

Sabbath School Department.

International Bible Lessons.

Lesson V. January 26.

THE READING OF THE LAW.

Neh. viii. 1-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth under-standing unto the simple.—Ps. cxix. 130.

Time.—B. C. 444.

Place.—Jerusalem.

Exposition.

V. 1. Read the last clause of the preceding chapter with this verse, thus: "And when the seventh month came and the children of Israel were in their cities, all the people gathered themselves, etc." Street, i. e. square or open space. Water-gate. "A gate in the eastern wall either for the escape of superfluous water from the Temple reservoirs or for the introduction of water from the Kidron valley, when the reservoirs were low."—Cook. This square between the south-east of the temple and the water-gate was called Ophel. Ezra. This is the first mention of him in this book. The supposition is that after completing the work mentioned in his book, he returned to the court of Artaxerxes, and again came to Jerusalem shortly before the time of this lesson. Scribes.—The special duty of the Scribes was to write, to study and to interpret to the people all sacred words. See Ezra vii. 6-10. The office was of highest importance.

V. 2.—The Priest. Ezra was a Jewish priest and a Persian Judge as well as a Scribe, but is best known as "Ezra the Scribe." The public reading of the law was commanded. Deut. xxxi. 10-13. All that could hear, etc. i. e. all the children that could understand. Upon the first day. See introductory notes.

V. 3.—From the morning until mid-day, i. e. about six hours. Ezra paused now and then as the assistants gave explanations of what he had read. And the ears of all the people. Every one has his own Bible now; then there were but few copies of the Scriptures in existence. "Even as late as A. D. 1272, it would take the wages of a laboring man 13 years to buy one Bible."—Peloubet. What a change printing has made, and what a blessing.

V. 4.—Pulpit, i. e. a platform, probably a pretty rough structure if compared with our pulpits. And beside him stood Matthithai &c. "These 13 persons were probably the chief priests of the course which was at that time performing the temple service."—Cook.

V. 5.—Opened the book. The skin of some animal, prepared for the purpose, was used to write on, the ink was made of lampblack and gall juice, a reed was used for a pen. The writings were kept in the form of rolls. "Ezra opened the book." i. e. unrolled the skin or parchment. All the people stood up. This showed their respect for the Word of God and also their eagerness to hear it!

V. 6.—Blessed the Lord, i. e., thanked and praised the Lord. God blesses us by the bestowment of His favors. "Bless them that curse you," i. e., desire their happiness. A pity that one word is made to serve so many different ideas; it leads to confusion and awkwardness. How awkward to say "We bless God for His blessings;" but it is perfectly correct. The Great God. See the book of Job for wonderful descriptions of God's greatness.—e. g. Job 26: 6-14, in which v. 14 is intensely sublime after what precedes it. For an example of blessing God, see 1 Chron. 29: 10-19. Amen, i. e., "so let it be." By saying this the people expressed their earnest desire that it might be according to Ezra's prayer, and that they accepted what he read as binding upon them. Lifting up their hands, they called God to witness their desire and acceptance, and then they assumed the attitude of humility in worshipping their God.

V. 7.—These 13 persons were probably leaders amongst the Levites, and they with the rest of the Levites stood in the crowd, one here and one there repeating and explaining what Ezra read. "There were probably as many as 20,000 people, and one voice could not reach them all."—Peloubet.

V. 8.—So they read. "Ezra read and they (the Levites) re-read."—Peloubet. Gave the sense. This probably implies two things; they expounded what was read, as ministers do now; but first they translated the law from the pure Hebrew in which it was written, into the Chaldean language then used by the people. The people learned to speak Chaldean in their captivity and lost to some extent the language spoken by Moses.

Remarks.

1. God had brought the people back from their captivity, and had protected and caused them to prosper in the rebuilding of Jerusalem; and now took place a solemn dedication of the people to God. "A great assembly was convened at Jerusalem; the book of the law was publicly read with weeping and with praise. No scene in the history of Judah is more vividly narrated. The great festival, with its triumphant gladness, the solemn fast, with its lowly confession of sin, and the prayer that followed, worthy to rank for pathos and true sublimity with the dedication prayer of Solomon, were the outward expressions of that loyalty to Jehovah and His law from which it must now have seemed that the chosen people could never swerve."—Green.

2. V. 1. A revival of religion is always attended by an increased interest in the Word of God, and indeed how could there be a true revival without this desire to know God's will? When a man begins to read his Bible seriously you may be sure he is seeking God.

3. V. 2. The importance of teaching children in God's word and of taking them as early as it is expedient, and taking them regularly to the place of public worship. The Jews were careful in this.

4. V. 3. The importance of attending to God's word! How often Christ said: "He that

hath ears to hear let him hear." Give reasons for this?

5. V. 56. The reverence of the people for God's word and their hearty participation in the acts of worship. Is there not room for improvement in these respects amongst us? We go to God's house too often as we go to a concert or lecture, and not to engage in real worship. We plant ourselves in our seats and look at the minister as much as to say, "Here I am, if you think you can impress me, you are welcome to try it," or "Here I am, sing to me, pray for me, preach to me, entertain me as well as you can. Would it be an offense if at times, when so disposed, the people should say "Amen," as well as the minister? Would it not help our worship if the people's voices could be heard in it a little more?"

6. Bodily attitude is not essential to worship, and yet it is not without its fitness and its importance as an aid to devotion. The importance of preaching so that the people will understand exactly what is meant, and what is not meant. It is often remarkable how much preaching people may hear, and yet how confused their religious ideas will remain. Do not be satisfied with a sermon unless it gives you at least one clear, strong idea.

P. E. I. Baptist Sabbath School Convention.

The above Convention held its fourth annual session with the Baptist Church, Charlottetown, on the 28th, 30th, and 31st ult. The meetings were all of very great interest. A portion of the first session was set apart as a social prayer meeting, after which the following officers were elected for the following year: President—Rev. J. A. Gordon, Bothwell. Secretaries—M. G. McLeod, Charlottetown, and G. W. Warren, Summerside. Treasurer—W. Wallner, Charlottetown.

Reports were read from the various schools represented, which were generally of a very encouraging nature, and showed that the majority of the Baptist Sunday Schools of this Island are doing much for the spread of truth in their own localities, and eliciting an increased interest in the study of God's Word among the members of the various churches with which they stand connected, as well as others who are influenced by them to meet for the study of the Scriptures.

From 18 schools which reported, we gather the following statistics, Teachers 83; scholars 905, total membership 988; of this number 326 are church members; number received from the Sunday Schools into the churches during the year 34.

The second session, Saturday evening, was opened as a "Welcome Meeting." The welcome address by the Assistant Superintendent of the Charlottetown School, and responded to in a neat speech by the President elect. The subject of the evening, "The Sabbath School—what is it? what its aim?" was opened by Bro. D. Archibald and sustained by several of the delegates.

SABBATH SERVICES. The social prayer meeting from 10 to 11 o'clock was well attended and was of a peculiarly interesting nature. Rev. Mr. Foshay preached the morning sermon from the text, "Redeeming the time because the days are evil." Eph. v. 16. The sermon was very appropriate and practical, bearing, as it did, on Sunday School work, it could not fail to have the desired effect.

In the afternoon, the "Model Bible Class" was conducted by Rev. D. G. McDonald. It consisted of a partial review of the quarterly lessons; it was a profitable and enjoyable occasion. Many of those who took a lively part in it were of very tender years, and the accuracy and aptness with which the questions were answered by these especially, called forth many expressions of approbation.

In the evening Rev. J. A. Gordon preached an excellent sermon to a full house from Luke ii. 21-22.

The subjects discussed on Monday and Tuesday were "The Superintendent, his qualifications and duties," opened by Bro. W. B. Hovatt. "The Normal Class a necessity, and the best means of conducting it," opened by Rev. H. Foshay. "Sabbath School Libraries" opened by Bro. D. Archibald. In this discussion some serious facts were developed. Extracts were read from books found in a Baptist Sunday School Library and published by certain Societies, having for their avowed aim, the propagation of truth. These books contained glaring perversions of the truth. As reference to some of these books will be made at a future date, the writer would in the meantime strongly caution all Baptist Sunday Schools to be very careful in the selection of libraries, no matter how highly recommended by the Religious Publication Societies.

On Monday evening the delegates and the public were treated to a concert by the children of the Baptist Sunday School. The house was crowded. The performers were nearly all very young, and acquitted themselves admirably. The entertainment was exceedingly interesting and drew forth much praise from a delighted audience. It added much to the interest of the Convention.

Tuesday noon brought the Convention to a close. Each session was peculiarly devotional in its nature and thoroughly enjoyed by all present. Most of the Sabbath Schools were well represented by delegates. We are convinced that the delegates from the other Schools and the brethren here parted with a determination to be more zealous and active in the Sunday School work. The meetings throughout were conducted with beautiful harmony, and in parting, the expressions of brotherly Christian affection, added no small degree of pleasure to the occasion.

We look forward with joyful anticipation to our next meeting to be held on the last Saturday of December next, with the brethren at Montague Bridge.

Charlottetown, Jan. 8th, 1879.

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