

THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

BY

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1861-1942

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Introduction

The book of Nehemiah is the latest of the historical books of the Old Testament. It is the continuation of the history of the company of people which had returned under Zerubbabel and Ezra to the land. In Ezra we saw the remnant getting back and rebuilding the temple, the place of worship. In Nehemiah we have the record of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and the restoration of the civil condition of the people, the partial and outward reestablishment of the Jews in the land. The book bears the name of Nehemiah, because he is the leading person in the recorded events, and likewise the inspired author of the main portion of this record. Two other persons by the name of Nehemiah are mentioned in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. One was the son of Azbuk (Neh. 3:15) and the other belonged to the returning remnant under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2 and Neh. 7:7). From these, Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah must be distinguished. His genealogy is obscure. Besides being the son of Hachaliah, the only other mention of his family is found in chapter 7:2; there he speaks of his brother Hanani. Some class him as a priest for the reason that he heads the list of priests. But his name is given there as the princely leader of the people. As to his office, he carried two titles. He is called "Tirshatha" in chapter 8:9, which means ruler or governor. In chapter 12:26 his title is also governor; the word used is "pechah," the Turkish word "pasha."

There can be no doubt that this man of God wrote chapters 1 to 7:5; it is an autobiography. Chapter 7:6-73 is a quotation of a register of names, which differs in numerous places from the register in Ezra 2:1-70. Both were probably copied from public documents, perhaps from the book of Chronicles mentioned in chapter 7:23. The discrepancies between Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 show that Nehemiah did not copy from Ezra's record. Chapters 8 to 10, it is claimed by some, were not written by the hand of Nehemiah. It has been suggested that Ezra is the author. The remaining section, chapters 11 to 13, bears the clear mark of Nehemiah's pen.

The History it Contains

Nehemiah was the cupbearer in the palace of Shushan, serving Artaxerxes the King. When he learned the deplorable condition of the people in the land of his fathers, he sat down, wept and prayed. The king discovered the source of Nehemiah's sorrow, and permitted him to go, giving

him full authority to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and to help his people. This was in the year 445 B.C. Nehemiah reached the city the same year, and was for twelve years actively engaged in the welfare work of Jerusalem. The city wall was finished and the work done in spite of the many hindrances and obstacles the enemy put in the way. Sanballat, the Moabite, and Tobiah, the Ammonite, were Nehemiah's chief enemies. With them were allied the Arabians, Ammonites and Ashdodites. They tried to hinder the work by mocking the workmen, then by threatening them with violence. When their attempts failed to arrest the restoration of the wall, then they tried craft. Nehemiah came out victorious. And there were also internal troubles among the people, threatening disruption. Thus as Daniel the prophet had announced, the wall was rebuilt and the work finished in troublous times (Dan. 9:25).

After the city had been fortified, the wall built, religious reforms were inaugurated. At the Watergate the law was read and expounded by Ezra the priest. The feast of tabernacles was also celebrated, followed by a solemn fast, repentance and a prayer of humiliation and confession of sins. A covenant then was made. In all this Nehemiah was assisted by the pious Ezra. About 432 B.C. Nehemiah returned to Babylon. His stay there does not seem to have been very long, and he went back to Jerusalem. After his return he demanded the separation of all the mixed multitude from among the people. He also expelled the Ammonite Tobiah from the chamber which the high priest Eliashib had prepared for him in the temple. Then he chased away the son-in-law of Sanballat, a son of Joiada the high priest. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Nehemiah died at an advanced age.

Interesting light has been thrown on this book and the conditions of the Jews of that period by the recent discovery of Aramaic papyri near Assouan. These papers were written twenty-four years after Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem, and sixteen years after the death of King Artaxerxes; they were therefore probably written during the lifetime of Nehemiah. These papyri speak of the Jewish colony in the land, and the house of the LORD with its worship, as well as what the enemy did to the people.

The Spiritual Lessons

Nehemiah is a beautiful character well worth a close study. He was a man of prayer, who habitually turned to God, seeking His wisdom and His strength. The rebuilding of the wall, the different gates, and the men who toiled there, the attempts of the enemies and their defeat, all contain truths of much spiritual value and help. The reader will find the spiritual and dispensational lessons pointed out in the annotations of each chapter.

The Division of Nehemiah

The contents of the book are best divided into three sections.

- I. HOW NEHEMIAH RETURNED TO JERUSALEM AND THE BUILDING OF THE WALL (1-7)
- II. THE SPIRITUAL REVIVAL (8-10)
- III. THE PEOPLE ESTABLISHED, THE DEDICATION OF THE WALL, AND NEHEMIAH'S FINAL ACTS (11-13)

Analysis and Annotations

I. HOW NEHEMIAH RETURNED TO JERUSALEM AND THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

CHAPTER 1

1. Nehemiah hears of the condition of Jerusalem (1:1-3)
2. His great sorrow, and prayer (1:4-11)

Verses 1-3. "The words of Nehemiah (the Lord is comfort) the son of Hachaliah." It is therefore the personal narrative of his experience which is before us in the first six chapters of this book, in which he describes his soul exercise, and how the Lord made it possible for him to return to Jerusalem, and how the wall was rebuilt. Nehemiah was a young man, born in captivity holding a position of nearness to the great Persian king and living in the beautiful palace of Shushan. He lived in luxuries, and was an honored servant of the king. It was in the month of Chisleu, in the twentieth year (445 B.C.) when Hanani his brother (7:2) visited him with certain men out of Judah. The question he asked them at once shows the deep interest he had in God's people. "I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem." Though he had never seen Jerusalem, the city of his fathers, he loved Jerusalem and felt like all pious captives, so beautifully expressed in one of the Psalms--"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6). Though he lived in prosperity his heart was with his people. It was bad news which they brought him. The remnant was in great affliction and reproach, the wall of Jerusalem in a broken-down condition, and the gates burned with fire.

Verses 4-11. This sad news overwhelmed him with great sorrow. He sat down and wept; his mourning continued certain days. If Nehemiah was so affected by the temporal condition of Jerusalem and the affliction of the remnant, how much more should believers mourn and weep over the spiritual conditions among God's people. Yet how little of this sorrowing spirit over these conditions is known in our day! It is needed for humiliation and effectual prayer. Nehemiah did not rush at once into the presence of the king to utter his petitions. He waited and fasted certain days and then addressed the God of heaven (Ezra 6:9). He reveals in the opening words of his prayer familiarity with the Word of God. "I beseech thee, O LORD, the God of heaven, the great and terrible God (Deut. 7:21; 10:17; Dan. 9:4) that keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments (Deut. 7:9; 1 Kings 8:23) let thine ear now be attentive (2 Chron. 6:40; Ps. 130:2) and thine eyes open (2 Chron. 6:40) that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer of thy servant." After these scriptural expressions, expressing confidence in the power and faithfulness of God, Nehemiah confessed his sin and the sins of his people. "Yea, I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept thy commandments, nor thy statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandest thy servant Moses." Ezra had prayed a similar prayer, and before him Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 9). There is no flaw revealed in Nehemiah's character, as there is none in Daniel's life, yet both of these

men of God went on their faces and confessed their sins and the sins of the people. They realized that they had a share in the common failure of His people. And so are we all blameworthy of the spiritual decline and failure among God's people, and should humble ourselves on account of it. It is this which is pleasing to the Lord and which assures His mercy.

But Nehemiah was also trusting in the promise of God. He was a man of faith, and cast himself upon the word of God, knowing what the Lord had promised He is able to do. "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that Thou commandest thy servant Moses." The promise in Deut. 30:1-5 is especially upon his heart and mentioned by him in the presence of the Lord. In the near future this great national promise of the regathering of Israel from the ends of the earth will be fulfilled, in that day when the Lord returns. The exercise and prayer of Nehemiah will be repeated in the Jewish believing remnant during the time of Jacob's trouble, the great tribulation. Furthermore Nehemiah claims the blessing for the people on account of their covenant relation with Jehovah. They are His servants, His people, "whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and by thy strong hand." And how he pleads for an answer. "O LORD, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who delight to fear thy name"--others were also praying--"and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man." He meant the powerful monarch Artaxerxes. Yet in God's presence he looked upon him only as a man, and he knew God could use this man in behalf of His people, as He had used Cyrus.

CHAPTER 2

1. The King's question (2:1-2)
2. The King's permission (2:3-8)
3. The arrival in Jerusalem and the night-ride (2:9-16)
4. The resolution to build the wall (2:17-18)
5. The ridicule of the enemy, and Nehemiah's answer (2:19-20)

Verses 1-2. The last sentence of the previous chapter, "For I was the king's cupbearer," belongs to this chapter. Nehemiah is seen exercising the functions of the King's cupbearer to minister to the joy and pleasure of the monarch. Notice that it was four months after his prayer. Hanani had visited his brother Nehemiah in the month Chisleu, the ninth month, and Nisan is the first month of the Jewish year. How many prayers he must have offered up during these three months! How patiently he waited for the Lord's time! He carried a heavy burden upon his heart, expressed in a sad countenance, which was at last noticed by Artaxerxes. "Why is thy countenance sad, seeing that thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart," said the king. Then was Nehemiah sore afraid fearing the king's displeasure.

Verses 3-8. Nehemiah answered the king and acquainted him with the reason of his sadness, "why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" From the meek answer Nehemiah gave we learn that his forefathers were inhabitants of Jerusalem, and he belonged therefore to the tribe of Judah. Instead of the angry outburst Nehemiah feared, the king asked graciously, "For what dost thou make request?" How his heart must have been stirred when the king uttered these words! He had prayed four months before that the God of heaven grant him "mercy in the

sight of this man." And now the answer to his prayer was at hand. When the king had asked for his request, Nehemiah prayed again to the God of heaven. He found time to pray between the words of the king and the answer he gave him. His lips did not speak, his knees were not bowed, nor did the king see any other sign that Nehemiah prayed. Yet there was earnest believing and prevailing prayer. It was an ejaculatory prayer, the soul's cry to God, carried swiftly by the Holy Spirit to the throne of God. This man of God every step of the way cast himself upon God; prayer was his constant resource. Such is our privilege. As we walk in His fellowship we too shall pray and look to the Lord as Nehemiah did. It is a blessed occupation to cultivate a prayerful mind; indeed it is the breathing of the new life. Whatever our experiences, the heart which is in touch with God will always turn to Him even in the smallest matters. After Nehemiah had stated his request the king granted what he had asked. His prayers were answered; God had touched the heart of the monarch. "So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time." The requested letters to the governors beyond the river to convey him till he came to Judah, and to Asaph the forester to furnish him with timber needed for the work, were granted to him. In this, like pious Ezra (Ezra 7:6; 8:18, 22) Nehemiah saw the power of God displayed--"according to the good hand of God upon me." Faith not only depends on God, but also sees, His gracious hand and gives the glory to Him. In faith Nehemiah could say "my God," like Paul in writing to the Philippians (Phil. 4:19).

Verses 9-16. He crossed the river Euphrates and traversed Transpotamia till he reached Samaria. He delivered the letters. Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, the servant, the Ammonite, Samaritans, are here mentioned for the first time. Sanballat may have been the governor of the Samaritan mongrel race. They were grieving exceedingly at Nehemiah's appearing, when they heard he had come "to seek the welfare of the children of Israel."

Sanballat (hate in disguise) is called the Horonite, an inhabitant of Horonaim, which was a southern Moabite city (Isa. 15:5; Jer. 48:3, 5, 34) and Tobiah, the servant, an Ammonite. They came from Moab and Ammon, blood-relations of Israel, being bastard offspring of Lot. The Moabite and Ammonite were not to come into the congregation of God forever; the curse rested upon them. They did not meet Israel with bread and water when they came forth from Egypt. They hated the people of God, and had hired Balaam the son of Beor to curse Israel (Deut. 23:3-6). They were the bitter enemies of Israel, which explains the displeasure of Sanballat and Tobiah when Nehemiah came with the king's credentials. They represented typically those who profess to be children of God, but are not born again; their profession is spurious and carnal, and as mere religionists, with a form of godliness but destitute of its power, they are the enemies of the cross of Christ and of the real people of God.

Nehemiah continues his narrative. "So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days." We can well imagine, though he does not inform us of it, that these three days were more than days of rest from the strenuous journey. They were days of waiting on God, renewed prayer for guidance and wisdom. He was alone with his God. When the three days of waiting were over he began a night ride to inspect the condition of the different gates and the wall. When all was quiet and people asleep, this servant of God went on this memorable night inspection, accompanied by a few men. No one knows what God had put in his heart; he kept it a secret. There was no boast that he had come to do a big work, and no heralding of his plans. The man of faith, who trusts God, can go and act without making known what the Lord

has commissioned him to do. He alone rode on an animal; the others walked. It must have been a sad journey as he passed from gate to gate in the walls. Desolation and debris everywhere. The gates were burned to ashes, and finally the rubbish in the way was so great that the animal he rode could no longer pass through. And how he must have sighed when his eyes beheld the ruin and havoc, the results of the judgment of God on account of Israel's sin!

And how many other true servants of God have spent nights like this in considering the failure and ruin among God's people, burdened with sorrow and deep concern, sighing and groaning, with hearts touched like Nehemiah's, ready to do the Lord's will.

Verses 17-18. The rulers, the Jews, the priests and nobles were ignorant of all he had done. On the morning after that night journey, he called the people together to tell them what the Lord had put in his heart. But with what meekness and tenderness he speaks to them! He does not reproach them or charge them with unfaithfulness and neglect. He does not assume the role of a leader, but identifies himself with the people. "Ye see the distress that we are in"--he might have said, "You see the distress you are in." Then he told them of what God had done. But we find not a word of credit to himself, nor of the lonely hours spent during that sleepless night. Then the people resolved to rise up and build.

Verses 19-20. Sanballat, Tobiah and a third one, Geshem the Arabian (an Ishmaelite) were at hand with their sneers. "They laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?" They realized that Nehemiah had come to build the wall of exclusion, and bring the people back to their God-given separation; therefore these outsiders began at once to antagonize the messenger of God. Magnificent is Nehemiah's answer. "The God of heaven, He will prosper us." He puts God first. Knowing that they were doing His will in rebuilding the wall, he had the confidence and assurance that God was on their side and none could hinder. "Therefore we His servants will arise and build." This was their determination to do the work. "But ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem." It is the refusal of their fellow help. Though they might have claimed a relationship with the people of God, yet did they not belong to Israel. Their help was not wanted. What a contrast with the unseparated condition which prevails in the professing church in what is termed "work for the Lord" in which the unsaved and ungodly are asked to participate!

CHAPTER 3

1. The builders of the sheep gate (3:1-2)
2. The builders of the fish gate (3:3-5)
3. The repairers of the old gate (3:6-12)
4. The repairers of the valley gate (3:13)
5. The repairers of the dung gate (3:14)
6. The repairers of the gate of the fountain (3:15-25)
7. The repairers of the water gate (3:26-27)
8. The repairers of the horse gate (3:28)
9. The builders of the east gate and the Gate Miphkad (3:29-32)

Verses 1-2. The work is begun at once. We shall not point out the location of these different gates, nor study the topography of Jerusalem in

the days of Nehemiah, as others have done. There are most helpful, spiritual lessons to be learned from the building of the wall and the repairing of the gates. A wall is for protection and to keep out what does not belong in the city. In Ezra's work we saw the restoration of the true place of worship. The wall surrounding the place where the people gathered once more in the true worship of Jehovah typifies the guarding of that place of privilege and blessing. A wall of separation is needed to keep out that which is undesirable and which would hinder and mar the true worship. (Even in connection with the millennial temple a wall is mentioned, "to make a separation between the sanctuary and the profane place" Ezek. 42:20.) Even so a church, an assembly, composed of true believers who gather together in that worthy Name, and unto that Name, must be protected from the world and all which dishonors Christ, or that which is contrary to sound doctrine, must be excluded. This is the true New Testament principle in connection with the true Church, foreshadowed in the building of the wall surrounding the place where the Lord had set His Name.

The third chapter is a remarkable one. We see the people of God at work building and repairing, every one doing the work in a certain place. Here is the record of the names, where and how they labored. God keeps such a record of all His servants and their labors. When all His people appear before the judgment seat of Christ this book will be opened "and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8).

Ten gates are mentioned in this chapter. In chapter 8:16 we read of "the gate of Ephraim" and in chapter 12:39 of "the prison gate." If we add these two to the ten mentioned in this chapter we have twelve gates (Rev. 21:12). The first gate at which the work started is the sheep gate. Through this gate the sacrificial animals were led to the altar, the constant witness to the fact that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" and the types of Him who was "led as a lamb to the slaughter." The sheep gate at which the work started is typical of the blessed work of the Lamb of God, He who bore our sins in His body on the tree, the offering of His spotless, holy body by which we are sanctified. The lesson here is that the person and work of Christ is the starting point of a true restoration, and that the cross of Christ, the work of God's Son has accomplished, must be guarded above everything else. At the close of this chapter this sheep-gate is mentioned once more. After making the circuit of all the gates, we are led back to this first gate. It is with this great truth, the gospel of Christ, that all repairing of the inroads of the world and the flesh, must start and terminate. This gate suggests Him who said, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). There is no other gate which leads to life and into God's presence.

Eliashib (God will restore) the high priest, with his brethren, builded the sheep gate, sanctified it and set it up. It was priestly work. The tower of Meah and the tower of Hananeel are mentioned. Meah means "a hundred" and it reminds us of the parable in which our Lord mentions the man who had a hundred sheep. Hananeel means "to whom God is gracious." Significant names. There is no doubt that this sheep gate is the same one mentioned in John 5:2, which affords still another application. The men of Jericho, once under the curse, but now in the place of nearness and blessing, toiled next to the high priest. What grace this reveals! Zaccur (well remembered) the son of Imri (the towering one) also was there.

Verses 3-5. Next was the fish gate. This was separated from the sheep

gate by the portion of the wall which the men of Jericho and Zaccur repaired. Outside of that gate may have been a fish market, or it may have been the gate through which the fishermen passed to catch fish. It reminds us of the words of our Lord, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). After we have passed through the sheep gate we must go through the fish gate, to catch fish, to be soul-winners. In this way, leading others to Christ, bringing sinners to a knowledge of the Saviour, the Church is built up. Hassenaah (lifted up) was the builder there. Then Meremoth (strong), Meshullam (repaying a friend) and Zadok (just) repaired next to the fish gate. "And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles did not put their necks to the work of their Lord." The prophet Amos was a Tekoite who had prophesied many years before, a simple herdman and gatherer of sycamore figs. He was chosen of the Lord, and here other humble instruments of Tekoa, used in doing the work, are immortalized in this record. Their nobles were slackers. They had no interest in the work of their Lord. And so there are such who do not work for the Lord, and in that coming day will suffer loss, though they are saved.

Verses 6-12. The next gate is the old gate. This gate was probably the same which elsewhere is called "the corner gate" (2 Kings 14:13; Jer. 31:38). Jehoiada ("the Lord knows") and Meshullam repaired this gate. This gate may also remind us of Him "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," who is the cornerstone, upon whom all rests. Next repaired Melatiah, the Gibeonite, and Jadon, the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and Mizpah. The Gibeonites, on account of their deception by which they had obtained a covenant of peace with Israel in Joshua's day, had been made "hewers of wood and drawers of water." Here we behold some of them participating in the great work. Of the others we mention Rephaiah, who was a wealthy man, who did not hire a substitute, but labored with his own hands, toiling with the rest. Shallum, the son of Haloresh, was another man of power and wealth; he and his daughters repaired like the rest. What a sight it must have been when these zealous men cleared away the debris and repaired the gates, and among them the daughters of Shallum!

Verse 13. The valley gate was repaired by Hanun (gracious) and the inhabitants of Zanoah (broken). The valley typifies the low place, humility. How needed this is in service for God, for "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."

Verse 14. The dung gate was repaired by Malchiah, and he was the ruler of Beth-haccerem (the place of the vineyard). This gate was used to carry out the refuse and filth from the city. This gate reminds of the exhortations that God's people must cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit "for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7).

Verses 15-25. The gate of the fountain was next to the dung gate. The fountain, ever flowing, is a blessed type of the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer and is in him, the well of living water springing up, like a fountain, into everlasting life (John 4:14). It is suggestive that the fountain gate came after the dung gate. If a believer cleanses himself from that which defiles, the Spirit of God will be unhindered, filling the believer and using him as a vessel meet for the Master's use. Shallun (recompense) the son of Colhozeh (wholly seer) the ruler of Mizpah (watchtower) repaired and built that gate. And these names fit in beautifully with the Spirit of God as the fountain of life and power. We

cannot mention all the names which follow. (A good concordance like Strong's or Young's gives most of the Hebrew proper names in a reliable translation. We suggest the study of the names of those who repaired as interesting and helpful.) Nor do we know anything whatever of the individual history of those zealous Israelites, who reconstructed and restored the wall and gates of Jerusalem. God knows each one and has preserved their names, though unknown by the world, in His Word. Surely "the memory of the just is blessed" (Prov. 10:7) and some day they, with us and all His servants, will receive the reward.

Verses 26-27. The water gate is mentioned and the Nethinim, who were servants and dwelt in Ophel (the high place) are connected with this gate. This gate suggests the Word of God so frequently spoken of under the symbol of water (John 3:5, 13:1-16; Eph. 5:26; Ps. 119:136). It is very interesting to notice that while the servants are mentioned in connection with the water gate, it does not say that they repaired the gate. The Word of God needs no building up or improving; it builds up those who bow to its blessed authority.

Verse 28. The horse gate (2 Kings 11:6; Jer. 31:40) suggests warfare and victory. In a world of evil the people of God wage a warfare. We wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with the wicked spirits. Paul speaks of the believer as a soldier of Christ. Victory is on our side, though the forces of evil may threaten on all sides.

Verses 29-32. The east gate was repaired and kept by Shemaiah, the son of Shechaniah. From Ezekiel's prophecy we learn that the Shekina glory left from the east gate, and that when the glory returns to dwell once more in the temple, the great millennial temple of Ezekiel's vision, the glory of the Lord will enter through the east gate. The east gate faces the rising sun. It suggests the coming of the Lord for His people. And here the two names fit in beautifully. Shemaiah means "heard of the Lord"; even so He will hear His people and some day will answer their prayer for His coming. Shechaniah means "habitation of the Lord." We shall be with Him.

The Miphkad gate was repaired by Malchiah (the Lord is King) the goldsmith's son. Miphkad means "the appointed place" or "a place of visitation." It was probably the gate in which the judges sat to settle disputes and controversies. It suggests the judgment seat of Christ.

Thus we learn that the wall surrounding and protecting the gathered people suggests the cross as the starting point; service; Christ as Lord; humility; cleansing from defilement; filling with the Spirit; the Word of God and its power; warfare and victory; the coming of the Lord and the judgment seat of Christ.

CHAPTER 4

1. The indignation and sneers of the enemies (4:1-3)
2. Nehemiah's ejaculatory prayer (4:4-6)
3. Conspiracy, and more prayer (4:7-9)
4. Nehemiah's precautions and confidence (4:10-23)

Verses 1-3. Sanballat (hate in disguise) having heard of the successful building of the wall, became very angry and mocked the Jews. And Tobiah the Ammonite used sarcasm. He said that which they build will be so

weak that one of the foxes, which infested the broken-down walls (Ps. 63:10) could break these newly built walls again.

Verses 4-6. The answer to these sneers was prayer. The language these two enemies used was provoking, but Nehemiah's refuge is prayer. Hezekiah did the same when the Assyrian taunted him and defiled the God of Israel. It is another of the brief ejaculatory prayers of Nehemiah. There are seven of them in this book: chapters 2:4; 4:4-6; 5:19; 6:14; 13:14, 22, 29. He prayed, "Hear, our God, for we are despised, and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee; because they have provoked thee to anger before the builders." He cast himself wholly upon God and with this prayer Nehemiah and the people put the matter in the hands of the Lord. They were an object of contempt, as His people who were doing the work of the Lord wanted to have done. Sanballat and Tobiah were the enemies of God. This prayer reminds us of the many imprecatory prayers in the psalms. When in the future another remnant of the Jews returns to the land, they will face in the great tribulation more powerful enemies than this remnant had to contend with. The man of sin, the Antichrist, will be in control, and it is then that they will pray these prayers, some of them almost like Nehemiah's prayer (Ps. 109:14).

The work was not hindered by the taunts of the enemy. "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof, for the people had a mind to work." If only God's people are in touch with God and cast themselves wholly upon Him, all the efforts of the enemy are unavailing.

Verses 7-9. As the work progressed and the Samaritan enemies saw that their taunts were unsuccessful, they became very wroth and conspired to use force and fight against Jerusalem. Sanballat and Tobiah had gathered others, the Arabians, Ammonites and Ashdodites, to hinder the work. Behind them stood the same enemy of God, Satan, who always hinders the work of God. His work of opposition is the same in every age. A very serious time had come to the builders of the wall. The enemy was threatening to fall upon them, and perhaps destroy what they had built. "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God." It was prayer, dependence on God, first. The next thing they did was to take precaution against the enemy--"and set a watch against them day and night, because of them." But was not prayer enough? Why the setting of a watch if they trusted the Lord? If they had not done this it would have been presumption on their part. Their action did not clash with their trust in God.

Verses 10-23. There was also discouragement in their midst. As the apostle wrote of himself, "without were fightings, within were fears" (2 Cor. 7:5), this was true of them. They became timid and fainthearted. It was Judah, the princely tribe, whose emblem was the lion, which showed discouragement and was ready to give up in despair. But Nehemiah made no answer to the complaint "we are not able to build the wall." The best remedy was to keep right on praying, working and watching. The adversaries intended to make a surprise attack and slay the workmen and cause the work to cease. That was their plan; but they did not reckon with God, who watched over His people. Ten times the Jews which were scattered among these adversaries warned them of the great danger of the coming attack. This was another discouragement. Then Nehemiah acted in the energy of faith. He knew God was on their side and that He would fight for them. He prepared the people for the threatening conflict and armed them with

swords, spears and bows. Then he addressed them with inspiring words. "Be not afraid of them: Remember the Lord, great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your houses." All was at stake. No mercy could be expected from the wicked adversaries. It was a blessed battle-cry he gave to them: "Remember the Lord." If He is remembered and kept before the heart defeat is impossible. The great preparation was soon reported to the enemies, by which they knew that their attack had become known. Nehemiah saw in it all God's gracious and providential dealings, "God had brought their counsel to nought." Then he continued to work at their task of building the wall. But they did not become careless. They continued to be on their guard. "Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work and with the other hand held a weapon." A trumpeter stood at Nehemiah's side. If he sounded the alarm they were to gather together; then, said Nehemiah, "our God shall fight for us." "So we labored in the work, and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared." We leave it with the reader to apply all this to our spiritual warfare against our enemies. The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God, and constant watching is needed for that.

CHAPTER 5

1. The complaint of oppression (5:1-5)
2. Nehemiah's rebuke and demands (5:6-13)
3. Nehemiah's generosity (5:14-19)

Verses 1-5. The internal conditions among the toiling people were serious. The work which was done in rebuilding the walls was a labor of love; no wages were paid. As the people were thus engaged their other occupations, including agriculture, had to be neglected. As a result the poor had been driven to mortgage their lands, vineyards and houses in order to buy corn, because of the dearth. The rich had taken advantage of this and had enslaved their sons and daughters, and there seemed to be no prospect of redeeming them. The rich Jews by usury oppressed the poor, who had lost their lands and houses. There was therefore a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. It was a sad condition; the enemy was doing his work in the camp (Acts 6:1). Oppression of the poor is especially displeasing to God and His Spirit condemns and warns against it (Amos 2:6; 5:12, 8:4-8; Prov. 14:31; 22:16; 28:3; and James 5:1-6).

Verses 6-13. Righteous Nehemiah, when he heard all this, was moved with indignation and righteous anger took hold on him. Nehemiah, the Governor, writes, "I consulted with myself." No doubt much prayer was connected with this self consultation. He then rebuked the nobles and rulers for having done what the law of God forbids and condemns (Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19; Ps. 15:5) to exact usury. A great assembly was called in which their conduct was denounced unsparingly. "We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us?" When Nehemiah came to Jerusalem he had freed those Jews who were in bondage to the heathen on account of some debt, and these rich usurers were selling their own brethren. They had no answer to give but were convicted of their evil deeds. He then demanded full restitution, "Restore, I pray you, to them even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive yards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine and the oil, that ye exact of them." The appeal was

effectual. They were at once ready to restore, to require nothing more of them, and to do all Nehemiah had demanded. It was a great victory. Had the oppression continued and the internal strife, it would have resulted in disaster. How often these internal strifes and acts of injustice have brought reproach upon the people of God, and dishonor to that worthy Name! (Gal. 5:15; James 3:16.) They had to give an oath to do this, and solemnly Nehemiah shook his lap and said, "So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, who performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out and emptied." An "Amen" from the great congregation followed, and they acted upon the promise.

Verses 14-19. The closing verses show the generosity and self-denying character of this man of God. It reminds us somewhat of the apostle Paul and his testimony concerning himself (1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Cor. 12:15-16; 1 Thess. 2:9-10). In all he had done as a servant of God he had the comfort that God knew and would be his Rewarder. "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people." He will have his reward, and so will all His people, who serve in behalf of God's people as Nehemiah did.

CHAPTER 6

1. The attempt to entice Nehemiah (6:1-4)
2. The attempt to intimidate him (6:5-9)
3. The attempt through a false prophet (6:10-14)
4. The wall finished (6:15-16)
5. The conspiracy between Jewish nobles and Tobiah (6:17-19)

Verses 1-4. Defeated in all previous efforts to hinder the work and to do harm to the builders of the wall, the enemies made new attempts to make them cease from the work. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arabian, with the other enemies, had heard that the wall was about finished. Sanballat and Geshem sent the message to Nehemiah, "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono." Nehemiah knew their scheme, "they thought to do me mischief," probably to assassinate him, or make him a prisoner. He therefore answered, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" Four times they tried to entice him, and four times he gave the same answer. Apparently Sanballat and Geshem offered a friendly meeting on neutral ground, suggesting some kind of an alliance. But Nehemiah, whole-hearted as he was, refused to come down and stop the important God-given work. He would not turn aside from the place given to him by the Lord and the work which he had been called to do. Maintaining this separation was his safeguard. In our own days of worldly alliance and compromise, when deceitful workers abound on all sides, who are like the Samaritans, who feared the Lord outwardly and served their own gods (2 Kings 17:33) the only way of escape is to act like Nehemiah did and have no fellowship with such.

Verses 5-9. After this failure they attempted to intimidate Nehemiah. Sanballat sent his servant the fifth time, and while the previous communications were sealed this one was in the form of an open letter. In this letter Nehemiah was slandered and a threat made to accuse him of treason to the king of Persia. Maliciousness breathed in every word of this open letter. With a clear conscience, knowing that all was a wicked invention, Nehemiah answered this new attack. "There are no such things

done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." He recognized what they tried to do and afresh Nehemiah looked to his God. "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." As it was in Nehemiah's day so it is still. Wherever the work of the Lord is done and God's servants labor to glorify Him, the enemy will rise up and hinder the work. When the Lord opens a door, then many adversaries will appear. The sneers, the hatred, the wiles and the lies of the world are the same today, because behind them stands the same person who acted through Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem--Satan, the god of this age.

Verses 10-14. Shemaiah's message was the message of a false prophet. He told Nehemiah that they would come to slay him. He supposed that Nehemiah would flee after receiving this information in the form of a message from the Lord. But Nehemiah said, "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being such as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." He was a man of faith, in fellowship with God and he at once knew that the message was not from Him. He perceived God had not sent him. Shemaiah was the hireling of the adversaries. It was a cleverly laid plan, not only to frighten Nehemiah, but to make him sin, so that they might have something against him. It seems that Shemaiah was ceremonially unclean; that is probably the meaning of "shut up." He was not fit in that condition to be in the house of God, within the temple. And Nehemiah too, not being a priest, would have transgressed had he followed Shemaiah's suggestion. This was the cunning scheme. With this hireling prophet there were also other prophets and a prophetess, by the name of Noadiah.

Verses 15-16. "So the wall was finished in the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days." How grateful they must have been when their task was finished! Critics have remarked that fifty-two days is too short a time to accomplish that much work. But a large number of people as well as the servants of Nehemiah (5:16) worked incessantly. The material, too, was ready, for they probably had to dig out the old stones to put them back into the right place; no new stones needed to be hewed and transported. God had worked and given His blessing. The success of it, next to God, was due to persevering prayer, personal and united effort, constant watchfulness and unflinching courage. And their enemies were more cast down, "for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God."

Verses 17-19. The final paragraph of this chapter reveals another sad condition which resulted from disobedience to the law. Mixed marriages were responsible for it. Nehemiah only reports this serious fellowship of the nobles of the Jews and his enemy Tobiah. We shall read later how Nehemiah dealt with those who had allied themselves with this Ammonite (chapter 13).

CHAPTER 7

1. Provisions made for the defense of the city (7:1-4)
2. The genealogy (7:5-65)
3. Their whole number (7:66-69)
4. The gifts for the work (7:70-73)

Verses 1-4. The wall had been finished and the doors set up. Porters, singers and the Levites were appointed, and Nehemiah gave to his brother Hanani and Hananiah, the ruler of the castle, charge over Jerusalem. The porters were gate keepers. These gate keepers are named in Ezra 2:42, and

here in this chapter in verse 45. Their duty was to open the gates and bar them at night. Nehemiah's instructions are given in the text, "Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house." The city was carefully guarded. Every one who entered the city had to do so in broad daylight, and a system of watches was established for the purpose of watching the gates of the city day and night. It seems the Hebrews before the exile, and some time after, had three night watches of four hours each. Later, at the time our Lord was on earth, they had four night watches (Mark 13:35). It was wisdom to guard the entrances to the city so as to keep out those who had no right to enter. As there were many enemies who might sneak in and do harm, this scrutiny and these watches were of great importance and necessity.

This caution exercised by Nehemiah in regard to watching those who entered the gates gives a lesson concerning the Church. The New Testament teaches the same caution as to those who are to be admitted to Christian fellowship, and those who are to be refused. Unregenerated persons have no right in a true church or assembly, nor any one whose life is not right, nor who holds doctrines contrary to the faith delivered unto the saints. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 10-11). But if even in the Apostolic days "certain men crept in unawares," as Jude writes (Jude 4) how much greater is this evil in these Laodicean days.

Verses 5-65. This chapter corresponds to the second chapter in Ezra; the annotations given there need not be repeated here. But we notice Nehemiah's statement, "My God put it into my heart." As a godly man, he acknowledges the hand of the Lord and His guidance.

Verses 66-69. The number of the whole congregation is given as 42,360. If we turn to Ezra 2:64 we find the same statement. There are differences between these two lists which prove that they are not identical.

Verses 70-73. The gifts for the work are mentioned more fully by Nehemiah. See Ezra's record, chapter 2:68-70. The amounts in both records do not agree, and it is generally charged that it is due to different traditions, or copyists' errors. But there is no real discrepancy. Ezra mentions what some of the chiefs of the fathers offered. Nehemiah records what he himself gave (Tirshatha is Nehemiah's Persian title as governor) besides the chiefs and the rest of the people.

II. THE SPIRITUAL REVIVAL

CHAPTER 8

1. The reading of the law before the water gate (8:1-8)
2. A day of joy and not of mourning (8:9-12)
3. The keeping of the feast of tabernacles (8:13-18)

Verses 1-8. This interesting chapter gives the record of a gracious revival through the reading of the law. All the people gathered themselves together as one man in the street that was before the water gate, the place which suggests the cleansing and refreshing power of the Word. And as a

united people they had but one desire, to hear the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded, to Israel. They gave orders to Ezra that he should bring the book of the law. This the people knew was the Word of the Lord, and for this they hungered. Every true revival must begin with the Word, and in believing submission to what the Lord has said. So, it has been in all the great revivals of the past, and so it will be in the future. The great need today is "back to the Bible"; and to listen to its message as the message of God. How willingly and joyfully Ezra must have responded, and how it must have cheered the aged servant of the Lord! He brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and those that understood in hearing (children of a certain age). Critics say that Ezra's law of Moses must not be understood as meaning the Pentateuch; they claim that it was a collection of different laws, and part of the so-called "priestly codex," which even then, according to the critical school, was not completely finished. Inasmuch as the destructive criticism denies that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, they are obliged to resort to these arguments in order to sustain their theory. There is no valid reason to doubt when the book of the law of Moses was demanded and Ezra brought it before the people, that it was the Pentateuch, which the Jews call Torah, the law.

Then followed under great attention the reading, from the morning until the midday. Ezra stood upon a pulpit of wood, which was a raised platform which had been made for this purpose. Alongside of Ezra were thirteen men; in all, counting in Ezra, fourteen men faced the people. They probably took turns in reading from the law. Their names are interesting if we look at their meaning--Mattithiah (gift of the LORD); Shema (hearing); Anaiah (answer of the LORD); Uriah (the LORD is Light); Hilkiyah (portion of the LORD); Maaseiah (work of the LORD); Mishael (who is as God is); Malchijah (King is the LORD); Hashum (wealthy); Hashbaddanah (esteemed by judging); Zechariah (the LORD remembers); Meshullam (reward). These names are suggestive of the Word itself. Then Ezra unrolled the parchment seen by all the people. Great reverence was manifested to the Word by all the people standing up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. Amen, Amen was the people's answer, with the lifting up of their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Ezra and the people believed that what they read is the Word of God. Hence this reverence, this praise and the attitude of submission. How little reverence for the Word of God our generation manifests. This too is a fruit of the destructive criticism, which has put the Bible on the same level with common literature. Thirteen others are mentioned who, with the Levites, caused the people to understand the law. Some think it means that the people did not understand Hebrew, and that the Hebrew text had to be translated into Aramaic. This is probably incorrect. Hebrew was not unknown after the captivity, for Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi spoke and wrote in that language. It rather means the interpretation of what had been read, that is, an exposition of it. The names of these thirteen expositors are also of interest. The first is Jeshua, which means "Jehovah is salvation"; this is the great truth which all Bible exposition must emphasize.

Verses 9-12. When the people heard the words of the Law they wept. They were conscience stricken on account of their individual and national sins; they judged themselves. The Word had been believed; their godly sorrow had been expressed by tears, and so they were ready for the words of comfort and cheer the Lord gave through Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites. "This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not nor weep ... go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to them for whom

nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord; neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength." And this was done. They were the Lord's people, separated unto Himself, and as they remembered all His goodness, they rejoiced in Him. Refreshed themselves, they were to remember those "for whom nothing was prepared."

Verses 13-18. The feast of tabernacles was kept by them. They came in reading the law to the command of Moses that the children of Israel should "dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month." Olive, pine, myrtle and palm tree branches were to be used to construct booths in commemoration of the wilderness journey. This was done at once by them in obedience to the Word. Thus we have three facts concerning the Word in this chapter; reading the Word, believing the Word, and obeying the Word. Hence there was great gladness in keeping the feast of tabernacles. The words, "for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so," present a difficulty. We read in Ezra 3:4 that the feast of tabernacles was celebrated immediately after the arrival of Zerubbabel; nor does it seem possible that God-fearing kings in the past overlooked this feast. 1 Kings 8:2 and 65 shows that Solomon kept this feast of the Lord. It therefore cannot mean that the people of Israel had neglected the keeping of the feast of tabernacles for a thousand years. The emphasis must be placed upon the word "so"--it means that never before had the feast of tabernacles been kept in such a manner. The reading of the Word and the revival which followed produced such a joyful and whole-hearted keeping of the feast, as had not been the case since the days of Joshua.

CHAPTER 9

1. The public humiliation and confession (9:1-5)
2. The great confession and prayer (9:6-38)

Verses 1-5. Two days after the feast of tabernacles had been concluded this humiliation and confession of sin took place. The assembled congregation fasted, with sackcloth and earth upon them. Separation was next. Evil confessed must mean evil put away. They separated themselves from all strangers, and after their confession they worshipped the Lord. Here again is the right order of a spiritual revival. Reading, hearing and believing the Word always comes first; humiliation, self-judgment, confession and true worship follow.

Verses 6-38. The Levites who occupied the platform (called here stairs) called upon the people to stand up and to bless the Lord and His glorious Name. Then follows the prayer. It is the longest recorded prayer in the Bible and is much like Daniel's prayer (Dan. 9) and Ezra's prayer (Ezra 9). These three prayers deserve a careful comparison and study.

First there is a beautiful invocation and outburst of worship. "Thou art the LORD, even thou alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all things that are thereon, the seas and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee." Here is the praise of the Creator, whose power is acknowledged, as well as the Preserver of His creation. The covenant of God with Abraham and the seed of Abraham is next mentioned (9:7-8) and then follows the account of the deliverance of their fathers from Egypt. He was their Redeemer (9:9-11). The experience of the wilderness is stated in verses 12-21. The Creator-Redeemer led them in a

pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night; He spoke with them, gave them His commandments. He supplied them with bread from heaven and water from the rock. Then follows the story of their disobedience, and with what graciousness the Lord had dealt with their fathers. "Thou gavest also thy good Spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not." The possession of the land of Canaan is given in verses 22-25, revealing God's faithfulness and His power in behalf of His redeemed people. Verses 26-30 cover the period of the judges and the prophets. In all the mercy of God is exalted. Then comes the prayer for mercy, with the acknowledgment of their sins as a nation.

CHAPTER 10

1. Those who sealed the covenant (10:1-27)
2. The obligations of the covenant (10:28-39)

Verses 1-27. The last verse of the preceding chapter mentions a covenant. "And yet for all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, our Levites, and our priests, seal unto it." In this chapter we find the names of the heads of the different houses who sealed the covenant, which means they put their signature to it. According to talmudical tradition these signers constituted "the Great Synagogue." Originally it consisted of 120 members, but later only 70 belonged to it. Its covenants were as follows:

- (1) Not to marry heathen women;
- (2) to keep Sabbath;
- (3) to keep the Sabbatical year;
- (4) to pay every year a certain sum to the Temple;
- (5) to supply wood for the altar;
- (6) to pay the priestly dues;
- (7) to collect and to preserve the Holy Scriptures.

The list is headed by Nehemiah with his official title as Governor (Tirshatha). In verses 2-8 the priestly houses are given. The Levitical houses are recorded in verses 9-13. From the book of Ezra we learn that only four priestly houses and only two Levites had returned under Zerubbabel. Here we have twenty-one priestly and seventeen Levitical houses. This shows a marked increase. The chiefs of the people were forty-one houses; their names are given in verses 14-27.

Verses 28-39. Besides the heads of the houses recorded in this chapter there were the rest of the people, priests, Levites (the individuals), porters, singers and the Nethinim (Ezra 2:43); they all had separated themselves and entered into a curse, and into an oath. The word "curse" has the meaning of an imprecatory expression in the form of an oath. There must have been some formula in connection with signing the covenant, in which the signers declared that if they broke the covenant God would do something to them (the curse) and then by a direct oath swore to keep the covenant. The obligations of the covenant are given in the rest of this chapter. These obligations may be summed up in one word, "obedience." They covenanted to obey the law of the Lord and to do all the commandments.

III. THE PEOPLE ESTABLISHED, THE DEDICATION OF THE WALL, AND
NEHEMIAH'S FINAL ACTS

CHAPTER 11

1. The willing offerers (11:1-2)
2. The heads of the residents of Jerusalem (11:3-24)
3. The inhabitants outside of Jerusalem (11:25-36)

Verses 1-2. A splendid example of self-sacrifice is given in these two verses. Certain men willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem, and the people blest them for the willing sacrifice. It must be explained that Jerusalem was not then a very desirable place for residence. The enemies of the city seeking to destroy the fortifications and harm the inhabitants were constantly active. There was much danger for those who dwelt in the city itself. For this reason the great majority of the returned captives preferred to live outside of the walls of Jerusalem. It was decided to make every tenth man to dwell in Jerusalem. The decision was made by lot. But then these volunteers came to the front and displayed self denial and courage.

Verses 3-24. Here is another register of names recorded in God's book, and not forgotten by Him. The children of Judah, the children of Benjamin, the priests who acted as temple officials, the Levites, the Nethinim, and those with special callings are all named. Some day the Lord will be their Rewarder for their faithful service, as He will be the Rewarder of all His people.

Verses 25-36. Those who lived outside of Jerusalem, in villages, are tabulated in the closing verses of this chapter.

CHAPTER 12

1. Priests and Levites at the time of the return under Zerubbabel and Joshua (12:1-9)
2. The descendants of Joshua, the high priest (12:10-11)
3. The heads of the priestly houses in the time of Joiakim (12:12-21)
4. Heads of Levitical houses (12:22-26)
5. The dedication of the walls (12:27-43)
6. Provisions for the priests and Levites, and other temple officials (12:44-47)

Verses 1-9. The names of the priests and Levites, who went up under Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua (or Joshua), the High Priest, are recorded first. Ezra, mentioned in the first verse, is not the Ezra of the book of Ezra. According to the seventh verse these persons "were the chiefs of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua." They constituted the heads of the twenty-four courses into which the priesthood was divided (1 Chron. 24:1-20). Only four heads of these courses had returned from the captivity; Jedaiah, Immer, Pasher and Harim. These were divided by Zerubbabel and Jeshua into the original twenty-four; but only twenty-two are mentioned in this record. The Abijah of verse 4 is one of the ancestors of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5).

Verses 10-11. This is the important register of the high priests, the descendants of Jeshua, or Joshua. From now on in the history of the Jewish

people chronological reckonings were no longer made by means of the reign of kings, but by the successions of the high priests. Jaddua is unquestionably the same who is mentioned by Josephus, the Jewish historian. In his high priestly robes he met Alexander the Great as he besieged Jerusalem, and was the means of saving Jerusalem. Alexander fell on his face when he saw Jaddua, for the great king claimed to have seen this very scene in a dream vision. Inasmuch as Jaddua was not in office till a considerable time after the death of Nehemiah, the name Jaddua must have been added later, under the sanction of the Spirit of God, so that Jaddua's descent might be preserved.

Verses 12-26. The heads of the priestly houses in the time of Joiakim (the son of Jeshua, verse 10) are here recorded, as well as the heads of the Levitical houses. The sentence, "also the priests, in the reign of Darius the Persian" (Darius Codomannus 336-331), was probably added later, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Further comment on the recorded names is not needed.

Verses 27-43. A full and interesting account of the dedication of the walls follows the register of the names. The singers are mentioned first (verse 27-30) for it was the occasion of praise and great rejoicing. They gathered from everywhere to celebrate the dedication with singing, with cymbals, psalteries and with harps. No doubt the Psalms were used by this multitude of singers, as they gave thanks in holy song. What singing and rejoicing there will be some day when "the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads" (Isa. 35:10). A great procession was made around the walls. This was the main ceremony of the dedication. The procession was in two great companies, one going to the right, and the other to the left. The one company was headed by Nehemiah and the other probably by Ezra, the scribe. Hoshaiah (set free of the LORD) and half of the princes of Judah are mentioned first in the one company. The two companies gave thanks, no doubt responding one to the other. Perhaps they used Psalms 145-147. Thus singing and praising the LORD they came to the house of the LORD. Here the greatest praise was heard, by the whole company. Seven priests blew the trumpets and eight others with them. The singers' chorus swelled louder and louder, so that the joyous sound was heard even afar off. Great sacrifices were offered and everybody rejoiced. It was God by His Spirit who produced this joy, "for God had made them rejoice with great joy."

Verses 44-47. The servants of the Lord, the priests and the Levites, were not forgotten. They brought their tithes and there was an abundant provision for all. Such were the blessed results under the spiritual revival of Nehemiah and Ezra. But when we turn to the last book of the Old Testament, to Malachi, we learn that declension must soon have set in, for we hear there the very opposite from what is recorded here. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings" (Mal. 3:8). Therefore a curse rested upon the nation (Mal. 3:9-12).

CHAPTER 13

1. The separation of the mixed multitude (13:1-3)
2. The unholy alliance repudiated (13:4-9)
3. Nehemiah's action in behalf of the Levites and singers (13:10-14)
4. Provision for Sabbath observance (13:15-22)

5. Nehemiah's protest (13:23-29)
6. His own testimony as to his work (13:30-31)

Verses 1-3. "On that day" does not mean the same day when the wall had been dedicated. It was a considerable time later, for we read in verse 10 that the Levites had not received their portion. It was different when the wall was dedicated. On a certain day when the law was read again, they came to the passage in Deuteronomy 23:3-5, where it is written that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not enter into the assembly of God forever. Obedience followed at once, "they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude."

Verses 4-9. Here we have the first indication of declension, which in Malachi's days reached a climax. Tobiah was an Ammonite, and with Sanballat and Geshem had strenuously opposed the building of the wall (chapter 6). Eliashib, the priest, who had the oversight of the chambers of the house of the Lord, had allied himself with the enemy of Jerusalem and prepared for this man a great chamber in the temple. There he had stored his household goods (verse 8). Nehemiah had been absent from the city, paying a visit to the Persian court, and during his absence all this happened. It was probably right after his return from King Artaxerxes in Babylon that the law was read that led to the separation from the mixed multitude, and this in time led to the discovery of the priest's alliance with Tobiah. Nehemiah acted quickly, being deeply grieved. He could not tolerate such an alliance and profanation of the house of the Lord. How much greater and more obnoxious are the unholy alliances in Christendom, and the profanation of God's best.

Verses 10-14. During Nehemiah's absence the tithes had not been given, and the Levites and singers had received nothing. In consequence they left the city and the house of God was forsaken. It is possible that the people had been outraged by Eliashib's alliance with Tobiah, and had refused the tithes. Nehemiah set all things in order, and he appointed also treasurers. On his prayer in verse 14 see chapter 5:19.

Verses 15-22. Another evidence of the declension which had set in after the spiritual revival was the laxity in observing the Sabbath. Nehemiah saw some on the Sabbath day treading winepresses; others brought all kinds of burdens on the Sabbath to Jerusalem; while still others sold victuals. And men of Tyre sold fish and other wares to the people on the Sabbath. We are sure that during Nehemiah's absence the law of God was no longer read, or they could not have fallen into this evil. All declension begins with the neglect of the Word of God. Then Nehemiah contended with the nobles. "What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

Again, he not only rebuked the evil, but acted energetically, and the Sabbath day was sanctified.

Verses 23-29. Alas! the flesh is flesh, and will ever be the same. Some Jews turned back and deliberately married again women of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Their offspring talked a mongrel language. Nehemiah acted in holy zeal. He cursed them, smote them and plucked off their hair. And Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, who had made an alliance with Tobiah, had married a daughter of Sanballat, the Horonite. Nehemiah refused to have anything to do with him--"I chased him from me."

Verses 30-31. The final thing we hear of Nehemiah is his testimony concerning himself and his prayer, "Remember me." In the day of Christ in glory, this great man of God will surely be rewarded for his earnest and faithful service.

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