

=THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 16

Nehemiah

Objects to have:

The sign for the new book: NEHEMIAH
Rebuilding the Wall

A picture of two eyes

Two white hearts

Two black hearts

Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Review the names of the books of the Bible learned thus far. Ask the children if they remember about the temple being rebuilt, the lesson from last Sunday. Ask them about the man named Ezra. Tell the children that the new book is named Nehemiah and that that is the name of a man. Show the children in the Bible where the book of Nehemiah is—the beginning and the end of it.)

(Put the eyes on the board.) Let us say that these eyes are God's eyes. They see everywhere and they see everything. Look at me. What do you see? (Help the children to describe the color of your hair, whether you wear glasses, your clothing, your shoes.) God sees all that about me, also.

God sees more than that, however; God sees my heart. The Bible tells us that "God looketh on the heart." God knows whether my heart is clean, whether I have asked Jesus to be my Saviour and has taken away my sins. God also knows whether I have asked forgiveness for any sin which I have committed since I asked Jesus to be my Saviour. God can look at my heart. He can know whether it is clean or dirty. That means that God even knows what I am thinking. That means God knows what I am planning to do even before anyone else knows.

In our Bible story for today we are going to talk about two different kinds of hearts, the white or clean hearts and the black or dirty hearts. Our Bible story comes from our new Bible book for today—the book of Nehemiah.

Telling the story:

Nehemiah was one of God's men. (Put up a white heart.) He lived in the country of the enemy. The enemy soldiers had big fiery torches. With their fire they burned Jerusalem. In fact, Nehemiah lived in the palace of the king whose army had burned Jerusalem. Nehemiah must have been an honest, hard-working and trusted man to have been taken to live in the king's house. Perhaps Nehemiah often thought about his home country and the city of Jerusalem, and was sad that he wasn't living there.

Nehemiah had company one day. A friend of his went to the enemy country. The enemy country was Babylon. Nehemiah's friend went to Babylon to see him. Nehemiah's friend said, "Nehemiah, I have just been to Jerusalem. What I saw made me so sad! Our once beautiful city of Jerusalem is so bad looking! Oh, the temple is rebuilt, but the walls around the city are still broken down and there are no new gates in the walls. "Nehemiah," his friend said, "do you suppose anything can be done about our country and our city of Jerusalem?"

As Nehemiah listened to his friend, he sat down and cried. In fact, he was sad for many, many days. He refused to eat any food. He could think of only one thing, and that was that his city of Jerusalem was in such terrible condition. Instead of eating, he prayed. When people want to pray most of the day and not eat, that's called

fasting and praying. Nehemiah fasted and prayed about what to do about the walls that needed to be rebuilt at Jerusalem. Nehemiah thought he should go back to Jerusalem and work to make Jerusalem beautiful again. Nehemiah asked the Lord to help make the king want to let him go back to Jerusalem.

One day Nehemiah was at work in the palace of the king. Nehemiah's job was to be a waiter for the king when the king ate his meals. Nehemiah made sure that everything which the king was eating was good food and everything he drank was good drink, and that there would be nothing to make the king sick. Nehemiah had always been happy when he was with the king; he would smile and laugh a lot. But on this day the king noticed that Nehemiah was sad. The king said, "Why are you sad, Nehemiah? I know that you are not sick."

Nehemiah said, "I cannot be happy. I have just learned that the city of Jerusalem where some of my people used to live is in bad condition. The wall around the city is broken up. The gates have been burned with fire."

The king said, "Nehemiah, what can I do to help?"

"If it is all right with you, O king," said Nehemiah, "I would like to go back to Judah, to the main city of Judah where my people used to live, the city of Jerusalem. I would like to go back to build it up again."

"How long will you be gone, Nehemiah? How long will it take you to travel there? How long will you stay there? When will you be back?"

Nehemiah told the king how long he probably would be gone. The king told Nehemiah that he should get ready to go, that it was all right for him to go.

Nehemiah needed to take some wood for working on the gates in the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah asked the king for a letter to the people who worked in the forest so he could get wood to build up the new gates. He asked the king if someone could go with him and give him a safe journey to Jerusalem. Nehemiah was so happy as he prepared to go back to Jerusalem! Some other men were getting ready to travel with him—some soldiers and some men who would ride the horses and drive other animals. They all left Babylon. It took many days, many weeks, and a few months for Nehemiah to get back to Jerusalem.

When he got to Jerusalem, Nehemiah went to a meeting with all the important people there. Nehemiah said to these people, "God will help us to do what we need to do. Let us build the wall of Jerusalem. Let us make new gates and hang them. God has been good to me, and has sent me to lead this work. Now, will you all work with me?" All the people in the meeting said that they would work with Nehemiah.

They all got to work. They worked by families. The men of some families worked on one part of the wall, and they had their daughters and their sons working with them. In the next part of the wall, more men with their children worked, and so on all around the wall of Jerusalem. The people were building. They got new huge stones, mixed the mortar, and started building the wall up again. Other people took the wood which Nehemiah had brought with him and sawed the boards to make big, strong gates again. They took small logs and made bars to go across the gates so that at night the gates could be locked. There were iron loops on the gates through which the bars could go when the gates were shut. It seemed as if everyone in the city of Jerusalem and everyone around the city were happy that once more the city was being built up and that the walls were being rebuilt.

But, there were two men who were angry about the building of the wall. Their names were Sanballat and Tobiah. (Put up the two black hearts.) These men went and talked to some of the Babylonian soldiers who lived around Jerusalem. They said to the soldiers, "Who do these Jews think they are! They think they can rebuild this wall and make it strong again. Why, even a fox could go up this wall and break it down." See, Sanballat and Tobiah thought they could make the people stop building the wall by making fun of them.

Nehemiah heard what Sanballat and Tobiah said. Nehemiah prayed, “Hear, O our God, for we are hated. Now they have made Thee angry by making fun of us while we are doing Your work.” God helped the builders to want to keep on building. The people had a mind to work, and they worked hard building the wall, making new gates and hanging the gates.

Sanballat and Tobiah did not give up. They went to other people who lived around Jerusalem. They said to these other people, “Why don’t you come out and fight against the Israelites? Do you want them to build up their city into a strong city again?”

Once again Nehemiah heard what Sanballat and Tobiah were doing. Once again Nehemiah prayed and asked God for safety. Then Nehemiah went among the men who were working on the wall. Nehemiah said to them, “Some of us are going to have to start guarding the wall at night.” He chose certain men to stand in certain places all around the wall at night so that nothing would happen to the work. No war was started against the Israelites.

Sanballat and Tobiah tried another trick. They tried to get Nehemiah to meet them, away from the city of Jerusalem. If they could get Nehemiah away from Jerusalem, then the work would stop, they thought. Sanballat and Tobiah said to Nehemiah, “Come to a meeting in one of the villages near Jerusalem. We want to talk about what you are doing.” Nehemiah sent messengers to Sanballat and Tobiah. The messengers told them that Nehemiah could not come. Nehemiah could not be tricked; Nehemiah loved God, and he had God’s help to know what to do.

Then Sanballat and Tobiah tried to get the people of Jerusalem to turn against Nehemiah. Sanballat wrote down a lie about Nehemiah; he wrote, “Nehemiah is building the wall of Jerusalem so that he can turn against the king of Babylon.” That was a lie! God saw to it that Sanballat’s lie did not stop the work.

One day the work was finished! Nehemiah said, “Let’s have a day of celebration. Let’s have some singers. Let’s have them sing songs about how good God has been to us. Let us gather for a special meeting.”

All the people gathered together in the street by the gate that is called the Water Gate. A platform had been built. (Put up a white heart.) Ezra brought the Bible; he opened it. The people all stood up. Ezra read from the Bible. All the men and the ladies and the boys and the girls listened carefully while Ezra read the Bible. As they listened, they knew that they were sinners. As they listened, they knew how good God had been to them. They praised the Lord.

As God looked at Nehemiah and Ezra, He saw they had white hearts. (Point to the white hearts.) They got their white hearts by trusting in God and asking Him to forgive them of their sins.

As God looked at Sanballat and Tobiah, He saw (point to the black hearts) that they had black hearts. They would not trust God; they were wicked. They made fun of God’s people, they tried to cause other people to fight God’s people, they tried to trick God’s man, and they lied against God’s people.

LEARN OUR BIBLE VERSE: Nehemiah 1:8, “And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.”