work. So every church and Sunday-school should do what Nehemiah did, and learn their exact situation; should take a census and know who attend and who do not, who have been neglected, who can be reached, what influences can be brought to bear, and what plans are most successful.

Hard and persistent work is necessary to success. "All at it, and always at it," will accomplish wonders. The trouble with most churches is that one fourth of the members do three fourths of the giving and working

Each One Worked over against His Own House. God has placed us in families, and united us in business and social relations, in order that we may have the means and the opportunity of influencing others for good.

The Women Joined in the Work. The new relations of women to the world, the new developements of their power, are not so much for the purpose of entering business as for carrying on the work of the kingdom of God. As yet we have seen but the beginning.

The sword and trowel must both be used, fighting against sin and wrong, and building us slowly and surely every good of character, habit, and virtue.

Watching and praying also must go together.

Opposition must be expected, ridicule, secret and open attacks by the great adversary, hours of discouragement, weary labors, failure of friends, appeals to fear. It seems strange that these should be allowed to stand between us and a holy life and heaven; but they are stairways, like Jacob's ladder, to heaven; they are hills Difficulty, from whose top may be seen the Promised Land; they are battlefields, where faith and courage may grow and victory be won; they are fields in which virtues may flourish, and on which may rest God's benediction. Well done, good and faithful, enter into the joy of your Lord.

The Bible in Manuscript.

BY S. BRAINARD PRATT, IN S. S. TIMES.

"And the books, but especially the parchments" (Paul to Timothy)

Parchment had its origin some centuries before the Christian era, and in color and delicacy it would vie with our modern paper. The finer qualities, called vellum, are made from the skins of calves, kids, and still-born lambs. Parchment paper is made of ordinary paper placed in a bath of dilute sulphuric acid, and afterwards carefully washed.

My library of sacred books contains no finer specimens than some received from Syria and Turkey of the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, written on parchment in ancient and modern Armenian.

One is a book of sermons written in the twelfth century, another contains portions of the Old Testament, with the Book of Acts, and most of the Epistles. They are not only beautifully written, but profusely illuminated in colors of red, green, gold, and blue.

One of these has this inscription and prayer: Transcribed by one Jeremiah from the copy of the Septuagint made by St. Pamphilius of Cæsarea in the third century.

O Chirst the Lord: have mercy on me Jeremiah, the transcriber of these books, and upon my parents. I beseech ye remember in your prayers the decorator of this book, the sinful earth priest Sarkis, and pray also for his dead parents.

The copyists of the dark of middle ages were trained in the monasteries, and became skilled artists in there writing and illumination It was to them a profession, and the books they wrote are in many cases marvels of taste and beauty.

Sometimes the ornaments on medieval manuscripts covered an entire page, representing men, animals, plants, and fruit. Gothic illustrations, vignettes, and initial designs, were common, and many words were colored in purple, red, or violet, while the parchment, especially for sacred books, was often dyed in colors of blue or purple, with the writing in gold or silver.

The scriptorium of the monastery was exclusively devoted to this purpose. For the libraries of their own monasteries the monks worked without direct pay. They were incited to a pious enthusiasm by language like this:

He may fill his mind with the Scriptures while copying the sayings of the Lord; with his fingers he gives life to men, and arms against the wiles of the devil. As the antiquarius copies the words of Christ, so many wounds does he inflict upon Satan. What he writes in his cell will be scattered far and wide over distant provinces. Man multiplies the words of heaven.

The work of these artists in the monasteries was necessarily confined to the writings of the Father, the Book of Hours, and to copies of the Scriptures.

One monk, born in 1013, gives a list of books transcribed and illuminated with his own hand. It included, with other manuscripts, nineteen missals, the writing of which, he tells us, nearly cost him his eyesight.

A Dutch missal in my library is written on fine vellum and very beautifully illuminated. It was found at the Convent of St. Katharine in Holland, and written probably about A. D. 1350. It has more than three hundred initial letters in gold and colors, and is enriched with birds and flowers.

This work of copyist was often done in a cold cell, for, in many portions of Europe, as in this country, the cold during the long winter months was very severe. This labor in the cold, naturally enough, became a penitential exercise.

To help the nightly toil of the scriptorium, mechanical lamps were made, which were self trimming, and insured a sufficient supply of oil. The work of the scribes was regulated on bright days by sun dials, and during the hours of the night by water-clocks.

The time necessary for copying the entire Scriptures would vary according to the hours devoted to the work, as also to the skill of the scribe. A year might be about the average. We are told that from nine to twelve months was required to write out a plain copy of Wycliffe's Bible, while the writing and illumination of a copy for the Emperor Charlemagne occupied the time of a skilled monk for twenty-two years.

In Books and their Makers we are informed that for copying the text of the Bible, without designs, a scribe in 1260 received eighty lires, or about sixteen dollars. Yet in England, in the year 1274, when the wages of a laboring man were but a penny a day, a finely written copy of the Bible sold for thirty-four pounds.

For transcribing a missal, and illuminating the same with original designs, a monk in Bologna is quoted as having received two hundred florins in gold,—the equivalent of about a hundred dollars. In 1420 a German scribe received for his week's work sixteen groschen, or forty cents.

Payment for the copyist in the monasteries was not always confined to this life, for we are assured that a certain worldly and sinful brother, who, in spite of his many frivolities, was a zealous scribe, had in industrious moments written out an enormous folio containing religious instruction. When he died, the Devil claimed his soul. The angels, however, brought before the throne of judgment the great book, and for each letter therein written pardon was given for one sin, and behold, when the count was completed, there was one letter over. And the chronicler informs us it was a very big book.

The Greeks and Romans committed the care of transcribing to slaves, who were valued according to their artistic skill.

When Origen began the revision of the Old Testament, St. Ambrose sent to his assistance a number of deacons and virgins skilled in calligraphy. These virgins of Christ brought to the work a dexterity, an elegance of attainment, and an assiduity, to which the monks themselves could not attain.

Some of he most beautiful specimens which have been preserved from the middle ages are the work of the nuns. They were required to give their time between their prayers and psalms to the reading and to the writing of holy works.

Small fragments of parchment containing valuable texts are sometimes found in the bindings of old books. I have a piece which could be placed inside of a very small thimble, but it contains parts of the first and fifth chapters of James. From the book where it was found, Professor Isaac H. Hall thought it might date back a thousand years.

A few words or lines thus found have made important additions to one the oldest and most valuable codices of the Scriptures now in existence.

GREAT THINGS FROM LITTLE CAUSES GROW.—It takes very little to derange the stomach. The cause may be slight, a cold, something eaten or drunk, anxiety, worry, or some other simple cause. But if precautions be not taken this simple cause may have most serious consequences. Many a chronically debilitated constitution to-day owes its destruction to simple causes not dealt with in time. Keep the digestive apparatus in healthy condition and all will be well. Parmelee's Vegetable Pills are better than any other for the purpose.

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