

AN OUTLINED COMMENTARY ON

EZRA & NEHEMIAH

BOB WINTON



**GOSPEL
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Preface and Acknowledgment

These various commentaries and other Biblical studies were developed through many years of hard and close study of the Bible. I have had an insatiable appetite to learn all of God's Word possible. I grew up in the Beans Creek Community of Coffee County Tennessee. My family started attending the Lord's church at Beans Creek in 1949, where I was privileged to have sister Ethel Croft as an outstanding Bible class teacher. All seven member of my father's family were baptized into Christ, plus my wife, Marie. Each of our five children also obeyed the gospel.

Sister Croft greatly encouraged me to study the Bible and to become a good worker for the Lord. I tried not to cause her any disappointment. In 1978, after preaching for many years, the brethren at Beans Creek invited me to conduct a gospel meeting. Sister Croft, though she was in advanced years and had to drive a good distance, did not miss any of the services.

Since first becoming acquainted with the gospel more than seventy years ago, I have had the honor to hear some of the greatest gospel preachers of the time. Some of these well-known to most members of the Lord's church, but some of them labored in the shadows, learning and dispensing the truth of God quietly and effectively. Not so many people in the brotherhood today knew such preachers as Luke Gibbs and Henry Simmons. I have learned much and have been profited greatly from many gospel preachers and teachers through these many years. I am fully appreciative also to those many sound brethren who have published books which I have had the privilege to study. I began preaching in July of 1961 in Italy.

A debt of gratitude is owed by many to the instructors of Memphis School of Preaching for the tremendous work they did through the years, patiently teaching their students the wonderful word of life. I am especially grateful to these great men who were serving in this capacity during 1970-72, when I attended the school: Roy Hearn Frank Young, Richard Curry, Charles Pledge, Ray Hawk and E.L. Whitaker.

I claim no originality for all of the material presented in the material included in my books. There is no way to give proper credit to all who have contributed to the information I have learned, but in every case possible, acknowledgment is cited. I have attempted to be as accurate, clear and concise as my finite knowledge allows, but, as with all human productions, there will doubtless be imperfections. Our grasp of the infinite will of God is not absolute, despite the diligence of our efforts; there is always more to learn.

Some have incorrectly thought that my books are merely expansions of the notes I took while studying at MSOP. But those notes were skimpy at best, and were not in my possession when I wrote my material. The notes were put together in connection with Bible classes I have taught over much time. For several years, a hundred or more hours weekly were required as I prepared to teach two different Bible books each week, Sunday morning and Wednesday evening, while at the same time, during full-time work as a gospel preacher. These notes became the "Outlined Bible Commentaries" that have been made available to countless people. "Outlined" does not imply skimpy—these are full-length books.

It has not been my aim to make money through these efforts—indeed, we barely cover our expenses. Many of my books have been given away without charge to the recipients. An uncounted numbers of books and compact discs were ordered and shipped out, for which no payment was ever received. A good many of these non-paying costumers were gospel preachers. I have learned from brethren who operated Bible Bookstores that they have had the same problem. One of these brethren reported that he had to secure his supply of Bibles, in locked cases, to prevent their being stolen by preachers.

The Bible quotations in my books are from the King James Version, unless noted otherwise. These books were intentionally put on 8.5 by 11 inch pages, to make the outline format easier to view. A normal hardback book contains about 800 words per page; my pages contain twice that number of words. The spiral-bound or wire-bound books are much less expensive to produce. My wife and I have done all the manual labor required to produce the books. The supplies, software and equipment are very costly. Marie still helps as much as she can despite the dementia she has had for several years— and her many surgeries and broken bones and heartaches.

Bob Winton

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bwint38@hotmail.com

(931) 728-7610 * (931) 639-0317 [cell]

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INTRODUCTION TO EZRA

A. Ezra the Ready Scribe and Priest.

1. As a scribe, Ezra's work consisted of copying the Law and teaching it to the people. His priestly function is generally described as leading the people in their religious life, perhaps even offering the sacrifices.
 - a. "Ezra was a scribe and thus well suited for God's plan. He would have been thoroughly acquainted with the Scriptures. Prior to the Exile, scribes served more as secretaries (11 Kings 22:3; Jer. 36:32), but during the time of captivity a decided shift in the Jewish religious emphasis changed the role of the scribe. Beginning with the Babylonian Captivity, the religious priorities of Judaism turned to the study of the Torah, and scribes became the Bible scholars and teachers of the people. This development persisted into New Covenant times, as scribes were more commonly known as Rabbis" (Jones, Edwin S, *MSOP Lectures*, p.229).
 - b. Ezra was a *ready* scribe, meaning that he was proficient in his work. He was also a priest, thus was able to do much in behalf of Israel and God.
 - c. Ezra 7:1-5,11-12: "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, The son of Zeremiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest....Now this *is* the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, *even* a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect *peace*, and at such a time."
2. Ezra lived in Babylonia until he was permitted to return to Canaan about 457 B.C.
3. He had prepared his heart to seek the Law of God: "This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he *was* a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him....For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:6,10).
 - a. Preparation is necessary in our complex society before we can enter into most fields of endeavor.
 - b. In religious duty, certain preparations are essential before one can become a Christian, serve as an elder, deacon, preacher, teacher, or personal worker.
 - c. Preparation includes the willingness to do whatever is necessary.
4. He had prepared his heart to seek the Law of God in order to do it.
 - a. Knowledge alone is insufficient:
 - 1) Matthew 7:21-27: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."
 - 2) Luke 12:47-48: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

- 3) Acts 9:1-2: "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."
 - 4) Acts 22:16: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."
 - 5) James 2:19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."
 - 6) Hebrews 5:8-9: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."
 - 7) Revelation 22:14: "Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."
- b. We must know and do God's will:
- 1) Acts 1:1: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach."
 - 2) 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."
5. He prepared his heart to seek the Law of God so he could teach it to Israel.
- a. We are taught to teach others: "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).
 - b. Christianity is spread only by teaching.
 - 1) John 6:44-45: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."
 - 2) Mark 16:15-16: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."
 - 3) 2 Timothy 4:1-5: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."
6. "The zeal and piety of Ezra appear, in this book, in a most conspicuous point of view; his memory has always been held in the highest reverence by the Jews, who consider him as a second Moses: though not expressly styled a prophet, he wrote under the influence of the Divine Spirit, and the canonical authority of his book has never been disputed. He is said to have died in the hundred and twentieth year of his age, and to have been buried at Jerusalem" (Horne, p.62).

B. Ezra, the Book.

1. "The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were antiently reckoned by the Jews as one volume, and were divided by them into the first and second books of Ezra" (ibid.).
2. "It is evident that the author of the book of Ezra was personally present at the transactions recorded in it, the narrative being in the first person. It also bears upon the face of it every character of natural simplicity, and contains more particulars of time, persons, and places, than could have been introduced by any other individual" (ibid.).
 - a. Parts of chapter seven and chapter 10 make reference to Ezra in the third person, while the other sections refer to him in the first person.
 - b. Perhaps to retain proper modesty from Ezra's point of view, the Holy Spirit incorporated those third-

person passages. The book [Ezra 7:6,10] speaks with glowing terms of the scribe, which would have been unbecoming of him to have offered these descriptions of himself in the first person: “This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him....For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”

3. The events described in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi took place between the years 536 B.C. and 430 B.C. The following chart lists some of the major events for this period of time:

DATE B.C.	EVENT
606	Babylonians conquer Jerusalem; some Jews are taken into captivity
597	Babylonians re-take Jerusalem; more Jews are taken into captivity
586	Babylonians destroy the temple and Jerusalem; other Jews are taken into captivity
536	Cyrus the Medo-Persian king releases Israel to return to Jerusalem
535	Work begins on rebuilding the temple
520	Haggai and Zechariah stirred up the people to complete the temple
516	The temple reconstruction is finally completed
483	Esther becomes queen in the Medo-Persian kingdom
474	Esther delivers Israel from the destruction Haman had devised
457	Ezra comes to Jerusalem
444	Nehemiah goes to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city
432	The marriage problem is resolved

4. Outline of Ezra: First Division: Ezra 1:1—6:22. (See McGarvey, pp.108-113).
- a. A Caravan of Captives Return: Ezra 1-2.
 - 1) The decree of Cyrus: 1:1-4.
 - 2) The caravan is formed and receives gifts: 1:5-11.
 - 3) The people in the caravan are numbered and named: 2:1-67.
 - 4) The returnees offer money for the temple at Jerusalem: 2:68-70.
 - b. Worship is Renewed and the Temple is Begun: 3:1-13.
 - 1) The offerings and festivals renewed: 3:1-7.
 - 2) The foundation of the temple is laid: 3:8-13.
 - c. The Work on the Temple Comes to a Halt: 4:1-24.
 - 1) The offer made by the Samaritans is rejected: 4:1-6.
 - 2) The enemies make an appeal to Artaxerxes: 4:7-17.
 - 3) An order to suspend work is received: 4:18-24.
 - d. The Work Resumes and the Temple is Completed: 5:1—6:22.
 - 1) The prophets exhort the people to resume the work: 5:1-5.
 - 2) A letter is sent to Darius: 5:6-17.

- 3) The king replies to the letter: 6:1-12.
 - 4) The house is completed and dedicated: 6:13-18.
 - 5) The Passover is observed: 6:19-22.
5. Outline of Ezra: Second Division: Ezra 7:1—10:44.
 - a. Ezra is Commission to Renew the Law in Judah: 7:1-28.
 - 1) An account of Ezra and his journey: 7:1-10.
 - 2) Ezra's letter of authority: 7:11-26.
 - 3) He gives thanks: 7:27f.
 - b. Ezra's caravan and his journey: 8:1-36.
 - 1) The families of his caravan: 8:1-14.
 - 2) Some Levites included: 8:15-20.
 - 3) The caravan fast and pray for their journey: 8:21-23.
 - 4) Twelve treasurers appointed: 8:24-30.
 - 5) The journey is completed and the accounting made: 8:31-36.
 - c. Ezra Denounces Unlawful Marriages: 9:1—10:44.
 - 1) Unlawful marriages reported to Ezra: 9:1-4.
 - 2) Ezra confesses the guilt of the nation: 9:5-15.
 - 3) A reformation is proposed by Shechaniah: 10:1-5.
 - 4) The reformation is accomplished: 10:6-17.
 - 5) The names of those who put away their wives: 10:18-44.

C. Facts Concerning the Book of Ezra.

1. The Purpose: "This work serves the purpose of giving an account, from the religious or priestly points of view, of the restoration of the nation to its land. It lays its emphasis upon the establishment of the people in the land as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation which is to walk in the light of the law" (Young, p.384).
2. The Restoration: "The New Empire of Babylon arose in 625 B.C., just nineteen years prior to the first stage of the Captivity in 606. Many of those first captives, as in the case of Daniel, lived to the end of the empire, through practically its entire period. Another great State, Medo-Persia, the Second Universal Empire, was divinely used to fulfil the predictions concerning the Restoration as Babylon was used to fulfill those pertaining to the Captivity. It required great nations to serve the ends of Jehovah in regard to His chosen people, ends that were Messianic, redemptive. Far back in the time of Isaiah the prophet, not only was the Restoration predicted, but the name of the one who should be the deliverer, Cyrus, is given. It is one of the most remarkable prophecies because the names of those who were to be the Lord's instruments were not usually given. We can readily understand how Cyrus would be profoundly affected when he came to know that long before he had been called by name as was to be used for the liberation of God's people. He himself declares the fact in uttering his proclamation that ended the long period of the Exile" (*New Analytical Study Bible*, pp.588f).
3. The Samaritans: When the Assyrians carried the people of the Northern Kingdom into captivity, they left behind the poorer classes. They imported people from other areas into Israel, who introduced their idolatry. In time, these people intermarried, producing a mixed race known as Samaritans.
4. The Prophets: When Zerubbabel brought the first contingent of Jews back from Babylon, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were in the company.
5. Persia is eminently connected with the history of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The following background information is helpful in grasping a view of those ancient events. PERSIA. A world empire that flourished from 539 to 331 B.C.
 - a. The Early History. The original native name Parsa, or Persia, was descriptive of the homeland of the

Persians in the western and larger part of the Iranian plateau that extended from the Indus on the E to the Tigris on the W. Iran was another native designation of the land. This name was officially restored in 1935 by the Persian government and means "the [land] of the Aryans." It is descriptive of the people of Aryan language who came into the highland (c. 1500 BC). The Amadai, or Medes, and the inhabitants of the land of Parsua W of Lake Urmia, or Persians, were the two Aryan tribes that were to come into the greatest prominence. The Medes occupied the NW portion of the territory. Their capital city was Hagmatana, later Ecbatana, modern Hamadan. Cyaxares, the Mede, was confederate with Nabopolassar in the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. Gradually the Persians migrated southward and settled in Anshan in a portion of country that they called Parsamash, in recollection of their old homeland of Parsua. Around 700 BC their leader was named Achaemenes. This name prevailed in the later Persian kings. About the middle of the seventh century B.C. the king of Parsamash was called Tiespes. He was a notable conqueror and increased the territories of the Persians E of Anshan and N of the Persian Gulf. This extended country became known as Parsa or Persian Land.

- b. Cyrus II, The Great. The founder of the mighty Persian Empire ascended the throne of Anshan c. 559 BC. Astyages, the Mede, was conquered by Cyrus who took Ecbatana. Henceforth Cyrus grew greater and greater with Parsa taking the lead, Media coming second, and Elam third. The supremacy of the Persians was hereafter established, although the Medes continued to be held in high esteem. Reference is made in Scripture to "Persia and Media" (Est 1:19), as well as "the Medes and Persians" (Dan 5:28). With lightning-like rapidity Cyrus extended his conquests, defeating Croesus of Lydia (c. 546 BC) and Babylon (539 BC), thus establishing the mighty Persian Empire. Cyrus was a remarkably humane leader (cf. Isa 45:1-4). It was he who issued the decree restoring the Jews to their homeland (2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:2-4). Archaeology has demonstrated that Cyrus's concession to the exiles was not an isolated account of generosity but a general policy of a remarkably beneficent leader of winning the favor of his new subjects by showing consideration for their religious beliefs. Cyrus's capital was Pasargadae in the land of Parsa. On his ruined palace can still be read the repeated words, "I, Cyrus the king, the Achaemenid." Cyrus was killed in battle in 530 BC. His body was returned to Pasargadae and buried in a tomb that is still extant. Plutarch (c. A.D. 46-120) says the inscription on the tomb ran thus: "O man, whosoever thou art and whensoever thou comest, for I know that thou wilt come, I am Cyrus and I won for the Persians their empire. Do not, therefore, begrudge me this little earth which covers my body."
- c. Cambyses II (530 BC - 522 BC) was Cyrus's son, who conquered Egypt. Shortly after his Egyptian triumphs civil war broke out, evidently led by his brother Bardiya or Smerdis. Cambyses is believed to have suffered a self-inflicted wound as he leaped on his horse in a hurry and in an excited state to ride off to deal with the insurrection. Reportedly the chape of Cambyses' dagger sheath came off, and he accidentally stabbed himself in the thigh and died about three weeks later somewhere in Syria. The Persian Empire almost collapsed in the confusion that followed; but Darius seems to have assassinated Bardiya, won the throne for himself, and subdued the revolts that broke out in the various provinces.
- d. Darius I, The Great (522 BC - 486 BC). This powerful ruler put down the rebellion, saved the empire, and recorded his victory over his enemies on the famous Rock of Behistun, visible from the old caravan road from Ecbatana to Babylon. This pivotal monument, with its trilingual inscriptions describing Darius's quelling of the insurrection, furnished the key to the decipherment of Akkad. cuneiform, just as the Rosetta Stone opened up the ancient language of the Nile River. Darius ruled a vast empire. The closing years of his reign saw the outbreak of the Graeco-Persian wars and the defeat of Persia at Marathon (490 BC), a precursor to the later defeat at Salamis (480 BC). The mighty empire over which Darius and his successors ruled extended from the Grecian Archipelago on the W, the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea on the N, to the Arabian and Nubian deserts on the S (cf. Est 1:1; 10:1) and the Indus River on the E. This vast territory was nearly 3,000 miles long and 500 to 1,500 miles wide, constituting an area of some 2 million square miles. In this huge kingdom Judah was a tiny dependency practically lost in the vast stretch of empire.
- e. Xerxes (485 BC - 465 BC). Xerxes followed his father Darius on the Persian throne. This king, as well as his father, was devoted to Ahura-Mazda. Xerxes is evidently the Ahasuerus of the book of Esther.

Esther did not become queen until the seventh year of Xerxes' reign (478 BC), after his return from his defeat in Greece (480 BC) when Herodotus states that he paid attention to his harem (9.108). Although the queen at this time is said to have been Amestris, certainly Xerxes, from what we know of him, may well have had other wives.

- f. Artaxerxes I Longimanus (464 BC - 423 BC). Artaxerxes I succeeded Xerxes. In his reign Nehemiah was cupbearer and visited Jerusalem (Neh 2:1). The Elephantine Papyri, discovered in 1903 on the island of Elephantine at the First Cataract of Egypt, shed important light on the Artaxerxes-Nehemiah era. Ezra 7:1-8 specifies that Ezra journeyed to Jerusalem in Artaxerxes' seventh year. This was 458 BC, if Artaxerxes I is meant. In such a case Ezra precedes Nehemiah. However, some construe Artaxerxes to be Artaxerxes II, the seventh year of whose reign would be 398 BC (cf. Ezra 10:6).
- g. Later Kings. Following Artaxerxes I the splendid Persian throne was occupied by Darius II (423 BC - 404 BC), Artaxerxes II Mnemon (404 BC - 359 BC), Artaxerxes III Ochus (359 BC - 338 BC), Arses (338 BC - 335 BC), and Darius III (335 BC - 331 BC), when the far-flung Persian Empire fell to the conquests of Alexander the Great" [The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (c) 1988].

Ezra 1

A. Ezra 1:1-4: The Decree of Cyrus.

1. Verses 1-2: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."
 - a. The background for the book is 2 Chronicles 36:14-23, which gives the overall details of Judah's fall from God's grace, their subsequent capture by the Babylonians, and deportation to the land of their captivity. "Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up" (2 Chron. 36:14-23).
 - b. Cyrus "had been king of Persia for many years before the issuing of his remarkable edict concerning the emancipation and restoration of the Jews; and therefore the words 'in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,' must, in accordance with ch. 5.13, be interpreted as meaning, not the beginning of his reign, but the first year of his acquisition of Babylon" (JFB, Vol. I, p.581).
 - c. In keeping with the prophetic proclamation made by Jeremiah, God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus so that he issued the decree giving the Jews permission and means to return to their land (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). Jeremiah had predicted that the captivity would come and would last seventy years.
 - 1) Jeremiah 25:12: "And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations."
 - 2) Jeremiah 29:10: "For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place."
 - 3) Figuring the beginning of the captivity to in 606 B.C. when the Babylonians first conquered Jerusalem, to the actual return of the first captives in 536 B.C., the seventy years are clearly identified.
 - d. How did God stir up Cyrus? The text does not give a direct answer, but Josephus described the most likely means. Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1ff, spoken nearly two centuries earlier, called Cyrus by name, and spoke of his releasing the Jews from their captivity; even the captivity had not occurred at the time of

Isaiah.

- 1) Isaiah 44:28: "That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid."
 - 2) Isaiah 45:1-4: "Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me."
 - 3) Josephus gives some information that sheds light on the matter. He quotes a statement that Cyrus had made in issuing the decree: "Thus saith Cyrus the king: Since God Almighty has appointed me to be king of the habitable earth, I believe that he is the God which the nation of the Israelites worship; for indeed he foretold my name by the prophets, and that I should build him a house at Jerusalem, in the country of Judea" (Antiquities 11:1.1). Josephus adds: "This was known to Cyrus by his reading the book which Isaiah left behind him of his prophecies..." (11.1.2).
 - 4) Someone, perhaps Daniel who lived until the first year of Cyrus (Dan. 1:21), showed Isaiah's prophecy to the king. Undoubtedly, this would have made a profound impression on him, and could have stirred him up to give the Jews their freedom to return to Palestine.
 - e. Speaking of Jehovah, Cyrus proclaimed that God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth, and had charged him with the responsibility of building him a house at Jerusalem. The kingdom of the Medo-Persian Empire stretched from Ethiopia to India.
2. Verse 3: "Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem."
 - a. The king proclaimed that any of the people who belonged to God could return to their own land, and build there a temple for the Lord. Solomon's temple had been destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C.
 - b. The invitation included not only the people from the Southern Kingdom (made up of Judah and Benjamin), but those of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom which had been deported to Assyria in 722 B.C. by the Assyrians. The Empire of Cyrus encompassed the territory of ancient Assyria.
 3. Verse 4: "And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."
 - a. There were many of the Israelites who chose to remain in the land of their captivity, having become prosperous there. These were to help provide the money and other supplies by which the temple was to be rebuilt. The money and supplies mentioned here were in addition to the *freewill offering* made separately.
 - b. The decree did not require that every Israelite return to Jerusalem; it gave them official permission to do so.
 - c. Those whose hearts were attuned to the will of God were quite willing to return; those who were more driven by comfort, prosperity, and safety were more inclined to stay where they were. The freedom to go back home was in effect a test of their devotion to God. However, there were doubtless some who were unable to return at the time due to special circumstances of their cases.

B. Ezra 1:5-11: The Families of the Caravan Are Numbered and Named.

1. Verses 5-6: "Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered."
 - a. Among the captive nation were those whose hearts were eager to return to the land of promise, and

establish the nation there once again. These included the chief leaders of the tribes, priests, and Levites. The chief men were those men whose responsibility and position is was to lead the various tribes and families.

- b. Other Jews strengthened their hands for the return by giving them vessels of silver, gold, goods, animals, and precious things. The writer notes that these gifts were above those freewill offerings made separately. The Jews have a reputation for kindly treating others of their number who are less fortunate.
2. Verses 7-11: "Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem."
 - a. The Babylonians had looted the temple of its holy vessels; these were still in Babylon. Cyrus, knowing of their existence, gave them to the returnees so they could be used in the rebuilt temple.
 - b. These vessels included:
 - 1) Thirty chargers of gold.
 - 2) A thousand chargers made of silver.
 - 3) Twenty-nine knives (used in dismembering the sacrificial animals).
 - 4) Thirty golden basins.
 - 5) Four hundred and ten basins of silver, plus a thousand other vessels.
 - 6) The total number of gold and silver vessels numbered five thousand and four hundred. However, the numbers given add up only to 2,499, a difference of 2,901 from the 5,400. The difference is likely accounted for by applying the number of the vessels of verses 9 and 10 to include only the most important vessels, and that the total given in verse 11 included the smaller vessels which were not included in verses 9-10.
 - c. These vessels were delivered into the hand of Sheshbazzar. "This was probably the Chaldean name of him who was originally called Zerubbabel....Some think this was quite a different person; a Persian or Chaldean, sent by Cyrus to superintend whatever officers or men Cyrus might have sent to assist the Jews on their return; and to procure them help in the Chaldean provinces, through which they might be obliged to travel" (Clarke, p.731).

Ezra 2

A. Ezra 2:1-2: The Leaders of the Returnees.

1. Verse 1: "Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came

again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city."

- a. Ezra introduces the people of the caravan by first accounting for their presence in Babylon. These people included some of those Jews who had been taken into Babylonian Captivity, plus their offspring who had been born in that pagan land.
 - b. These were going back to Palestine to settle again in the cities given to their ancestors according to the division of the land following the conquest under Joshua.
 - c. Their forebears had once been citizens in a proud and prosperous nation, but now these descendants were merely a small province in the great empire of the Persians.
2. Verse 2: "Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel."
- a. The first names given are the leaders. Zerubbabel was in charge of the great train. Jeshua was the high priest (Haggai 1:1).
 - b. This Nehemiah is not the one of the book bearing that name, for this Nehemiah returned with Zerubbabel in 536 B.C., and the Nehemiah of the following book returned nearly a century later (444 B.C.). Ezra, it will be remembered, made his journey to Palestine in 457 B.C.

B. Ezra 2:3-67: The Listing of The Returnees.

1. Verses 3-35 [The families of the people]: "The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua *and* Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12 The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. 14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15 The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16 The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17 The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18 The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. 19 The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20 The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. 21 The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three. 22 The men of Netophah, fifty and six. 23 The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 24 The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25 The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. 26 The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27 The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. 28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29 The children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30 The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. 31 The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34 The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35 The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty."
2. Verses 36-42 [The priests and Levites]: "The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. 40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. 41 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight. 42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, *in* all an hundred thirty and nine."
3. Verses 43-58 [The Nethinims and servants of Solomon]: "The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth, 44 The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon, 45 The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, 46 The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmal, the children of Hanan, 47 The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, 48 The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, 49 The children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai, 50 The children of Asnah,

the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim, 51 The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, 52 The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, 53 The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah, 54 The children of Nezhiah, the children of Hatipha. 55 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, 56 The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, 57 The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. 58 All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred ninety and two."

- a. The Nethinims were the temple-bondmen, servants who served in the temple in some capacity.
 - b. 1 Chronicles 9:2: "Now the first inhabitants that *dwelt* in their possessions in their cities *were*, the Israelites, the priests, Levites, and the Nethinims."
 - c. Ezra 7:7,24: "And there went up *some* of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king....Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them."
 - d. Ezra 8:17,20: "And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, *and* to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God....Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name."
 - e. Nehemiah 10:28: "And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding."
4. Verses 59-60 [The families of those who could not prove their Israelite genealogy]: "And these *were* they which went up from Telmelah, Telharsa, Cherub, Addan, *and* Immer: but they could not show their father's house, and their seed, whether they *were* of Israel: 60 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two."
5. Verses 61-63 [The priests who could not establish their right to the priesthood]: "And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name: 62 These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. 63 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim."
- a. These men could not establish their right to the priesthood, and so were excluded until proof could be obtained. Nehemiah 7:63-65 gives essentially the same information: "And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called after their name. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim."
 - b. The Urim and Thummim are mentioned elsewhere (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Dt. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Neh. 7:65). In some way, unexplained in the Scriptures, information could be obtained from God by means of the Urim and Thummim. The Urim and Thummim were securely attached to the high priest's breastplate, which was safely connected to the ephod (cf. 1 Sam. 23:4-9).
6. Verses 64-67 [The totals of the people and animals]: "The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred *and* threescore, 65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom *there were* seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and *there were* among them two hundred singing men and singing women. 66 Their horses *were* seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; 67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; *their* asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty."

C. Ezra 2:68-70: The Returnees Give Free-Will Offerings for the Temple's Reconstruction.

1. Verse 68: "And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place." Funds were needed to rebuild the temple, so some of the leaders gave freely of their means to this great cause.
2. Verse 69: "They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments." Sixty-one thousand drams of gold equal 68,625 English pounds and 5,000 pound (mina) of silver would be about 30,000 English pounds (Keil, p.48).
3. Verse 70: "So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities."

Ezra 3

A. Ezra 3:1-7: The Altar is Erected and the Feast of Tabernacles is Celebrated.

1. Verses 1-3: "And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening."
 - a. The previous chapter ended with the people settling into their various cities; here they are called together into a national meeting at Jerusalem.
 - b. The religious leader (Jeshua, Joshua) and the civil leader (Zerubbabel), with their brethren, addressed the assembly and led the people in building the altar of burnt offerings. This was the logical first step in restoring the nation to its original standing in accordance with the Law of Moses.
 - c. The altar was erected. The people lived in fear of the people in the surrounding territory, so they offered sacrifices morning and evening, as a means of honoring God and obtaining his help in facing the hostility of their neighbors.
2. Verses 4-5: "They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD."
 - a. They kept the feast of tabernacles as ordained in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 23:34ff). Following the observance of this feast, they continually offered the other prescribed offerings as each came due.
 - b. What they were doing was to restore the Mosaic system; they had to start small and rebuild each part in its own proper time. This in principle is what our brethren began to do in the early stages of the Restoration Movement in this country.
3. Verses 6-7: "From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia."
 - a. They began to offer burnt offerings on the first day of the seventh month, and continued them in accordance with the Law.
 - b. However, the foundation of the temple had not yet been laid. Money was given to the masons and carpenters, along with food, drink, and oil; these workers were from Zidon (Sidon). Also, arrangements were made for men of Tyre to bring cedar trees from Lebanon by sea to the seaport of Joppa. Cyrus had given them a grant by which they were able to procure the necessary timber from Tyre. The Phoenicians from Tyre and Zidon were skilled in the kind of work the temple required. These people had helped Solomon in building the temple of his time (1 Kings 5).
 - c. "The exiles had no doubt been employed by the Babylonian monarchs to a large extent in building, as their ancestors had been during their sojourn in Egypt (Ex 1:2). Consequently, among those who returned there were many masons and carpenters. These were now set to work by Zerubbabel, and received their wages in money. And meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre. The Phoenicians, on the other hand, received their wages in kind. As Phoenicia was a narrow strip of country, and grew but little corn, it had always to depend mainly for its supplies of food on its neighbours, and generally drew the greater part from Palestine (see Acts 12:20). Hiram had furnished materials to Solomon for the first temple on condition of receiving wheat, barley, wine, and oil (2 Chron 2:15). Zerubbabel made a similar arrangement at the present time with the Tyrians and Sidonians. To bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa. Having cut the timber in the

mountains, the Phoenicians conveyed it to the coast, perhaps sometimes letting it pass down the rivers, and, collecting it on the coast into large rafts or 'flotes' (2 Chron 2:16), took these by sea to the roadstead of Joppa (Jaffa). Hence it was conveyed by land a distance of thirty-five miles to Jerusalem. Lebanon cedar was in great request in the East, and appears to have been cut and carried off both by the Egyptians and the Assyrians. The forests must in the ancient times have been far more extensive than at present. According to the grant that they had of Cyrus. A special grant of Phoenician timber, made by Cyrus, seems to be intended. Though Cyrus had not conquered Phoenicia ('Herod.,' 3:34), he might regard his conquest of Babylon as involving the submission of what had for some time been a Babylonian dependency" [Pulpit Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2001 by BibleSoft].

B. Ezra 3:8-13: The Foundation of the Temple is Laid.

1. Verse 8: "Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD."
 - a. As the second year began, following their return to the land, the work on the temple was commenced. The Levites who were twenty years old and older were set forward to the work of rebuilding the Lord's house.
 - b. The priests and Levites would have a more intimate knowledge of the temple's design and its services.
2. Verse 9: "Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites."
 - a. Those named in the verse were overseers of the work, including Jeshua (Joshua). This Joshua was not the high priest, but the head of a Levitical family. The phrase emphasizes the unity with which they operated—the stood up as one man.
 - b. "Jeshua here is the head of the Levitical family mentioned in ch. 2:40 as 'the children of Jeshua,' and Kadmiel is the head of the other family....The sons of Henadad, who are here united with the Jeshuites and Kadmielites, constitute a third Levitical family, which (as the text stands) was also engaged in superintending the work" [Pulpit Commentary, BibleSoft].
3. Verses 10-11: "And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid."
 - a. The occasion when the foundation of the temple was laid was one of rejoicing and worship. The priests donned their gorgeous apparel and held their trumpets; the sons of Asaph had their cymbals; thus were they prepared to praise the Lord in accordance with David's ordinance.
 - b. They sang by course (taking turns), giving thanks to God because of the mercy he showed to Israel. The people raised a great shout, and praised the Lord because of the occasion, the laying of the temple's foundation. The text does not say how long the foundation required to be laid; the occasion at hand took place on its completion.
4. Verse 12-13: "But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off."
 - a. There was a mixture of sentiment expressed. The old men who had seen the original temple, wept; the former house was much larger in size and glory than the one now under construction. Seeing the

inferiority of the latter, they were saddened.

- b. Haggai 2:3-9: "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts."
- c. Those who had not seen Solomon's temple were not disappointed in the relative inferiority of the current building; they shouted with great joy over this achievement. Undoubtedly, they had heard many stories of the glory of the former house, but they were supremely happy to have a temple they could use.
 - 1) The older men were living in the past; they should have been glad over the present house, but seemed to have more interest in the beauty and grandeur of the house Solomon built.
 - 2) The noise of the weeping of the older men and the happiness of the younger people joined to create a great sound, which could scarcely be separated by the ears of others.

Ezra 4

A. Ezra 4:1-5: Hindrances to Rebuilding the Temple.

1. Verse 1: "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel."
 - a. There seems always to be someone who will oppose a good work. There were envious and spiteful men in the land of Canaan who opposed the work of rebuilding the temple.
 - b. Perhaps they thought the Jews might be overwhelmed and subjugated if they did not have the motivating and unifying effect the temple would have over them.
 - c. It is not likely that they were being sincere in wanting to join with the Jews in the work, since they are called *adversaries*.
2. Verse 2: "Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither."
 - a. These people were idolaters (2 Kings 17:29-31); God had sent lions among them as punishment (2 Kings 17:24-26). There was nothing valuable and good that they could contribute to the work of God. Although a Muslim might not steal, yet he is a poor representative to send on a missionary work for Christ!
 - 1) 2 Kings 17:29-31: "Howbeit every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities wherein they dwelt. And the men of Babylon made Succothbenoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima, And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites burnt their children in fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim."
 - 2) 2 Kings 17:24-26: "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore he hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land."
 - b. They might claim to be seeking to serve the God of Israel, but their practice denied the assertion; they in fact worshipped a variety of idols.
3. Verse 3: "But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us."
 - a. Their charter from Cyrus did not call for the Samaritans to help in the rebuilding of the temple; and it is certain that God's will did not permit help from such people.
 - b. In plain, blunt words, the leaders of Israel rejected the offer of help. They were not being rude or spiteful; they acted with wisdom and faithfulness, for had they accepted the assistance, the nation would have been contaminated with the sins of these heathen neighbors, and would have been yoked together with unbelievers.
 - c. One compromise, even in a seemingly small matter, opens the door for more and greater compromises. This precept is true with regards to an individual, a congregation, or a nation. A compromise with error or sin will inevitably weaken the cause of truth and holiness.
4. Verses 4-5: "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."

- a. There would be many different ways by which these adversaries could discourage the Israelites and interfere with their work. Later, when Nehemiah was rebuilding Jerusalem's walls, the enemy made fun of their work. "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall" (Neh. 4:3).
- b. Verse five identifies the primary method they employed to disrupt the work: They hired agents to use political means to close down the project of rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple.
 - 1) These men may have been Persian officials who were bribed by the Samaritans to represent their cause in Babylon, where Cyrus reigned. These agents may have been lawyers, paid to seek an end to the Jews' work.
 - 2) The counsellors operated through the rest of Cyrus' reign, and to the beginning of that of Darius.
- c. Cyrus reigned in Babylon from 537-529 B.C. The period during which the work was halted covered the last five years of the reign of Cyrus and the seven and one-half years of the reign of Cambyses (Cyrus' son; the same king who is identified as *Ahasuerus* in verse six), plus the "seven months of the Pseudo-Smerdis, and one year of Darius (till the second year of his reign)" (Keil, p.62).

B. Ezra 4:6-10: Complaints Sent to Artaxerxes in a Letter.

1. Verse 6: "And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem."
 - a. Ahasuerus was known as Cambyses to the ancient Greeks; he was the son of Cyrus, and reigned for seven years and five months (Clarke, p.737). *Ahasuerus* was used as a royal name (JFB, p.590), similar to *Pharaoh* and *Caesar*.
 - b. During the early part of his reign, the counsellors the Samaritans had employed (or bribed) wrote a letter of accusation to the king, in which charges were made against Judah and Jerusalem.
2. Verse 7: "And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue."
 - a. "After the death of Cambyses, one of the *Magi* named *Oroporstus* by Trogus Prompeius, *Smerdis* by Herodotus, *Mardus* by Aeschylus, and *Sphenadiates* by Ctesias, usurped the empire, feigning himself to be *Smerdis*, the brother of Cambyses, who had been put to death. This is the person named Artaxerxes in the text: or, following the Hebrew, *Artachshasta*. It is generally believed, that from the time of Cyrus the great, *Xerxes* and Artaxerxes were names assumed by the Persian sovereigns, whatever their names had been before" (Clarke, p.737).
 - b. The letter was written by Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions. Were these the hired counsellors of verses five and six, or the Samaritan leaders who hired the counsellors?
 - c. The language employed was not Hebrew, but Syrian (also known as Aramaic or Chaldee). This was the language used in official communications with the Jews.
 - 1) 2 Kings 18:26: "Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall."
 - 2) Isaiah 36:11: "Then said Eliakim and Shebna and Joah unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, unto thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and speak not to us in the Jews' language, in the ears of the people that are on the wall."
3. Verse 8-10: "Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort. Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time."
 - a. Rehum may have been the Persian governor of the province; Shimshai was the scribe (secretary).

Herodotus says that each Persian governor had a secretary assigned to him, ostensibly to serve the governor, but who in fact served as a spy for the Persian monarch.

- b. Those involved in the authorship of the letter included not only Rehum and Shimshai, but their companions among the Samaritans: the Dinaites, Apharsathchites, Tarpelites, Apharsites, Archevites, Babylonians, Susanchites, Dehavites, and Elamites, and others from various other countries who had been imported into cities of Samaria following the exile of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.
- c. We are told of one such importation in 2 Kings 17:24, but the reference in our present text may be a different occasion (see JFB, p.591). [See Genesis 10 for a table of the ancient nations]. Esarhaddon was the prime mover behind the episode mentioned in 2 Kings 17:24, while Asnappar is identified as the instigator of the migration named in our text.
 - 1) It could be, of course, that Asnappar was Esarhaddon's agent; but it could also be true that Asnappar is another Assyrian king, perhaps Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.), who left behind a great library of information that has been a windfall to archaeologists.
 - 2) Mentioning the relocation of the people identified, the writer speaks of their having been brought to the Canaan side of the Euphrates River, and speaks of the date only as "at such a time."
- d. "With [verse 8] the *Chaldee* part of the chapter begins; and the same language continues to the end of verse 18 of chapt. vi. These men wrote to Darius in their own language; and the king in the same dialect returns an answer, chapt. v. This circumstance adds authenticity to what is written: so scrupulous was the inspired penman, that he not only gave the words which each spoke and wrote, but he gave them also in the very language in which they were conceived, and in the *character* peculiar to that language" (Clarke, p.737).

C. Ezra 4:11-16: A Copy of the Letter Sent to Artaxerxes.

1. Verse 11: "This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time."
 - a. If we wonder how Ezra could have known the content of the letter, the question can best be answered by reminding ourselves that he was guided by the Holy Spirit.
 - 1) 2 Samuel 23:1-2: "Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."
 - 2) Nehemiah 9:20: "Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst."
 - 3) Nehemiah 9:30: "Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands."
 - b. The letter began by stating the writers' claim to be servants of the king (Artaxerxes). Keil says that "and at such a time" is equivalent to our "and so forth," which indicates that a part of the other remarks were not included in the present copy of the letter. Coverdale (1535) translated the original word (*Cheeneth*) as "Canaan." The word has perplexed translators and commentators for ages.
2. Verse 12: "Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations."
 - a. This letter states the allegation that Jerusalem had a past history of rebellion and badness. The city had rebelled against the Babylonians (2 Kings 24-25), and earlier against Assyria (2 Kings 18:7; 2 Chron. 23:11).
 - b. The letter wrongly charges that the Jews had already completed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem; this work was not done until after Nehemiah returned (444 B.C.). The purpose of the letter was to arouse the fear and anger of the Persian king against Jewish efforts to rebuild the city; they were willing to tell any plausible falsehood in order to gain the king's support for their position.

3. Verse 13: "Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings."
 - a. Further unsupported charges are here made, which were intended to prejudice the king against the case of the Jews. If they can get the ruler to believe that he will not receive the proper taxes, he can be moved to take action against the Jews.
 - b. Their statement of the previous verse clashes with their statement here regarding the walls: in verse 12, they said that the walls had been finished; here, that if the walls are finished, certain unpleasant things will result.
 - c. If the walls were built, the Jews might refuse to pay tribute, and thus the king would have to send an army up to Jerusalem to subjugate it again; this would be an expensive and time-consuming effort, and the example of one rebellious city might incite others to do the same.
4. Verses 14-15: "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed."
 - a. The individuals writing the letter (Rehum and Shimshai) drew their support from the government of Persia; they had a personal stake in the issue if the Jews refused to pay their taxes. Since their livelihood derived from the king, they said they could not stand idly by while the king was dishonored by any refusal to pay tribute. Their point is that they are faithful servants of the king, and will not violate the king's trust.
 - b. But from the text of the book, these men were not operating from a basis of conscientious concern for the welfare of the Persian Empire; they opposed the Jewish efforts to rebuild the city, and sought the king's support in their opposition. They were more concerned about their own selfish interests than in the king's affairs! If the city was rebuilt, it was the Samaritans who would be pushed aside or subjugated by the Jews.
 - c. The Samaritans knew something about Jerusalem's history. They knew that if the king were to check the historical records left by his predecessors, he would find that Jerusalem had indeed rebelled against Babylonia, and had been overthrown.
5. Verse 16: "We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river."
 - a. They assured the king that if the Jews successfully rebuilt the city, they would usurp Persian control over that part of the Empire.
 - b. But the Jews were still very few and weak in Judah and Jerusalem. Only about 50,000 had returned in the first migration back to Palestine under Zerubbabel. Others were to return with Ezra and Nehemiah, but at the time, there was only an insignificant number of Jews in the land.
 - c. The writers of the letter were putting the worst possible face on the situation, and describing a scenario that would never occur. The Jews were favorably inclined toward the Persian government, since it was Cyrus who had taken the initiative to give them the right to return home.

D. Ezra 4:17-24: The King's Answer.

1. Verses 17-19: "Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein."
 - a. The king responded to the letter with the expected answer. "I commanded, and search has been made. The Pseudo-Smerdis, who was a fanatical adherent of Magism, which disallowed temples altogether (Herod., 1:130), and who had already destroyed the temples of Ormuzd in Persia ('Behistun Ins.,' col. 1. par. 14, 5), was naturally willing enough to do as the Samaritans desired, and stop the restoration

of the Jewish temple. Accordingly, he had a search made among the state records, and found, as they had expected he would, evidence of insurrections on the part of the Jews against the foreign countries to which they had been subject, as Assyria (2 Kings 18:7) and Babylon (ibid. 24:1; Jer 52:3), and also proof of the formidable power possessed by certain Jewish or Israelite kings; upon which he thought himself justified in complying with the Samaritan request, and ordering the work that was going on at Jerusalem to cease (see ver. 21)" [Pulpit Commentary, BibleSoft].

- b. Sure enough, he had found in the old records the fact that Jerusalem had rebelled against their masters in the past. No one had denied it. The very fact that the Jews had been carried to Babylonia, with many of them still residing there, evidenced some kind of tumultuous departure from their own land.
 - c. It should have been even more clear that Cyrus had released the Jews to return to Palestine. That event was only a few short years in the past, and would be known by a great number of the king's advisors. This should tell him that no rebellion was to be expected from the Jews.
2. Verse 20: "There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them."
- a. The king had discovered that Jerusalem had been governed by mighty kings of her own, and had ruled over other nations, receiving tribute from them.
 - b. What had happened in the past, might again occur in the future. The king could reason that there was a danger posed by the Jews. But again, he overlooked the immediate past: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:1-4).
3. Verse 21: "Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me."
- a. The king gave Rehum authority to command the Jews to cease their efforts to rebuild the city. This order was an injunction for a temporary stoppage of work. Evidently, the king intended to check out the situation further. Persian law was such that it only had to be stated once, and once stated, it was beyond repeal or alteration.
 - 1) Esther 1:19: "If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she."
 - 2) Daniel 6:15: "Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed."
 - b. His letter showed plainly, however, that work on the city could not be started again without an express order from the king authorizing it. The wording of the order in the verse seems to indicate that the king was reserving the right to change his mind on this ruling.
4. Verses 22-23: "Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings? Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power."
- a. Artaxerxes warned Rehum here to be sure to carry out the instructions. The king was hundreds of miles away in Babylon; just because he issued an order did not necessarily mean that the order would be obeyed. However, in this case, he did not need to worry: the Samaritans were happy to see that the

work on the city was stopped!

- b. Rehum and his companions were no doubt overjoyed with the information contained in the king's letter. They quickly went to Jerusalem, and caused the Jews to stop work, using force and power.
 - c. Acting officially, and with the aid of whatever military force was at their disposal, they coerced the Jews to quit working on the city. This *posse* used violent means to drive the Jews from their labors.
5. Verse 24: "Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia."
- a. The work stopped forthwith, and was not started again until the second year of Darius. The work had been hindered from the time of its inception, and fully halted with the receipt of the king's letter.
 - b. Pseudo-Smerdis was assassinated after a short reign of about seven months, allowing Darius to ascend the Persian throne. The work officially halted for about two years.
 - c. "Then ceased the work... until the second year of the reign of Darius. The interval of compelled inaction was not long. The Pseudo-Smerdis reigned, at the utmost, ten months; after which a revolution occurred, and the throne was occupied by Darius, the son of Hystaspes. If the work was resumed early in this monarch's second year, the entire period of suspension cannot have much exceeded a year and a half. King of Persia. There is probably no intention of distinguishing the Darius of this book from 'Darius the Mede' (Dan 5:31; 6:1). 'King of Persia' is appended to his name merely out of respect and honor, as it is to the names of Cyrus (Dan 1:1,2,8), Artaxerxes I. (Dan 4:7), and Artaxerxes II. (Dan 6:14). Such a superfluous attachment to his name of the style and title of a monarch is common throughout the Old Testament, and generally marks a distinct intention to do the individual honour (see Gen 41:46; 1 Kings 3:1; 9:11,16; 11:18; 2 Chron 36:22, etc.)" [Pulpit Commentary, Biblesoft].

Ezra 5

A. Ezra 5:1-5: Haggai and Zechariah Prophecy Unto the People.

1. Verse 1: "Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them."
 - a. Because of the opposition from the Samaritans and the official decree from the Empire, the Jews naturally became discouraged in prosecuting their rebuilding efforts. Added to this distressing situation, was the sorrow expressed by the older people who remembered the superior size and grandeur of Solomon's temple in comparison to the house now under construction. Being few and weak, and seemingly without any divine help, their hearts were soon filled with discouragement.
 - b. The situation had so deteriorated, that God took timely action to insure the work was accomplished. He sent Haggai and Zechariah to deliver such information to the people that they would rise to the work again. A study of the books which bear their names will reveal the information they gave to revive the work.
2. Verse 2: "Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them."
 - a. Zerubbabel, the civil ruler among the Jews, and Joshua, their religious leader, rose up to reassert their leadership over the fledgling nation.
 - b. With the combined efforts of these two men, plus the work done by the prophets, the work commenced anew.
3. Verse 3: "At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?"
 - a. The adversaries were not about to cease their opposition. Tatnai, who was the governor of the territory on the west side of the River Euphrates, which included Palestine, came with others to demand to know why the Jews had taken up their building work again.
 - 1) Ezra 4:24 showed that the work began again during the second year of Darius; that time had come. It may be that Tatnai had replaced Rehum following the ascension of Darius to the throne.
 - 2) Tatnai, being the ruling authority over the land west of the Euphrates, and Zerubbabel the governor only over Judah, the Jews were under the authority of Tatnai.
 - b. The Jews had returned to Palestine in 536 B.C., and had begun the rebuilding of the temple by the next year. For about 15 years (535-520 B.C.), the work had been greatly hindered, if not altogether at a standstill. It was completed in 516 B.C., seventy years after the destruction of Solomon's temple in 586 B.C.
 - c. Tatnai demanded to know by what authority the Jews had returned to their work.
4. Verses 4-5: "Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter."
 - a. The KJV gives verse four in the form of a question; the ASV translates it as a statement: "Then we told them after this manner, what the names of the men were that were making this building."
 - b. God was with the leaders of Judah so that Tatnai and his companions did not force the Jews to cease their work; rather, they decided to let the work continue until they received a message from Darius.
 - c. Jamieson gives this information:
 - 1) But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews ... The unusual presence, the imposing suite, the authoritative inquiries of the satrap appeared formidable, and might have produced a paralyzing influence, or led to disastrous consequences, if he had been a partial and corrupt judge, or actuated by unfriendly feelings toward the Jewish cause. The historian, therefore, with

characteristic piety, throws in this parenthetical verse to intimate that God averted the threatening cloud, and procured favour for the elders or leaders of the Jews, so that they were not interrupted in their proceedings until communications with the court should be made and received. Not a word was uttered to dispirit the Jews or afford cause of triumph to their opponents. Matters were to go on until contrary orders arrived from Babylon.

- 2) After surveying the work in progress, he inquired, first, by what authority this national temple was undertaken; and, secondly, the names of the principal promoters and directors of the undertaking. To these two heads of inquiry, the Jews returned ready and distinct replies. Then, having learned that it originated in a decree of Cyrus, who had not only released the Jewish exiles from captivity, and permitted them to return to their own land for the express purpose of rebuilding the house of God, but, by an act of royal grace, had restored to them the sacred vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had carried off as trophies from the former temple, Tatnai transmitted all this information in an official report to his imperial master, accompanying it with a recommendatory suggestion that search should be made among the national archives at Babylon for the original decree of Cyrus, that the truth of the Jews' statement might be verified.
- 3) The whole conduct of Tatnai, as well as the general tone of his despatch, is marked by a sound discretion and prudent moderation, free from any party bias, and evincing a desire only to do his duty. In all respects he appears in favourable contrast with his predecessor Rehum (Ezra 4:9). [Jamieson, Fausset, Brown, BibleSoft].

B. Ezra 5:6-17: Message to King Darius.

1. Verses 6-7: "The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace."
 - a. Tatnai was joined by others in penning a letter to the king. They graciously addressed the king, as was meet, before stating the purpose of the epistle. Again, the Holy Spirit guided Ezra in accurately reporting the contents of the letter.
 - b. In writing fiction, the author may choose to let the principle character report the information from a first-person viewpoint, or he might unfold his story from what could be called the "omniscient" viewpoint—the viewpoint is from one who knows everything about the events described. No human author can speak from omniscience, but the inspired writers of the Bible were guided by God's all-seeing and all-knowing awareness; thus, even the most secret conversation and the deepest-held plans were fully known by the Almighty.
2. Verse 8: "Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands."
 - a. "The letter itself begins with a simple representation of the state of affairs (v. 8): 'We went into the province of Judaea, to the house of the great God (for so might Persian officials speak of the God of Israel, after what they had learned from the elders of Judah of the edict of Cyrus), and it is being built with freestone, and timber is laid in the walls; and this work is being diligently carried on, and is prospering under their hands.' The placing of wood in the walls refers to building beams into the wall for flooring; for the building was not so far advanced as to make it possible that this should be said of covering the walls with wainscotting" [Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.].
 - b. They stated that their report on the work at Jerusalem was from their first-hand observation. They had personally surveyed the progress of the work.
 - c. It seems surprising that they referred to God as "the great God." Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus had both used similar expressions in reference to God.
 - 1) Daniel 2:47: "The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret."

- 2) Daniel 3:29: "Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."
 - 3) Ezra 1:2-3: "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem."
- d. The stones used in the temple are described as great and the work was prosecuted with diligence (ASV) by the Jews. The letter was intended to impress Darius with the idea that there was something to fear from the work being done. It implies that the work being done was not insignificant or slow.
 - e. "*The house of the great God* is a remarkable expression in the mouth of a heathen. It has some parallels, e.g. the expressions of Cyrus in Ezra 1:2,3, and of Nebuchadnezzar in Dan 2:47 and 3:29; but they were persons who had been brought to the knowledge that Jehovah was the one true God, under very peculiar and miraculous circumstances. Tatnai, on the other hand, represents the mere ordinary Persian official; and his acknowledgment of the God of the Jews as 'the great God' must be held to indicate the general belief of the Persians on the subject....Which is builded. Rather, 'being builded.' With great stones....And timber is laid. A good deal of timber had been employed in the old temple, but chiefly for the floors of chambers (1 Kings 6:10), for the internal lining of the walls (ibid. vers. 9, 15), and probably for the roofing" [Pulpit Commentary, Biblesoft].
3. Verses 9-10: "Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them."
 - a. Tatnai and his cohorts reported in the letter that they had inquired of the Jews concerning the authority by which they had taken up the work again, and had asked the names of those who did the work.
 - b. They sought the names of those who were responsible so that proper charges could later be preferred.
 4. Verse 11: "And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up."
 - a. Tatnai's letter paraphrased the reply the Jews gave. He said their answer was: "We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth." According to Tatnai, they refused to give their individual names.
 - b. Regarding the authority by which they worked, the Jews had replied that they were merely rebuilding the temple that had been erected many years in the past, which one of Israel's great kings had constructed.
 - c. The response as stated by Tatnai seems to be a clear enough answer to the questions.
 5. Verses 12-13: "But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God."
 - a. The response of the Jewish elders continues in these two verses, as reported by Tatnai. What the governor writes in the letter coincides with the facts of Jewish history.
 - b. After the temple had been erected (during Solomon's reign), the Israelite people had provoked the God of heaven; because of their rebellion against his will, he punished them. It must have been a painful experience for the Jews to admit the sinfulness of their forebears.
 - c. The punishment consisted of allowing Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, to conquer their nation, destroy the temple, and carry the people into captivity.
 - d. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Babylon, Cyrus made a decree which released the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the temple for God. Cyrus became king of Babylon only after the defeat of

Babylon; earlier, he had been king of his home territory. It was during his first year as king over conquered Babylon that the decree was issued. Instead of being rebels against the Persian ruler, they were acting in full harmony with the official ruling of the king.

6. Verses 14-15: "And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place."
 - a. The elders mentioned the vessels of gold and silver which Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon; these had Cyrus returned to the Jews to be used in the rebuilt temple. This was a reference to a real fact of history, one which could be verified by a search of the official records.
 - b. They had pointed out to Tatnai that Cyrus had removed these vessels from his pagan temples, and turned them over to Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor. These reference to historical facts and individuals had on their very face, the appearance of truth. One who is trying to delude another with a lie, is not apt to be very specific in offering details.
 - c. Citing the edict issued by Cyrus, the elders described the kingly instructions permitting them to return to their land and rebuild the temple.
 - d. With this kind of answer to the question of verse 3, we can understand why Tatnai did not force the Jews to cease from their work.
7. Verse 16: "Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished."
 - a. The elders continued their response to Tatnai: Sheshbazzar took the holy vessels, returned to Jerusalem, and since that time, the temple had been under construction. The opposition of the Samaritans had hindered the progress of the work, and the injunction issued by Darius' predecessor had halted the work altogether.
 - b. The Jewish elders stated that the temple "is not finished." Is there a subtle hint in this statement that Tatnai and his cohorts and their predecessors might be open to a possible charge of hindering an edict of Cyrus?
8. Verse 17: "Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter."
 - a. Tatnai closed his letter with the request that a search be made of the royal archives to determine whether the order allegedly made by Cyrus was genuine.
 - b. Many official documents have been uncovered by archaeologists in the past hundred years of the ancient Empires of Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia.

Ezra 6

A. Ezra 6:1-12: Darius Replies to Tatnai's Letter.

1. Verses 1-2: "Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written."
 - a. The record was found in a palace in Achmetha, the capital of Media, situated in modern Iran, south of the Caspian Sea. This place is also known as Ecbatana; its modern name is Hamadan. This city is said to have been the summer home of Cyrus and his successors on the Persian throne.
 - b. The record preserved the decree of Cyrus, and spelled out the details of the edict, thus verifying the claim of the Jews.
2. Verses 3-5: "In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God."
 - a. During Cyrus' first year (counting from the time he conquered Babylon, 5:13), the king decreed that a temple was to be constructed at Jerusalem for the God of Israel. Its foundation was to be strongly laid, and the dimensions of the building was to be 60 cubits by 60 cubits (90' x 90'). Solomon's temple measured 90' long, 30' wide, and 45' high; the porch was 30' long and 15' wide; it also had chambers built on to it (1 Kings 6:1-10). The first house was doubtless far more glorious and expensive.
 - b. The new temple was to have three rows of great stones and a row of new timber to form its walls. The expense of construction was to be born [at least in part] by the treasury of the king of Persia. Earlier, Ezra has shown that free will offerings were given by the Jews.
 - c. Further, the roll showed that the decree included a return of the precious temple vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had plundered from the temple when he destroyed it (in 586 B.C.).
3. Verses 6-7: "Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place."
 - a. The king bluntly commanded Tatnai and his henchmen to refrain from hindering the work, but let it proceed. The governor knew that he had no choice in this matter, if he valued his life.
 - b. God's hand was behind the original decree, and had doubtless been involved in causing the decree to be preserved to the time then present for the purpose it served.
 - c. The present king respected the edicts of his predecessors.
4. Verse 8: "Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered."
 - a. Not only was Tatnai to cease interfering with Israel's work on the temple, he was to give them funds from the tax receipts collected from the territory under his control.
 - b. Israel's enemies had thought a simple letter to the king would undermine their efforts, and might even set themselves in good light before the king for having brought the charges. Tatnai's disappointment and shame must have been great when he read the king's reply!
5. Verses 9-10: "And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests

which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons."

- a. "The decree granted them the privilege of drawing from his provincial treasury of Syria, to the amount of whatever they required for the furthering of the work, and providing sacrifices for the service of the temple, that the priests might daily pray for the health of the king and the prosperity of the empire" (JFB, p.595).
 - b. The Persian king had faith in Israel's God. One of his chief motives for underwriting the financial support of their efforts to rebuild the temple was that prayers might be made to God in his behalf.
 - c. His willingness to promote the temple service extended even to providing for the animals and supplies that were used in the daily sacrifices.
6. Verse 11: "Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this."
- a. A straight-forward command was issued in the letter for Tatnai to deliver the funds needed in erecting the temple and the items necessary to conduct the sacrifices.
 - b. The letter provided for a severe penalty to be imposed on anyone who would alter the instructions contained in it. The prescribed punishment was that the individual's house should be pulled down, timbers from it should be set up as a gallows, and the culprit be hanged thereon, and that his house should be made a dunghill.
 - c. "The extremely favourable purport of this edict, which was issued about sixteen or seventeen years after that of Cyrus, was no doubt owing in some measure to the influence of Cyrus....But it proceeded still more from the deep impressions made even on the idolatrous people of that country and that age, as to the Being and Providence of the God of Israel. It may tend to throw additional light and illustration on the motives that influenced Darius to mention what is asserted by *Josephus* ('Antiquities,' b. xi., ch. iii, secs. 1-9), that Darius, who was warmly attached to the Jews, had made a vow that if ever he became king, as he had a legitimate claim to that dignity, he would restore the sacred vessels and rebuild the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem; that Zerubbabel, who had been his familiar friend in private life, on learning of Darius's elevation to the throne, set out expressly to remind the king of his vow, and obtained from his majesty the most liberal grants" (JFB, p.595).
7. Verse 12: "And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed."
- a. Darius gives God credit for having established his name at Jerusalem. He states that God will destroy any king or any people who seek to alter the decree or seek to destroy the temple.
 - b. No one would be likely to oppose the decree in view of the authority that issued it, by the requirements contained in it, and by the severe penalty imposed against those who violated it. Added to those, the king warned that the God of Israel would destroy any who sought to oppose it.
 - c. He closed his letter by saying that he had made a decree, and that its demands were to be carried out speedily.

B. Ezra 6:13-18: The Temple is Completed and Dedicated.

1. Verse 13: "Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily."
 - a. Neither Tatnai nor any other enemy was minded to oppose the king's edict; the requirements the king set forth were carried out with haste.
 - b. Ezra 3:8-10: "Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the

sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.”

2. Verse 14: "And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia."
 - a. The will of God was the motivating force behind the entire operation. God had sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the people; he had caused the Persian kings to support the return of Israel to their land and the rebuilding of the temple. God showed in all of this his determination to fulfill the promises issued centuries earlier to Abraham: “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:1-3).
 - b. The work of Haggai and Zechariah was essential to keep the Jews interested in the work. They did this by showing the people what God was planning to do in the future (during the Messianic Age).
 - c. Cyrus gave the original decree; it was repeated by Darius and Artaxerxes Longimanus. This last monarch "sent Ezra to Judea with new privileges....With the permission of the same king, Nehemiah came to Judea...The writer recapitulates the different sovereigns who favoured the Jews after the Babylonish captivity" (Clarke, p.742).
3. Verse 15: "And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king."
 - a. "A concurrence of favourable events is mentioned as accelerating the restoration of the temple, and infusing a new spirit and energy into the workmen, who now laboured with unabating assiduity till it was brought to a completion. Its foundation was laid in April, 536 B.C. (Ezra 3:8-10), and it was completed on 21st February, 515 B.C., being twenty-one years after it was begun" (JFB, p.595). Other authorities give 516 B.C. as the year the temple was completed.
 - b. “The house was finished on the third day of the month Adar. Haggai (Hag 1:15) gives the exact day of the recommencement of the work as the twenty-fourth of Elul in Darius's second year. Ezra here gives the exact day of the completion. From Zerubbabel's laying of the foundation (Ezra 3:10), the time that had elapsed was twenty-one years. From the recommencement under the inspiring influence of the two prophets, the time was only four years, five months, and ten days. DEDICATION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE (Ezra 6:16-18). Following the example of Solomon, who had solemnly ‘dedicated’ the first temple (1 Kings 8:63), and had offered on the occasion a sacrifice unexampled for its magnitude in the whole of Jewish history (ibid.), Zerubbabel now, under the advice of two prophets, inaugurated the new building with a similar ceremony. In ‘the day of small things’ it was not possible for him to emulate Solomon's magnificence in respect of the number of victims. Solomon had sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep. Zerubbabel's means only enabled him to make an offering of 712 animals, more than half of them lambs. He did, however, according to his ability; and God, who accepts all our endeavours according to that we have, and not according to that we have not, was content to receive graciously the humble offering made to him, and to bless the building thus inaugurated with a glory unknown to the first temple. The Lord himself, the Messenger of the covenant, so long sought by his people, suddenly came to this temple (Mal 3:1)—came to it, and frequented it, and taught in it, and gave it a dignity and a majesty far beyond the first temple, which possessed indeed the Shechinah, but was once, and once only, vouchsafed a brief manifestation of the actual Divine presence (2 Chron 7:1)” [Pulpit Commentary, ibid.].
 - c. The work of the two prophets is especially cited as the motivating force behind the successful work. The elders of the nation furnished the leadership; God provided the vision of the future through the

prophets which moved the people to work.

- d. With the authority of the Persian monarchs underwriting the work, the temple was completed. Remember that God gave the means by which Cyrus was initially stirred up to issue the proclamation which enabled the Jews to begin returning to Palestine (Ezra 1:1-4).
4. Verses 16-18: "And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses."
- a. The first service at the temple was one to be remembered. They used the temple for the purposes it was intended, and thus did they dedicate it to God's service.
 - 1) Under the Mosaic System, the temple was a holy place, the vessels used in it were holy vessels, and the garments worn by the priests were holy garments. The first room in the temple was known as the "holy place," and the second room was called "the holy of holies" or "the most holy place."
 - 2) This episode does not give authority for Christians to "dedicate" meeting houses today. The parallel is wrong. The temple of the Mosaic Age corresponds to the body of Christ in the Christian Age. A meeting house is not the church—it is simply a tool, a convenience. Dedicating meeting houses is a denomination concept which grew out of the notion that the buildings where religious services are conducted are holy places. If we choose to dedicate the building to make it a holy place, why not do the same for a tool shed in which the church's lawn mower and other equipment are stored? Why not dedicate the lawn mower? Or the song books?
 - b. Many of the old men who had wept when the foundation of the present temple was laid, owing to its lack of splendor in comparison to the original house, were now dead. The occasion was one of thorough joy. They could now consider themselves a nation restored to its original standing. The rebellion of their fathers had been punished, and was in the past; the captivity was over; they could worship God now according to the pattern given in the Law of Moses. However, their personal lives were not in order, as will be seen later in the book.
 - c. The sacrifices included 100 bullocks, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and 12 he-goats. One goat was offered for each of the twelve tribes as a sin offering. The tabernacle was dedicated over a period of twelve days (Num. 7); Solomon dedicated his temple with a tremendous offering which included 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep (1 Kings 8:63). Goats were used on the day of atonement as *scapegoats* (Num. 16).
 - d. The priests were set into their proper courses so the services of the temple could be conducted orderly. There were twenty-four courses of priests (1 Chron. 24; 28; 2 Chron. 8:14; 31:2). The leader of each priestly course was called a chief priest; these chief priests were part of the Sanhedrin Court of the New Testament.
 - e. A sin offering was made for each of the twelve tribes, although the Israelites present were primarily from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The implication of the offerings is that representatives from each of the twelve tribes were among the returned captivities.
 - f. "The completion of the new temple was naturally followed by an arrangement of the ministers corresponding to that which had been originally made by David, and afterwards adopted by Solomon, for the service of the old temple (see 1 Chron 23. 6-23; 24:1-19). This arrangement was based upon the ordinances of the law with respect to the respective offices of the two orders, as given in the Book of Numbers (Num 3:6-10; 8:6-26), and, so far, was according to the writing of the book of Moses. But the 'courses' themselves were not established till David's time" [Pulpit Commentary, *ibid.*].
 - g. Notice the reference in this passage to a return to the Law of Moses. The only way they could be pleasing to God was by doing so; his revealed will was the law he gave through Moses. The problem that the Israelites had was due to their leaving that law (Jer. 6:16). The only way anyone living today can be pleasing to God is by returning to the New Testament, to the Law of the Gospel of Christ.

- 1) Jeremiah 6:16: "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein."
- 2) 1 Peter 4:11: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."
- 3) Galatians 1:6-12: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

C. Ezra 6:19-22: The Passover is Observed.

1. Verse 19: "And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month."
 - a. The initial observance of the passover was held on the eve of their departure from Egypt (Exod. 12-14). This solemn feast could not be observed while they were in captivity: their priests were polluted; their temple and its altar were destroyed. Ezekiel 44-45.
 - b. This occasion of the Passover must have been an extremely important day for these Jews who had now returned to their land and to their God. When their forebears originally observed the Passover, their captivity to the Egyptians was ended; they would begin their journey to their own land on the next day. These Jews had ended their Babylonian Captivity, and were now entering into a new phase of their nation's history.
 - c. "*Celebration of the passover in the ensuing month, and observance of the feast of unleavened bread* (Ezra 6:19-22). Specially solemn passovers were celebrated on specially solemn occasions; and these received special record at the hands of the sacred writers. Of this kind are the passover celebrated By Hezekiah in the year B.C. 726, recorded in 2 Chron 30, and that celebrated by Josiah in B.C. 624, recorded in 2 Chron 35. Both of these followed upon a cleansing of the temple, and restoration of the temple worship after a period of suspension. Ezra seems to place the passover of B.C. 516 in the same category. It marked the period of the full re-establishment of the regular ordinances of religion, more or less interrupted from the time of the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. It terminated the abnormal and commenced the normal condition of things. Perhaps it is to mark this, that Ezra at this point disuses the Chaldee dialect, which he had introduced in ch. 4:8, and returns to the Hebrew, the established language of the Jewish religion" [Pulpit Commentary, *ibid.*].
2. Verse 20: "For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves."
 - a. The priests had been purified and were authorized to perform their duties in the Passover observance. Those who had charge of the rites killed the passover for the people, the rest of the priests, and for themselves.
 - b. The Passover was held in remembrance of the occasion when God passed over the firstborn of Israel, doing them no harm when he passed through Egypt; the firstborn among the Egyptians and others, who were not protected by the blood of the passover lamb, were slain.
3. Verse 21: "And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat."
 - a. The Israelites ate the Passover meal, which consisted of the flesh of the lamb or goat which they killed for the occasion, plus bitter herbs and unleavened bread: "And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron

in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever” (Ex. 12:1-14).

- b. There were people who lived in the land of captivity with Israel who had adopted the Jews' religion. These had given up their pagan religions, and had returned to Palestine with the Jews. These proselytes also ate the passover with their Jewish brethren.
4. Verse 22: "And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."
- a. The Passover and the feast of unleavened bread went together: “Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread” (Ex. 12:15-20).
 - b. There was great joy on the present occasion on account of their happy circumstances. God had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to their cause. The king was the monarch of the Persian Empire. This king reigned over the territory that formerly had belonged to the Assyrians, and later to the Babylonians, and could be referred to accurately as the king of Assyria, Babylon, Media, and Persia; he controlled all these territories.
 - c. “Kept the feast ... with joy: for the Lord ... turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them—i.e., king of the Persian empire, which now included the possessions, and had surpassed the glory, of Assyria as well as of Babylon and Media (D'Herbelot, 'Bibliotheque Orientale,' sub voce 'Noah'). The three great ancient empires were frequently viewed and spoken of as the same under different dynasties. The use of this title has been accounted for on a different ground—namely, that this chapter, along with the preceding five, was written by Haggai or Zechariah, who, in common with the older Jewish exiles, were accustomed to apply it to the kings that carried them captive (Hervey, 'Genealogy,' p. 318; see

Introduction to Ezra). The favourable disposition which Darius had evinced toward the Jews secured them peace and prosperity, and the privileges of their own religion during the rest of his reign. The religious joy that so remarkably characterized the celebration of this feast was testified by expressions of lively gratitude to God, whose overruling power and converting grace had produced so marvelous a change on the hearts of the mighty potentates, and disposed them, pagans though they were, to aid the cause and provide for the worship of the true God” [Jamieson, Biblesoft].

- d. “The Lord had... turned the heart of the king of Assyria. It has been generally supposed that Darius is personally meant here, and surprise has been expressed at his being called ‘king of Assyria.’ That title is never elsewhere given in Scripture to a king of Persia. Perhaps the writer's real intention in this place is to express in a general way the thankfulness of the Jews that God had turned, the hearts of their civil rulers, whether Assyrians, Babylonians, or Persians, from hostility to friendship, having replaced the bitter enmity of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar by the hearty good-will of Cyrus and Darius. On this view, Assyria would represent merely the great power of Western Asia, and ‘the king’ would not be Darius personally, but the lord of Western Asia in a more general way, who by God's goodness had become the permanent friend of Israel instead of her oppressor and enemy” [Pulpit Commentary, *ibid.*].

Ezra 7

A. Ezra 7:1-10: An Account of Ezra's Journey.

1. Verses 1-5: "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest."
 - a. These five verses furnish the subject of the sentence; the predicate is found in verse six. The action expressed is Ezra's departure from Babylon when he traveled to Jerusalem.
 - b. This passage gives the genealogy of Ezra, tracing his ancestry back through fifteen generations to Aaron, the first Levitical High Priest. The purpose for listing his pedigree is to establish his right to the role he would fill on returning to Jerusalem. Seraiah was the name of a high priest slain by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21); some think he is the same one mentioned in the text, but if so, he is not Ezra's physical father, but a forefather. The genealogy here may be abbreviated.
 - c. About 80 years had passed from the time when Zerubbabel led the first party of Jews back to Palestine (536 B.C.). About 60 years had gone by since the time noted in the closing part of Ezra 6. Ezra has given the information contained in the previous six chapters so that a proper background could be established for the events and work that are now to be noted.
 - d. The king of Persia at this time was Artaxerxes Longimanus; the time was 457 B.C.
2. Verse 6: "This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him."
 - a. Ezra is described as a *ready* scribe. This does not mean that he was a fast writer or even that his penmanship was outstanding; rather, he was one who was "eminently skilful in expounding the law" (Clarke, p.743).
 - b. The subject in which Ezra was skilled is the Law of Moses. This law is further identified as that which the Lord God of Israel had given. The inspired writer does not agree with modern destructive critics of the Bible who deny that the law was inspired. He does agree with 2 Peter 1:20-21 and all the other Bible statements which affirm Biblical inspiration.
 - 1) 2 Timothy 3:15-17: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."
 - 2) 2 Peter 1:20-21: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."
 - c. The king (Artaxerxes) had granted Ezra's requests (which obviously related to his going to Jerusalem); the grant resulted from the hand of God being with the king.
 - d. If Ezra is the inspired writer of this book, how is it that the information here is presented in the third person? It would have been pompous of the writer to describe himself as being a "ready" scribe ("I am a ready scribe"). But the Holy Spirit could present this same truth in the third person without being unseemly. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).
 - e. Ezra had access to the king of Persia—the most likely reason was due to his profession as a scribe. Jewish scribes were men who copied the Law of Moses, and because that work qualified them to know the law, they taught it. It may be that Ezra served the king as scribe (secretary). It is implied in the text that Ezra had made a request of the king, something that required access to him.
3. Verses 7-9: "And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the

singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him."

- a. His request being granted, Ezra assembles a company to journey to Jerusalem, including some Israelites, priests, Levites, singers, porters, and Nethinims (servants in the temple).
 - b. On the first day of the first month of the seventh year of the king's reign they began their travel; the caravan reached Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month. Their journey required four months. The writer attributes their successful and safe trip to the good hand of God.
4. Verse 10: "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."
- a. He had prepared his heart to seek the Law of God (Ezra 7:6,10). Preparation is necessary in our complex society before we can enter into most fields of endeavor.
 - 1) In religious duty, certain preparations are essential before one can become a Christian, serve as an elder, deacon, preacher, teacher, or personal worker. Preparation includes the willingness to do whatever is necessary.
 - 2) To prepare the heart is to set the heart. To set is to fix, purpose, or determine to do. His efforts were not the result of happenstance or impulse, but were determinedly fixed.
 - b. He had prepared his heart to seek the Law of God in order to do it.
 - 1) Knowledge alone is insufficient.
 - a) James 2:19: "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."
 - b) Matthew 7:21-27: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."
 - c) Luke 12:47-48: "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."
 - d) Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."
 - e) Hebrews 5:8-9: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."
 - f) Acts 9:1-2: "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."
 - g) Acts 22:16: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling

on the name of the Lord.”

- 2) Before Ezra could teach the law to anyone else, he must follow it himself. His enemies might charge him with failure to obey it himself, but he and God were the ones to know.
- 3) We must know and do God's will.

- a) Acts 1:1: “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”
- b) Romans 2:1-11: “Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God.”

c. He prepared his heart to seek the Law of God so he could teach it to Israel.

- 1) We are taught to teach others (2 Tim. 2:2). Christianity is spread only by teaching.
 - a) 2 Timothy 2:2: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”
 - b) John 6:44-45: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”
 - c) Mark 16:15-16: “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”
 - d) 2 Timothy 4:1-5: “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”

- 2) Ezra was prepared to teach Israel statutes and judgments. Before he could teach it to Israel, he had to know it himself, and believe it. He had to be convinced in his own ability to do the work, and know that such work was necessary, regardless of the attitude he found in the people. The statutes and judgments of God's law refer to God's authoritative decrees, both negative and positive.

d. This beautiful verse describes the fundamentals of our Christian duties.

B. Ezra 7:11-26: Ezra's Letter of Authority.

1. Verses 11-12: "Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time."
 - a. The king sent a letter of introduction and authority with Ezra. Ezra is described as a priest and a

scribe, with the added thought that his scribal duties related to the law of God.

- b. Artaxerxes identifies himself as "king of kings." All the lesser, subordinate kings in his vast empire were subject him. The letter named Ezra as the subject of the letter, identifying him as a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, and ascribed peace to those who dwelled in Jerusalem.
2. Verses 13-16: "I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem."
 - a. The letter went on to state in written form the authority with which Ezra was empowered, and spoke of certain gifts which the king had provided for the benefit of conducting the Lord's business at Jerusalem.
 - b. He stated the offer that extended to all the Jews yet in the land of their captivity, that they had permission by virtue of the king's decree, to return to Jerusalem, if they so-desired.
 - c. Ezra's mission, in part, was to inquire regarding the state of affairs in Judah and Jerusalem. The names of the counsellors are given in Esther 1:10: "On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king."
 - d. Mention is also made in the letter of the gold and silver which the king and his counsellors were sending to the Jews; other gold and silver offerings from the people and priests in the province of Babylon were collected for Ezra to carry to Jerusalem.
3. Verses 17-19: "That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem."
 - a. The letter also gave Ezra authority to buy bullocks, rams, lambs, and other things to be used as offerings at the temple. Whatever money was left over was to be used according to the discretion of Ezra, in keeping with the will of God. Certain vessels were also being sent with Ezra, to be used as needed in the house of God.
 - b. "That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, etc. The primary application of the money sent by Ezra was to be the maintenance of the Jewish ritual in its full splendour (compare the decree of Darius, Ezra 6:9,10). The residue was, however, to be employed in any way that Ezra, acting under Divine guidance, might direct (see below, ver. 18). Apparently, this residue was actually employed on beautifying the temple (see ver. 27)...The vessels also. It does not appear that these were sacred vessels belonging to the temple, like those which Cyrus had intrusted to Zerubbabel for restoration to the house of God. Rather, it would seem, they were a part of the voluntary 'offering' mentioned in ver. 15, in which they are distinctly included (viii. 25-28). We may perhaps conclude that the vessels sent with Zerubbabel had proved insufficient in number for the great festivals" [Pulpit Commentary, Biblesoft].
4. Verses 20-22: "And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much."
 - a. In the case that more money was needed, Ezra was empowered to make request for the same from the

government officials in the province of which Judah was part.

- b. Notice was included in the letter requiring the treasurers in the province to supply Ezra with whatever funds he requested, up to a hundred talents of silver, a hundred measures of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, an hundred baths of oil, and salt in whatever amount the scribe made request. Clark says each measure of wheat was about 75 bushels (750 bushels authorized); he says a bath was about 7 gallons and 5 pints; he also said a talent of silver equaled 450 English pounds.
5. Verses 23-26: "Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment."
- a. The letter the king gave Ezra was extremely generous, stating that whatever God required, that Ezra was to do, without specifying any spending limits. The king was being liberal and helpful so as to avoid incurring the wrath of the God of heaven.
 - b. The king specifically forbade Tatnai or any other government official to levy any tax on the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters, the Nethinims, and the ministers of the temple; the king exempted all of these from tolls, tribute, and customs.
 - c. The king further charged Ezra with appointing magistrates and judges when he came into the land, and that he should teach all the people who know God's law, and even those who did not know it. He directly referred to the wisdom of God "that is in thine hand" (speaking of the copy of God's word which Ezra held), as the source of the wisdom he should use in setting up the magistrates and judges, and which should be taught to the people.
 - d. The letter also gave Ezra authority to bring proper punishment upon those who refused to do the will of God, even to the extent of execution if the case called for such, or banishment, confiscation of property, or prison.

C. Ezra 7:27-28: Ezra Gives Thanks.

1. Verse 27: "Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem."
 - a. Ezra was overwhelmed with gratitude at the magnanimity of Artaxerxes; he expressed his thankfulness and joy to the Lord for providing for such a wonderful outcome.
 - b. Only the God of heaven could have brought about such a disposition in the heart of the king to provide for the beautification of the temple.
2. Verse 28: "And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me."
 - a. He was grateful for the mercy God had shown him before the king and his counsellors and all the king's mighty princes.
 - b. Ezra closes the chapter with a reference in the first person to the effect these benefits had wrought in the great man's heart. He said he was strengthened as a result of the Lord's works. Being thus encouraged, he gathered together a company from the chief men of the nation to go with him to Jerusalem.

Ezra 8

A. Ezra 8:1-14: The Families of Ezra's Caravan.

1. Verse 1: "These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king." A list of names is given which identifies heads of several families, with a brief genealogy of those returnees who pertained to the family heads.
2. Verses 2-14: "Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush. Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty. Of the sons of Pahathmoab; Elihoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males. Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males. Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males. And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males. And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names *are* these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males. Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males."
 - a. Some from the priestly line (Gershom) and some from the royal line (of David) are named. Phinehas was the son of Eleazar who was the son of Aaron; Ithamar was a younger son of Aaron: "And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day" (1 Chron. 5:29-30).
 - b. One of the priests which went up with Nehemiah was named Daniel (Neh. 10:6), but this is not likely the same as the one named here in verse two.
 - c. Two other men with the name Shechaniah are named in the book.
 - 1) Ezra 8:5: "Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males."
 - 2) Ezra 10:2: "And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing."
 - d. One reason for the list of names is to give honor to these individuals and families, for a great deal of courage was required for some of these to give up their established positions in Babylon, to return to the weak and unsettled status that Judah occupied in Canaan.

B. Ezra 8:15-20: Some of the Levites Included.

1. Verse 15: "And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi."
 - a. The name of the place and the name of the river are identical (Clarke). In preparation for the journey, Ezra gathered the company to Ahava, where they lived in tents for three days. They had departed from Babylon on the first day of the first month (7:9); they left the present encampment on the twelfth day of the first month (8:31).
 - 1) Ezra 7:9: "For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him."
 - 2) Ezra 8:31: "Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way."
 - b. "We gather from scattered statements in this passage:

- 1) "That Ezra, with his companions, after a journey of nine days' duration, reached Ahava from Babylon on the ninth day of the first month;
 - 2) "That he rested three days at Ahava, and proclaimed a fast;
 - 3) "That he was there joined by a small number of Levites and a considerable body of Nethinims from the immediate neighbourhood;
 - 4) "That, on the twelfth day of the first month, he resumed his journey, and, though threatened by some opposition upon the way, arrived safely at his destination fourteen weeks after he quitted Ahava, and exactly four months after he had started from Babylon. The only other important fact mentioned is, that at Ahava twelve of the principal priests were selected by Ezra, and the royal offering of silver, gold, and vessels handed over to them for safe custody, after having been carefully weighed. The weights are recorded with Ezra's usual exactness in vers. 26, 27" [Pulpit Commentary].
- c. The priests were all descendants of Levi, but none of the Levites present were non-priests. To serve as a priest was a high honor, but only a certain number of Levites were qualified and chosen. There were other jobs to be done by the Levitical tribe which did not require the priestly office; these jobs were important.
 - d. "The 'river that runneth to Ahava' is now generally identified with the Is of Herodotus (i. 179), a small stream flowing into the Euphrates from the east, at a point where stood a city of the same name, distant (according to Herodotus) eight days' journey from Babylon....The modern name is Hit. The town has always been one of some importance in connection with the bitumen springs of the neighbourhood. Ezra's reason for selecting the place as a halting-point seems to have been the fact that many Jews were settled in the district (see ver. 17). We abode in tents. A large caravan, like Ezra's, even when it reached a town, would pitch its tents outside, and remain in them rather than scatter itself among the khans and caravanserais. The phrase is therefore to be understood literally. I viewed the people. Rather, 'I looked among the people'—I looked to see whether there were any Levites or no....And found there none of the sons of Levi. It is difficult to account for the fact; but there seems certainly to have been a special disinclination to return to Jerusalem on the part of the Levites. Only seventy-four went up with Zerubbabel, when the priests who returned were 4289 (Ezra 2:36-40); and now there was not a single one in the whole of Ezra's band" [ibid.].
2. Verses 16-17: "Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and or Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God."
 - a. Ezra sent for nine men who are called *chief men*, plus two others who were men of understanding. The eleven were influential because of their positions; the two were influential due to their wisdom.
 - b. These eleven men were instructed to go to Iddo, the chief of Casiphia. Casiphia may have some connection to the Caspian Sea or Caspian Mountains. Clarke suggested that Iddo was in charge of a group of Levites and Nethinims who were working silver mines, since the name (Casiphia) signifies *silver*.
 - c. The purpose of going to Iddo was to request that he [Iddo] dispatch some of the Levites and Nethinims to serve as ministers at the temple.
 3. Verses 18-20: "And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name."
 - a. Attributing the success to the providence of God, Ezra states that thirty-eight Levites were sent to join the caravan. Two hundred and twenty Nethinims were also sent. Evidently, Casiphia was nearby for

the people sent came prior to the departure of the caravan on the twelfth of the month.

- b. David had appointed the Nethinims to serve at the Tabernacle. The names are not given in the text, but were probably supplied to Ezra by Iddo.

C. Ezra 8:21-23: The Caravan Fasts and Prays for Their Journey.

1. Verse 21: "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance."
 - a. The company fasted and prayed, asking God's help on the venture. They *afflicted* themselves in that they did not eat for a period of time.
 - b. Ezra saw the need to request the assistance of God. They would have prayed for safety and guidance during the time of travel, and for a successful completion of the work they anticipated doing in Judah. They prayed for a straight path, for their little ones and for their possessions.
 - c. There is always a need for asking God's help as we face our daily endeavors and for the special activities we plan.
2. Verse 22: "For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him."
 - a. There were outlaw bands and warlike tribes along their route, but since Ezra had told the king that God would protect them, he was ashamed to make request for soldiers and horsemen to protect them.
 - b. The scribe had correctly told the king that God would help those who seek him for good, but his power and wrath oppose those who turn from him. Having made this declaration, Ezra could not now ask for a military escort lest the king see the contradiction. Word about the assets carried by the company would have preceded them, making their caravan a rich prize for any robber band, and thus necessitating their prayers for God's protection.
3. Verse 23: "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us."
 - a. Their fasting and prayers, demonstrating their faith, were heard and accepted by the Lord. We are not told how they knew this, unless some message was received from heaven, or else the report was written after the journey had successfully been completed.
 - b. God blessed their journey, protected them from the enemy, and brought them safely into the land of Canaan. "Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth *day* of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way" (Ezra 8:31).

D. Ezra 8:24-30: Twelve Treasurers Appointed.

1. Verse 24: "Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them."
 - a. Two of the twelve are named; the other ten are simply called "their brethren with them." All of these twelve men were chief among the priests; according to verses 18-19, they were Levites, but not priests. This makes the statement about them to say that they were chief men associated with the priests. It is not likely that these Levites would be placed in superior positions to the priests.
 - b. The job to which they were being appointed was that of treasurers. The company carried with them a large amount of gold and silver, and other valuable property. Ezra showed good judgment by making these men to be responsible for the money.
2. Verses 25-27: "And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; Also twenty basins of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold."
 - a. Ezra divided the money and vessels between these twelve men. The responsibility was likewise divided, with no one man being responsible for all of the treasure. The wealth was donated by the

king, his counsellors and lords, and Israelites.

- b. The treasure consisted of silver vessels valued at 100 talents, 650 talents of silver, 100 talents of gold, 20 basins of gold, and 2 vessels of fine copper.
 - c. A talent of gold is estimated to be 60-120 pounds; a talent of silver is thought to be 50-100 pounds. A talent of silver was valued at \$1250—\$2500; a talent of gold \$20,000—\$40,000. (Halley).
 - d. The copper vessels were as precious as gold.
3. Verse 28-30: "And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God."
- a. Each of the treasurers was to be responsible until they delivered it to the proper officials in Jerusalem at the temple.
 - b. The men were holy to the Lord; the vessels were also holy, as were the silver and gold offerings. The treasure was to be used in the temple, and the men were to occupy themselves in and about the temple; in this way, these men and treasure were holy.

E. Ezra 8:31-36: The Journey is Completed and the Accounting is Made.

1. Verses 31-32: "Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days."
 - a. Having spent three days in their encampment on the River Ahava, they departed on their journey on the twelfth day of the first month.
 - b. They had left Babylon on the first day of the month, and finally arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month (7:9), making the journey a four-month trip. Following the Fertile Crescent, they would have traveled about 1000 miles.
 - c. The company was at Jerusalem three days before delivering the treasure to the officials of the temple.
2. Verses 33-35: "Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD."
 - a. On the fourth day, the silver and gold and the vessels were weighed, and turned over to the temple officers. No discrepancy is reported in the amount the twelve treasurers received, and the amount they delivered.
 - b. The descendants of those who had been carried into captivity by the Babylonians offered sacrifices to God. The offerings consisted of 12 bullocks, 96 rams, 77 lambs, and 12 he goats.
3. Verse 36: "And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God."
 - a. Ezra presented the commissions he had received from the king to the government officials over Judah. These documents would show the rulers that the status and programs of work intended had the king's full permission.
 - b. The arrival of Ezra's company furthered the cause of the Jewish nation and enhanced the temple and its service.
4. Matthew Henry gave the following application of the chapter: "The expressions here used, direct our attention to the deliverance of sinners from spiritual bondage, and their pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem, under the care and protection of their God and Saviour. Those who have been long enslaved

to sin and Satan, are exhorted to go forth from their captivity, and to enter on this pilgrimage. Difficulties and dangers await them, but the Lord will be with them by the way, as their Leader and Commander. Under his defence, whatever opposition may be raised, the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. O ... that men of piety and zeal, like Ezra, may stand forth as leaders in the church, to call sinners out of their captivity, and to go before them in the way to Zion!" (quoted in ADL, p.122).

Ezra 9

A. Ezra 9:1-4: Unlawful Marriages Reported to Ezra.

1. Verse 1: "Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites."
 - a. After being in Palestine for a period of time, certain leaders of the people came to Ezra with the disturbing news that the Israelites who had already returned to the land were mixing and mingling with the pagans who lived there.
 - b. God had commanded, centuries earlier through Moses, that there was to be no close contact between his people and the heathen nations. "And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. 7:2-3).
 - c. However, the Jews had not separated themselves from the pagans, going even to the point of intermarrying with them: "And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). The priests and Levites, who should have known better, were involved, and consequently the common Jews were likewise implicated.
2. Verse 2: "For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass."
 - a. This verse sheds some light on Malachi 2:15, which speaks of a *godly seed*. "And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth" (Mal. 2:15).
 - b. By intermarriage with the idolaters, the Jews had polluted the holy seed. There is nothing morally pure or impure about anyone's blood, but the practices of the pagans would surely contaminate both the souls and the worship of Israel.
 - c. The religious and civil leaders of the nation had taken the lead in thus polluting the Israelites. The common people are strongly influenced by popular leaders. If the priests married heathen wives, and gave their sons and daughters to heathen mates, the average Jew would take that to mean this was an acceptable practice before God. So the problem swelled.
3. Verse 3: "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished."
 - a. When a sinful practice is followed by the majority for a period of years, people get acclimated to it, and after a while, the practice becomes so common that no one considers it to be wrong. A generation of people born into such an environment will never question the rightness of the action.
 - b. However, Ezra was stunned to learn that the priests and others were intermarrying with the pagans, in violation of the Law of God. He was so taken aback by this obvious sinful condition that he rent his garment and his mantle (his outer and inner clothing). This was a sign of great agitation or sorrow.
 - 1) Reuben rent his clothes when he learned that his brothers had sold Joseph into slavery: "Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes" (Gen. 37:28-29).
 - 2) Jacob rent his clothes when he saw Joseph's blood-stained coat of many colors: "And they took

him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it" (Gen. 37:24).

- 3) Job rent his clothes when he learned of the death of his children: "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped" (Job 1:20).
- c. Ezra plucked hair from his head and his beard. So disturbed was he that he took this drastic action, probably acting, not from conscious thought, but from deep emotional stress. This was a sincere man of God; he sought to do right, and was knowledgeable of God's Law. Since he thus reacted to the practice indicated, he knew it to be a drastic rebellion against God. This is the only place in the Bible where someone pulled out his hair and his beard. This does not mean he plucked out all of his hair and beard.
4. Verse 4: "Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice."
 - a. The great man sat speechless until the time for the evening sacrifice. During this period (perhaps several hours), a group of Jews gathered to him. These were those who "trembled at the words of the God of Israel." They had a deep reverence for God and equally profound respect for God's word. "Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:1-2).
 - b. These people trembled at the Lord's word on account of the transgression of those who were carried away. That is, these people had learned the intended lesson of the captivity their forebears had received. Knowing the wrath of God which he pours out upon rebels, Ezra and these other faithful Jews feared lest a horrible fate befall their foolish Jewish neighbors.

B. Ezra 9:5-15: Ezra Confesses the Guilt of the Nation.

1. Verse 5: "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God."
 - a. Apparently as the evening sacrifice was being offered at the temple, Ezra arose from his sorrows, and spread out his arms unto God as he prayed on bended knees.
 - b. Acts 3:1 reports that Peter and John entered the temple at the hour of prayer, which was at the ninth hour (3 p.m.). This may have also been the time of the evening sacrifice, although Clarke suggests that the sacrifice was offered between the two evenings (sunset and twilight).
2. Verses 6-7: "And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day."
 - a. The great man's prayer is a beautiful expression of reverence, penitence, gratitude, petition, and praise. He expresses his sorrow and shame over the sinful state of God's people on account of the wretched condition of their association with the heathen people of the land. He could barely lift his face toward heaven because of the shame he felt over their departure from God's will.
 - b. He describes the guilt of the nation as having increased to cover their heads, and to have mounted up into the sky. There was no desire to hide or minimize the guilt. He did not try to disguise their sin by calling it something less than it was.
 - c. He confesses that since the time of their forebears who rebelled against God, the nation had been steeped in sin. The consequences of the past sins of the people, their kings, and their priests, resulted in the nation being subjected to the sword, to captivity, to being spoiled, and shamed. The present generation still bore the shame of their rebellion, and remained in a wicked state. The book of Ezekiel shows that even in captivity, many of the Israelites were still in rebellion.
3. Verses 8-9: "And now for a little space grace hath been showed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us

a little reviving in our bondage. For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem."

- a. For a relatively short time, God had shown them mercy. In 536 B.C., the first contingent of Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem from captivity. The year was now 457 B.C., so for about 79 years (*a little space*) they had been receiving the benefits of God's grace.
 - b. "The 'little space' must be understood relatively to the long enjoyment of Divine favour from Abraham to Zedekiah. It was a space of more than eighty years. A remnant to escape. The Hebrew has simply *p'leythah*, 'a remnant,' the 'remnant' being that which had escaped the two dangers of destruction and absorption, and had returned from Babylon to Palestine. To give us a nail. 'A nail' seems to mean here 'a firm and sure abode,' as our translators note in the margin. For we were bondsmen. Rather, 'we are.' The Jews had not recovered their independence. They continued to be the subjects of a despotic monarch, and were therefore *'abddim*, 'slaves.' All the favour shown them by the kings of Persia had not changed this fact. To give us a wall. That is to say, 'a shelter.' The city wall still lay in ruins (see Neh 1:3; 2:13, etc.)" [Pulpit Commentary, Biblesoft].
 - c. God had allowed them to go home, and have a *nail* in the holy place. Ancient houses did not have the cabinets and closets we build in our modern dwellings. Nails (pegs, pins) were built into the walls on which to hang clothes, utensils, and tools. The reference may be to this kind of nail. Clarke thought that the reference was to ground space on which they stretched their tents and drove the tent pegs.
 - d. The Lord had permitted a remnant of Jews to return, and thus preserved the nation. In surviving the captivity and returning home, the perceptive ones had their eyes opened to perceive the hand of God in all these experiences. Their eyes had been enlightened.
 - e. They were now being revived, whereas they had been perishing in exile. God had given them another chance to fulfill the destiny he had intended for them.
 - f. They had been in bondage, but their God had not utterly forsaken them. He had caused the Jews to be viewed in good light by the Persian kings, who released them and financed their return to their own land. The first chapter of Ezra sheds some light on this.
 - g. With God working behind the scenes, the Persian kings had freed Israel, and financed their rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem, giving them "a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem." The *wall* (cf. Isa. 5:5) was a walled enclosure, a secure place.
 - h. Ezra had his eyes open, and recognized God's hands behind these affairs, and tenders thanks to him for these mercies.
4. Verses 10-11: "And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness."
- a. With these truths in mind, Ezra wonders how the nation could explain why they had gotten into their present state of rebellion.
 - b. God's word had been very plain in describing the wicked condition of the heathen nations occupying ancient Canaan. The reason God allowed the Canaanites to have as much time possessing the land was God's willingness to be longsuffering toward them, giving them opportunity to make a change for the better.
 - 1) Genesis 15:16: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full."
 - 2) Romans 2:4: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"
 - 3) 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

- c. The descendants of those ancient people were still corrupt, and the warnings regarding them still applied, as the next verse shows.
5. Verses 12-13: "Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this."
 - a. God warned Israel long ago against having any dealings with the pagans: "When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:1-6).
 - b. Ezra knew that ancient prohibition: that there was to be no intermarriage between Israel and the Canaanites; that Israel was neither to seek peace with them nor to be covetous of their wealth; that Israel's strength and prosperity depended on her being separate from them; that Israel's future prosperity required remaining free of any entangling contacts with those corrupt nations.
 - c. Despite all of Israel's past rebellions against God, he had not punished them as fully as they deserved. Their punishment had been severe, but they had deserved to be utterly destroyed. Instead of being annihilated, God had delivered them from their captivity and restored them to their own land.
 6. Verses 14-15: "Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? O LORD God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespasses: for we cannot stand before thee because of this."
 - a. With verses twelve and thirteen giving the background, this statement concludes the thought. Despite the clear and strong warnings God had given ancient Israel to remain uncontaminated by the pollutions of the Canaanites, they had ignored his counsel, and had become defiled by their contact with those wicked nations. God had brought punishment upon Israel, but even in chastising them, had shown mercy.
 - b. These facts furnishing the background, Ezra wonders in his prayer how could they have once again fallen into the same trap their forefathers had entered. His reference in the question is to the problem described in verses one and two of this chapter.
 - c. Since the present generation, knowing the details of why the nation had been in exile, and knowing that God had brought about their release and return to Canaan, and then to promptly commit the same error their ancestors had committed, how could they but expect complete annihilation! Ezra could not see how God could do anything else. Of course, God had a great plan in mind which required the continuation of Israel, despite their often rebellions.
 - d. Because of their sinful state, Ezra knew that they could not stand before God. The Lord being infinitely righteous, how could he allow wicked Israel to continue? The great man well-understood the grave danger the people faced, but they seemed to be oblivious of their peril.

Ezra 10

A. Ezra 10:1-5: A Reformation is Proposed by Shechaniah.

1. Verse 1: "Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore."
 - a. Ezra's actions of the past several hours had not gone unnoticed. There was the group of godly men who had brought him the initial report of Israel's affiliations with the idolaters of the area. As the great man arose at the evening sacrifice, and spread his hands forth in humble and tearful prayer, others were drawn to the scene.
 - b. *A very great congregation of men and women and children* assembled, and were deeply touched by the prayer they heard. The great congregation broke forth in tears. One person's tears often bring forth a similar emotional response from others. Jacob Creath, Jr. (1799-1886) was born on Butcher's Creek in Mecklenburg County, Virginia. He was a fearless proclaimer and defender of the faith. He was also noted for his praying.
 - 1) In 1854, L.B. Wilkes went to Missouri to hold a meeting; he was privileged to spend some time with Creath. Creath led Wilkes out into the woods near his house. Wilkes described Creath's prayer: "We fell on our knees and O such a prayer!....Brother Creath talked so to God that I voluntarily felt for the moment that if I should open my eyes I should certainly see him upon whom no one can look and live. I have never heard such a prayer before, and now thirty years have passed since that remarkable experience, and yet I have heard no such prayer since" (West, Vol. 1, p.124).
 - 2) During the War Between the States, a company of soldiers was camped near Palmyra, Missouri, planning an attack. "Creath went out to the grove to pray and the leader of the troops happened to be near. He edged closer to the grove and listened as Creath prayed for his neighbors, his town and for peace. The next day the troops withdrew without any attempt to capture the town" (West, Vol. 1, p.124).
 - c. More was involved in the tears of the people than merely an emotional response. The prayer of Ezra spelled out in plain detail the corrupted condition of his generation, as he confessed their mutual sins to God. Obviously, the congregation recognized their guilt, and wept in their penitence.
2. Verse 2: "And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing."
 - a. Shechaniah apparently was one of the leaders of the nation. He spoke up, acknowledging the sin of taking wives from among the aliens. Those present now recognized their peril. There are few people who are aware of the awfulness of sin, or of the terrible penalty it bears.
 - 1) Ezekiel 18:20: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."
 - 2) Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."
 - 3) Revelation 20:12-15: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."
 - 4) Matthew 7:21-23: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of

heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

- 5) Matthew 25:46: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”
 - 6) John 5:28-29: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”
 - 7) 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9: “Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.”
- b. Shechaniah realized that there was hope for them. Confessing their sin, he called on the people to make a covenant with God (verse 3).
3. Verse 3: "Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law."
 - a. Shechaniah called on the guilty to promise God that they would put away their strange wives and the children born through that unlawful alliance.
 - b. Referring to Ezra as *my lord*, Shechaniah states their willingness to act in accordance with such counsel as Ezra would give, and the wise directions which could be offered by "those that tremble at the commandment of our God." He was aware of the righteous few who had brought Ezra the report: “Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass” (9:1-2).
 - c. He stated that the action contemplated was to be done in harmony with the Law of God (cf. Deut. 28).
 - 1) Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”
 - 2) Jeremiah 6:16: “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.”
 - 3) Deuteronomy 4:2: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”
 4. Verses 4-5: "Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware."
 - a. Shechaniah continues his appeal to Ezra, calling on the great man to arise and take the lead in fulfilling the plan suggested. He advises Ezra to be of good courage and do the thing required.
 - b. Ezra arose as he was requested, and led the chief priests, the Levites, and all of Israel to vow to do according to the word of God in the matter. Any violation of God's law is serious, but some have greater immediate consequences than others.
 - 1) This present transgression involved their unlawful marriages with the idolaters of the land, which

had produced a considerable number of offspring. Undoubtedly, those Jews who had married pagans loved their mates and children, but love does not turn a sinful arrangement into a righteous union. That which has been obtained by unrighteous means may not be justly retained.

- 2) The oath that Ezra required of these individuals was designed to bind them to the commitment of separating themselves from these unholy marital arrangements, and thus return to the proper standing with God. The act of sin was severe, and the process of making things right was equally exacting.

B. Ezra 10:6-17: The Reformation is Accomplished.

1. Verses 6-8: "Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away."
 - a. Ezra did not take the action contemplated unadvisedly or without distressing inner turmoil. He would eat no food and drink no water during the ordeal, because he mourned over this tragic case of transgression. Those who are aware of the serious nature of sin will not take a flippant attitude toward it.
 - b. The ready scribe entered the dwelling of Johanan, and there he fasted and mourned over the transgression of Israel, and from there a proclamation was issued calling all of the nation to gather at Jerusalem. A severe penalty was imposed for anyone who failed to respond to the decree. Anyone who did not present himself in Jerusalem within three days faced the loss of all his possessions and would be cut off from the congregation of Israel.
 - c. There is a terrible penalty careless Christians must pay for their neglect to assemble with the saints, in terms of spiritual blessings they forfeit by their absences, as well as the judgment that is to fall upon them for their omission of duty: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:23-31).
2. Verse 9: "Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain."
 - a. The proclamation applied to the men of the nation. They all lived within three days' journey from Jerusalem. These all gathered in Jerusalem on the 20th day of the 9th month.
 - b. The great crowd numbered in the tens of thousands. They assembled in Jerusalem, sitting in the street near the temple, trembling because of the dire nature of the occasion and for the great rain that was falling.
 - c. Rain is often a faith-testing occurrence. Rain or the threat of rain will keep the lukewarm members from assembling with the saints, but the same situation will not keep them from going to work or shopping. Faith will cause us to assemble regardless of the weather.

3. Verses 10-11: "And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives."
 - a. The purpose for the assembly was already known by the people (verses 1-5,9). The words Ezra delivered to them was the official statement of the proposition.
 - b. Ezra plainly announced to them that they had sinned in taking wives from among the pagans, and that in so-doing they had increased the sinful standing of Israel as a whole.
 - c. He proceeded to tell them what they must do: they were to confess their transgressions to God, commit themselves to follow his Law, to separate themselves from the people of the land, and to separate from their heathen wives. All of this is reported to us in two short verses, in 43 words. The problem was described and the solution was given quickly and easily, but carrying it out would obviously be most painful.
4. Verses 12-14: "Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do. But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us."
 - a. Some spokesman from the congregation made a practical suggestion concerning how the requirements were to be followed. First, they affirmed their willingness to obey the demand; they saw their duty and committed themselves to do it.
 - b. However, some practical approach must be used to bring the problem to a clear and satisfactory conclusion. The activities involved would require more than a day or two. Also, the heavy rain that was presently falling was a great hindrance. Further, there was a very great number of Israelites who were involved in the problem.
 - c. The suggestion was made that the rulers of the nation (who were guilty) be the first to take the actions involved in putting away their heathen wives. Then, by appointment, the guilty parties in each city were to come, along with the elders of the city, and fulfill their vow to put away their heathen wives, and offer the proper sacrifice.
 - d. This suggestion was not designed to postpone the inevitable, but to present an orderly arrangement by which the problem could be handled in an efficient manner. That they understood the grievous danger they faced is clear from the reference in verse 14 to turning away from them the "fierce wrath of our God." It is a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). Our God "is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29).
5. Verses 15-17: "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month."
 - a. "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite gave them support. Then the descendants of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of the fathers' households, were set apart by the fathers' households, each of them by name; and they sat down on the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. By the first day of the first month they finished questioning all the men who had taken pagan wives" (NKJV).
 - b. The ASV gives verse 15 in these words: "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah stood up against this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them." The ASV margin gives "were appointed over this" as an alternate rendering for "stood up against this matter."

- 1) The meaning of the verse is difficult: Is it saying that these men were opposed to the plan of verse 14? Or is it stating that these men were opposed to the demand? In most cases where God's will exposes the errors of men, those who are guilty often oppose the will of God, and refuse to make a change.
- 2) Could it be that these four men were placed in charge of the operation? The next verse, however, indicates that Ezra and certain other chief men were given charge of the process.
- c. Verse 16 reports that the guilty parties did what they were required to do, putting away their strange wives. Ezra and the other leaders of the people sat as administrators of the plan, apparently examining each case as they were presented to them.
- d. They began disposing of the cases on the first day of the tenth month, and continued until it was completed on the first day of the first month of the next year. All of the guilty parties fulfilled the requirements of the law.
- e. "They ran through the whole list of those who were accused of having taken strange wives, and adjudicated on every case, by the first day of the first month, Nisan, corresponding nearly with our April. Deducting Sabbaths, the number of days in the three months would be seventy-five or seventy-six; but it is of course possible that the court did not sit continuously....Aware of the danger that the nation might relapse into the sin which he was seeking to root out, Ezra punishes the wrong-doers by placing their names on record, that others might fear to do the like. He assigns the first place in his catalogue of offenders to the priests, doubtless because in them the sin was greatest; they, as the special custodians of the Law, were most bound to have observed the Law. Next to the priests he puts the Levites, on the same principle, because of their semi-sacerdotal character. He then concludes with the [others], arranged under their several families. By the list of [others] appears that ten only out of some thirty-six [other] families were implicated in the sin. Three of the four priestly families, on the other hand, and even the near-kindred of the high priest, were among the guilty. It is remarkable that it is Ezra, a priest, and one by many accused of over-sacerdotalism, who gives this testimony against his own order" [Pulpit Commentary, Biblesoft].

C. Ezra 10:18-44: The Names of Those Who Put Away Their Wives.

1. Verses 18-19: "And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass."
 - a. The sons of Jeshua who was the son of Jozadak were among the offenders. Jeshua had served earlier as high priest (cf. Zech. 3:1). Included in the number of offenders in the lineage of Jozadak and Jeshua were Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah.
 - b. These men admitted their guilt, and offered the proper sacrifice for their trespass. Of course, they put away their heathen wives as instructed.
2. Verses 20-43: "And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. 21 And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah. 22 And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasa. 23 Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. 24 Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. 25 Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. 26 And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. 27 And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. 28 Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. 29 And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth. 30 And of the sons of Pahathmoab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. 31 And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, 32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. 33 Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. 34 Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel, 35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh, 36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, 37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau, 38 And Bani, and Binnui,

Shimei, 39 And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah, 40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, 41 Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah, 42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. 43 Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah."

3. Verse 44: "All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children."
 - a. Why were these names included in the sacred record? Perhaps their inclusion serves as a warning to all others who contemplate rebellion against God. Perhaps also to show that God forgives, and remembers those who have been pardoned.
 - 1) Hebrews 8:12: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."
 - 2) Revelation 20:12-15: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."
 - b. Among the offenders were priests and Levites. These could be expected to include the most knowledgeable and devout among the Israelites. Yet they committed sin. A subtle warning is indicated by that fact to anyone who deems himself to be above sin. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Introduction to Nehemiah

A. Nehemiah.

1. His name means "consolated by Jehovah." What we know about him is included in the book of Nehemiah. He is not the Nehemiah who returned with Zerubbabel in 536 B.C., that person having lived many years before the time of the subject of this book.
2. Nehemiah was cupbearer to Artaxerxes Longimanus I, king of Persia. The story Nehemiah reports begins during the twentieth year of the king's reign, which was 445 B.C.
 - a. A cupbearer to the king occupied a responsible and highly-trustworthy position. Poison was a prominent method of assassinating a political figure, hence the cupbearer had to be trusted completely.
 - b. Serving the king in such a capacity would give Nehemiah continuing access to the monarch, with all the privileges daily contact would offer.
3. Nehemiah possessed the following qualities (as suggested by Roy Deaver in ADL, pp.384-392:
 - a. He was a man of prayer (1:4).
 - b. He was a man of deep compassion (1:4).
 - c. He recognized his responsibility, and exercised the self-discipline to discharge it (2:5).
 - d. He did not seek self-glory or personal gain in his undertaking the work (2:10).
 - e. He exercised good judgment in getting the work done (2:16).
 - f. He did not ride roughshod over the people he sought to help (2:17-18).
 - g. He did not allow the scorn and opposition of the enemy to deter his efforts (2:19-20).
 - h. He used wisdom in planning the work (Neh. 3).
 - i. He recognized that they were working for God (4:20; 2:18,20).
 - j. He refused to compromise with the enemy (6:2-4).
 - k. He was able to unmask false prophets (6:10-14).
 - l. He knew the importance of teaching God's law to the people (8:1-9).
 - m. He would not fellowship one who was in sin (13:4-11,28).
 - n. He was deeply grieved when people rebelled against God's will (13:8,28-30).
 - o. He was willing to expose sin (13:15-21).
4. "Nehemiah's great work was rebuilding for the first time since the destruction by Nebuzaradan, captain of Nebuchadnezzar's army, of the walls of Jerusalem, and restoring that city to its former state and dignity, as a fortified city. How low the community of the Palestine Jews had fallen is apparent from the fact that from the time of Darius to the seventh year of Artaxerxes, there is no history of them whatever, and that even after Ezra's government brought to them, they were in state of affliction and reproach in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes: their country pillaged, their citizens kidnapped and made slaves by their heathen neighbors, robbery and murder rife in the very capital, Jerusalem almost deserted, and the Temple falling into decay. The one step which could preserve the Mosaic institutions and lay the foundation of future independence was the restoration of the city walls" (Richard Curry, ADL, pp.315f).

B. The Book of Nehemiah.

1. "In Nehemiah we have the shining character of an able governor, truly zealous for the good of his country and for the honour of his religion: who quitted a noble and gainful post in the greatest court in the world; generously spent the riches he had there acquired for the public benefit of his fellow Israelites; and waded through inexpressible difficulties with a courage and spirit, which alone could, with the divine blessing,
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procure the safety and reform the manners of such an unhappy and unthoughtful nation. The administration of this pious and truly patriotic governor lasted about thirty-six years..." (Horne, p.64).

2. Contents of the book:

- a. Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem with official authority to rebuild Jerusalem's walls: 1:1—2:11.
- b. The account of the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem: 2:12—4:23.
- c. Struggles with the enemies reported: 5:1—7:4.
- d. Names of people in his caravan: 7:5-73.
- e. The reading of the Law and the reformation of the people: 8:1—13:31.

C. Detailed Outline of the Book (from McGarvey).

1. Nehemiah obtains permission to rebuild Jerusalem: 1:1—2:20.
 - a. He is distressed about the conditions of the city and people: 1:1-11.
 - b. His request is granted: 2:1-8.
 - c. His journey and a secret examination of the ruins: 2:9-16.
 - d. His purpose made known and the enemy excited: 2:17-20.
 2. The walls rebuilt: 3:1—4:23.
 - a. The work distributed in forty-two sections: 3:1-32.
 - b. The enemies mock and Nehemiah prays: 4:1-6.
 - c. A plot of the enemy defeated: 4:7-15.
 - d. Precaution against an attack: 4:16-23.
 3. The oppression of the poor broken up: 5:1-19.
 - a. Complaints of suffering and usury: 5:1-5.
 - b. The evil corrected: 5:6-13.
 - c. Nehemiah's own example: 5:14-19.
 4. The plottings of the enemy: 6:1 -7:4.
 - a. A conference requested: 6:1-4.
 - b. A false charge presented: 6:5-9.
 - c. Treacherous counsel within the city: 6:10-14.
 - d. Treacherous correspondence with Tobiah: 6:15-19.
 - e. The city carefully guarded: 7:1-4.
 5. The genealogy of Zerubbabel's caravan: 7:5-73.
 - a. Why is this repeated? Cf. Ezra 2:1-70.
 - b. What differences between them and how are they accounted for?
 - c. What is the meaning of "the book of the genealogy?"
 6. The reading of the Law: 8:1-18.
 - a. The time, the place, and the reading: 8:1-3.
 - b. The method of procedure: 8:4-8.
 - c. The people comforted: 8:9-12.
 - d. The feast of Tabernacles observed: 8:13-18.
 7. A confession of sins, and a covenant: 9:1—10:30.
 - a. A penitent assembly: 9:1-3.
 - b. A prayer of the Levites: 9:4-38.
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- c. The parties who sealed the covenant: 10:1-27.
 - d. The statutes which they covenanted to keep: 10:28-39.
8. A re peopling of Jerusalem: 11:1-36.
- a. The plan adopted: 11:1f.
 - b. A register of the chiefs in the city: 11:3-24.
 - c. The cities of Judah and Benjamin at this time inhabited: 11:25-36.
9. The dedication of the walls: 12:1-47.
- a. A register of priests and Levites; 12:1-26.
 - b. The walls are dedicated: 12:27-43.
 - c. Keepers of tithes appointed: 12:44-47.
10. Certain reforms effected by Nehemiah: 13:1-31.
- a. Separation from the Moabites and Ammonites: 13:1-3.
 - b. An unlawful privilege of Tobiah broken up: 13:4-9.
 - c. Neglected tithes restored: 13:10-14.
 - d. Sabbath-breaking broken up: 13:15-22.
 - e. Heathen marriages broken up: 13:23-31.
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Nehemiah 1

A. Nehemiah 1:1-3: Nehemiah Learns of Jerusalem's Condition.

1. Verse 1: "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace."
 - a. The Nehemiah of this verse and book is not the same as the one who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; 7:7); he is different from the one named in Nehemiah 3:16. Zerubbabel's journey took place in 536 B.C., while Nehemiah returned in 444 B.C. (92 years apart). The Nehemiah of chapter 3:16 was the son of Azbuk, but our Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah.
 - b. The statement here is all that is given concerning his genealogy, hence his tribal connection is unknown. Some scholars have supposed that he was from the lineage of Judah since his forefathers were buried in Judah at Jerusalem (2:5). His brethren are mentioned in direct connection with certain men of Judah (1:2).
 - c. The events presented in the book had their inception in the month of Chisleu, during the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus (see 5:14; cf. Ezra 7:1). Chisleu corresponds to the latter part of November and the first part of December on our calendar.
 - d. Shushan the palace was at Susa, the winter residence of Persian kings. This ancient capital city was situated east of the Tigris River, about 220 miles east of Babylon.
2. Verse 2: "That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem."
 - a. Hanani is identified as Nehemiah's brother (7:2), although the term might be used loosely. Hanani, accompanied by certain men of Judah, came to Susa from Jerusalem. We are not told when he went to Jerusalem, but it was most likely in company with Ezra (see Ezra 10:20).
 - b. No information is provided to account for his journey to Susa, although the purpose may have been that which resulted, as detailed in the book. Being a brother to Nehemiah, Hanani would have sought out Nehemiah. Josephus alleges that Nehemiah overheard some people talking in the Hebrew tongue, as he walked about the palace walls. See *Antiquities*, Book xi, chapter 5, paragraph 6, page 236.
 - c. Nehemiah naturally inquired about the welfare of the Jews and the current status of the rebuilding process in Jerusalem. Zerubbabel and Ezra were not commissioned to rebuild the walls and gates of the city.
3. Verse 3: "And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire."
 - a. The condition of the people in Judah could hardly be worse. They were suffering from great affliction and reproach. Ezra contains some details of the affliction and persecution the Jews were suffering.
 - b. They had no protection from their enemies in the land since the walls were broken down and the gates had been burned. Apparently no work had been done on the walls and gates since the Babylonian army destroyed them in 586 B.C., one hundred and forty-two years earlier. That would be like the city of Richmond, Virginia remaining in the desolation which the Federal army inflicted on it during the War Between the States.

B. Nehemiah 1:4-11: Nehemiah Laments and Prays.

1. Verse 4: "And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."
 - a. The sincere sympathy of Nehemiah was touched by the sad news. Those with stony hearts try to justify their indifference toward the misfortunes of others by claiming that their manhood will not
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- permit tears or tender feelings. Such insensitivity is no mark of manhood, but of hard-heartedness.
- b. The great people of the Bible were sensitive to the sad plight of their fellowman.
 - c. Our Lord wept over the tragic impenitence of the Jews.
 - 1) Luke 19:41-44: "And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."
 - 2) Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"
 - 3) John 11:33-36: "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!"
 - d. Paul shed tears over the welfare of others.
 - 1) 2 Corinthians 2:4: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you."
 - 2) Acts 20:19, 31: "Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews....Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."
 - e. Both of these are examples for us.
 - 1) 1 Peter 2:21-25: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."
 - 2) 1 Corinthians 4:16: "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me."
 - 3) 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."
 - f. Others in the Bible were not ashamed to weep.
 - 1) Acts 21:12-14: "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."
 - 2) Jeremiah 9:1: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"
 - 3) Acts 20:36-38: "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship."
 - 4) Acts 9:39: "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them."
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- 5) Lamentations 1:12: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."
- g. Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted, and prayed. This continued, not for a few minutes or few hours, but for four months: from Chisleu to Nisan (2:1). He could not have gone completely without food for that lengthy period; and he continued to render his regular service as cupbearer to the king. But his mourning and praying would have dented his appetite, and undoubtedly he went days without taking sustenance.
- h. Prayers is not intended to be *said*, but prayed with fervency and frequency (Jas. 5:16; Luke 18:1ff; Phil. 4:6). Prayer is a wonderful outlet for grief. "Our hearts must melt before our hands will move" (Roy J. Hearn).
- 1) Luke 18:1-8: "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"
 - 2) James 5:16: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."
2. Verse 5: "And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments."
- a. Nehemiah showed in his prayer that his conception of God was accurate. He knew that God was a God of Justice and Mercy; he is not exclusively one or the other. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22).
 - b. God had manifested his wrath in punishing Israel for their rebellion. However, he had given them more than sufficient time and opportunity to repent, and avoid the penalty. He had shown mercy by bringing about the release of Israel from captivity, permitting them to return to Canaan.
 - c. Aware that God is able to punish and bless, Nehemiah makes his request. His prayer is reverent, sincere, and was productive of much good. It was not offered only once, but continued for four months.
 - 1) Nehemiah 1:1: "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace."
 - 2) Nehemiah 2:1: "And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence."
 - d. God is dependable. He keeps his covenants and will not forget our faithfulness (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 6:10). He knows our needs even before we recognize them (Matt. 6:8); therefore, we are commanded to pray, not to inform the Father of our needs, but for our own benefit. When we have a need, and realize that it can only be provided by our Heavenly Father, and pray sincerely and often over the matter, we develop within ourselves a disposition of reliance and trust that is so essential to our spiritual maturity. Scriptural prayers not only can obtain from God those things we need, they also build us up spiritually.
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- 1) 1 Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."
 - 2) Hebrews 6:10: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."
 - 3) Matthew 6:8: "Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."
3. Verse 6: "Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned."
- a. His pray respectfully requests that God hear his prayer. His prayers were offered day and night, and directly involved the welfare of his fellow citizens. His prayers were not selfish.
 - b. His prayers included confessions of wrong-doing on the part of the nation, his father's family, and himself. One who is unwilling to admit his sins is a spiritual weakling. Men who consider themselves to be strong in this world advise others to follow their example: "Never admit a mistake; acknowledging an error is weakness; never say you are sorry." Such foolishness never came from God! We might expect such counsel from a John Wayne movie, but not from the Bible!
 - c. Because sin is a common ailment afflicting every accountable soul, penitence must be expressed by all who seek to approach God.
4. Verse 7: "We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses."
- a. Openly, without reservation, this great man of God acknowledge Israel's gross neglect and blatant rebellion against the Law of God. Sin is committed by failing to do what God commanded and by doing what God has prohibited.
 - 1) James 4:17: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."
 - 2) 1 John 3:4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."
 - b. God delivered his Law through Moses. Israel demanded that Moses stand between them and God, for they were too fearful to behold the mighty manifestations of God's presence (Ex. 19).
 - 1) Exodus 20:18-21: "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was."
 - 2) Hebrews 12:18-21: "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake)."
5. Verses 8-9: "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name
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there."

- a. In his prayer, Nehemiah gently reminds the Lord of the warning he had given Israel, in which he promised to scatter them among the nations if they transgressed his will. This threat God gave through Moses.
 - 1) Leviticus 26:33: "And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste."
 - 2) Deuteronomy 4:25-28: "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the LORD thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the LORD shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the LORD shall lead you. And there ye shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell."
 - 3) Deuteronomy 28:64: "And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone."
 - b. Of course, God did not need to be told what he had said; this was Nehemiah's means of bringing up the subject, which properly introduced the next statement.
 - c. Having stated the warning, Nehemiah could not but notice the promise God made to restore them to their land. If they returned to do God's will, he would bring them back home.
 - 1) Leviticus 26:39: "And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them."
 - 2) Deuteronomy 4:29-31: "But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul. When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice; (For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he sware unto them."
 - 3) Deuteronomy 30:2: "And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul."
 - d. Because God had a great plan in mind, with Israel featured as a prime element, it was necessary for the Lord to restore them to the land.
 - 1) Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."
 - 2) Genesis 12:1-3: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."
 - 3) Galatians 4:4-5: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."
 - 4) Ephesians 3:1-11: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when
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ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

6. Verses 10-11: "Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 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 desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer."
 - a. Nehemiah is now able to make his request: In view of these warnings and promises, and many in Israel having repented and been restored to the land of promise, he asks God to hear his prayer and enable him to fulfill the purpose he has in mind regarding Israel.
 - b. Although Israel had rebelled, they were still God's people. He pleads with the Almighty to prosper him in what he is about to ask from the Persian king.
 - c. Nehemiah states, not as part of the prayer, that he was the king's cupbearer. "This officer, in the ancient Oriental courts, was always a person of rank and importance, and, from the confidential nature of his duties, and his frequent access to the royal presence, possessed of great influence" (JFB, p.606).
 - d. "In this day and age of a total disregard for things of a Divine nature, we need to study the prayer of Nehemiah for the people of God. The message of this book is more than that of a man facing a most difficult task....It is more than that of a man of courage and dedication....It is a message of a man preparing, planning, and praying for a people to get right with God, listen to the Book of God, and once again be the people of God by a return to God in faith" (Goebel Music, ADL, p.154).

Nehemiah 2

A. Nehemiah 2:1-8: Nehemiah's Request is Granted.

1. Verses 1-2: "And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid."
 - a. Nisan is equivalent to parts of our March and April. It was about four months after Nehemiah's meeting with Hanani that this encounter occurred.
 - b. On the occasion at hand, Nehemiah was serving wine to the king. Always before, Nehemiah had worn a pleasant expression on his face, but the burden he was carrying in his heart was so heavy, that his sadness was visible.
 - c. The king took note of Nehemiah's sorrow of heart, and inquired about it. Nehemiah was stricken with great fear on account of the great request he was about to make of the king. He was aware of the awesome stakes that depended on his supplication, with Israel's future hanging in the balance. But he had prepared his heart to make the petition, and with the prayers of the past several weeks, and the knowledge that God was with him, he spoke openly to the king.
2. Verse 3: "And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?"
 - a. Using wisdom, he expressed his best wishes on the king's future before making his plea. In view of what he is about to describe, Nehemiah had a right to have the sad countenance, as the king would admit.
 - b. He spoke first of the sad condition of the city in which the sepulchres of his forebears were situated. The city had been desolated and even now the gates were still nothing but ashes.
3. Verses 4-5: "Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it."
 - a. The king, having a high regard for Nehemiah and appreciating his faithful servant's concern, asked Nehemiah what request he wished to make in regard to the problem.
 - b. Before stating the petition, Nehemiah said he prayed to the God of heaven. We have occasions when we are faced with a trying circumstance in which we will utter a short silent prayer for God's help. It seems that Nehemiah did the same here, just prior to stating his request.
 - c. Ancient kings had absolute authority in their realm, even the power of life and death. Esther placed her life in jeopardy when she entered her husband's palace unbidden. Nehemiah was more concerned that his petition would be denied and Israel would perish, than he was with his own safety.
 - d. Nehemiah clearly and concisely stated his desire: That the king would commission him to journey to Judah, to the city of Jerusalem where his fathers' sepulchres were located, so that he could rebuild the city.
4. Verse 6: "And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time."
 - a. The queen was present, sitting beside her husband.
 - 1) "Since the Persian monarchs did not admit their wives to be present at their state festivals, this must have been a private occasion. The queen referred to was probably Esther, whose presence would tend greatly to embolden Nehemiah in stating his request; and through her influence, powerfully exerted, it may be supposed, also by her sympathy with the patriotic design, his

petition was granted, to go as deputy-governor of Judea, accompanied by a military guard, and invested with full powers to obtain materials for the building in Jerusalem, as well as to get all requisite aid in promoting his enterprise. I set him a time. Considering the great despatch made in raising the walls, it is probable that this leave of absence was limited at first to a year or six months, after which he returned to his duties in Shushan. The circumstance of fixing a set time for his return, as well as entrusting so important a work as the re-fortification of Jerusalem to his care, proves the high favour and confidence Nehemiah enjoyed at the Persian court, and the great estimation in which his services were held. At a later period he received a new commission for the better settlement of the affairs of Judea, and remained governor of that province for twelve years (Neh 5:14)" [Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by Biblesoft].

- 2) However, Clarke denies that this queen was Esther; he asserts that instead of queen, the original word might be translated as harlot or concubine. The time factor may not permit this to be Esther; reliable scholars place Esther's husband on the throne from 486 to 465 B.C., with Esther becoming queen about 478 B.C., and her deliverance of the Jews about 473 B.C. This king was known as Xerxes to the Greeks, and it was his army that was defeated by Greece at Thermopylae and Salamis (about 479 B.C.).
- 3) Why is the queen mentioned in the verse unless there is some special significance for her presence? Perhaps the thought is not significant, but intended to give a fuller picture of the setting in which the important request was made.
- b. The king inquired as to the length of time he would be gone. Nehemiah "set him a time" for the completion of his mission and return to Persia. Chapter 5:14 places him in Jerusalem for twelve years, from the twentieth year of Artaxerxes until the thirty-second year of his reign. Esther's husband reigned only about twenty years in all.
5. Verses 7-8: "Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me."
 - a. Nehemiah further requested that letters of authority be given him so that his journey might be successfully made to Judah, and to give him permission to obtain the timber for the construction projects he planned at Jerusalem. The work he envisioned included the walls and the gate, plus the palace (fortress) situated next to the temple, and a house in which Nehemiah would live (as governor).
 - b. The king granted his requests, which Nehemiah attributes to "the good hand of my God." "The piety of Nehemiah appears in every circumstance. The conception of this patriotic design, the favourable disposition of the king, and the success of the undertaking, are all ascribed to God" (JFB, p.607).

B. Nehemiah 2:9-16: His Journey and a Secret Survey of the Walls.

1. Verse 9: "Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me."
 - a. Passing over the plans and preparations for the journey, and the journey itself, Nehemiah places himself in Judah. The king had sent soldiers and horsemen with him, insuring his safe and expeditious passage. The journey was upwards of about 1500 miles from Susa.
 - b. He presented the letters to the proper authorities. There could be no doubt as to Nehemiah's authority, hence there should have been no opposition.
 2. Verses 10-11: "When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. So I
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came to Jerusalem, and was there three days."

- a. Sanballat and Tobiah were grieved when they heard that Nehemiah had arrived, seeking the welfare of Israel. Obviously, this devilish duo had sought the downfall and destruction of the Jews.
 - 1) Sanballat, being called a Horonite, may have been from the Moabite city of Horonaim. Tobiah was an Ammonite. Moab and Ammon, descendants of Lot by his two wicked daughters, were perennial adversaries of Israel.
 - 2) Tobiah is referred to as a servant, but possibly this was his former position, and that he had been elevated to an official position in the Persian Empire. Apparently, these two men were both governors (officials) in the province of Judah.
 - b. Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for three days prior to getting the construction projects started. This time could have been spent resting, getting settled, and getting acquainted with the area and the people.
3. Verses 12-13: "And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire."
- a. Taking only a few men with him, Nehemiah went out at night, riding upon a beast, to survey the walls. He kept his own counsel, saying nothing to anyone about the plan he had in mind.
 - b. He passed by the gate of the valley, to the dragon well, and on to the dung port. The *dragon well* is thought by some to be a fountain which had a spout in the shape of a dragon's mouth; others have conjectured that it is so-named because the stream it emitted followed a serpentine course. The ASV translates it as *jackal's well*.
 - c. Nehemiah found the walls to be broken down and the gates to have been consumed by fire, just as they had been left by the Babylonian army in 586 B.C.
4. Verses 14-15: "Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned."
- a. Continuing his examination of the walls, Nehemiah went on to the gate of the fountain, and on to the king's pool. The king's pool may have been Solomon's. Possibly, the rubble from the fallen wall was such that the beast could not make its way through it.
 - b. He made his way by the brook (Kidron), viewed the wall, and returned to the city by means of the gate of the valley.
5. Verse 16: "And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work."
- a. None of the rulers, priests, or people knew where he had gone. There would be a proper time to reveal to them the work he anticipated doing.
 - b. For the time being, it was wise that he kept his plans from the knowledge of the enemies, lest they find some way to interfere.

C. Nehemiah 2:17-20: His Purpose Made Known and the Enemy Excited.

1. Verse 17: "Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach."
 - a. When did Nehemiah speak this to the people? Possibly the next day. He would have presented his commission from the king to do the work, thus showing that this was not some arbitrary decision he had made on his own.
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- b. Pointing out the danger the inhabitants of Jerusalem faced in the absence of the protective wall and gates, he called further attention to the desolate condition of the city itself, and laid before them the challenge to rebuild the wall.
 - c. One of the favorite ploys of an enemy is to heap ridicule upon his victim. The Samaritans had doubtless thrown many barbed, ridiculing remarks toward Israel. The rebuilding of the city's walls would remove one source of scorn.
 2. Verse 18: "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."
 - a. At this point he produced the documents which gave them authority to prosecute the construction. He described how God's hand had been with him, and repeated the words the king had spoken to him regarding the work.
 - b. They could see the need for the work, and knowing now that they had the authority and means by which to do it, they united in their resolve to "rise up and build." They strengthened their hands for the task.
 3. Verse 19: "But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?"
 - a. Joined by Geshem the Arabian, Sanballat and Tobiah laughed them to scorn when they learned the of the proposed work. Ridicule is a poor argument, but is often effective in discouraging a weak heart.
 - b. The scorn these enemies used was to charge them with rebelling against the king. "What you are proposing to do is nothing short of rebellion! What do you think will happen to you when the king finds out?" Of course, not only did the king know about it, but he had fully authorized the entire operation.
 4. Verse 20: "Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem."
 - a. Nehemiah gave the proper response: God will cause our work to prosper; we are his servants; we are serving him and he will bless our efforts.
 - b. He reminded these Samaritans that they had no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem; there was nothing about the Mosaic System that pertained to them. Thus did Nehemiah put them in their place.
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Nehemiah 3

A. This Chapter is a Record of Faithful Workers.

1. The Bible is God's inspired word, and because it is, everything recorded in it fills a need. We tend to think of the biblical genealogical tables as boring and insignificant. We must remember that the Bible was studied and used by countless individuals through many generations preceding our time. Those lists of names may seem to offer no instruction or information of value to modern Americans, however there may be far more importance to them that we recognize.
 - a. To the ancient Jews, those lists gave valuable information regarding their forebears, helping to establish their lineage. The Jewish nation was kept separate from the Gentile people, in part for the purpose of enabling men to trace the lineage of Christ, proving that he truly entered the world as a descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Tribal lineage was maintained among these Israelites in order to show that Christ was of the tribe of Judah.
 - 1) Genesis 49:10: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."
 - 2) Hebrews 7:14: "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood."
 - b. Embedded in the lengthy genealogical tables are to be found certain *gems of truth*. There is a brief reference to Jabez in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, in the midst of many obscure names of ancient people. This succinct statement about this man is both interesting and instructive, and shows that although we know nothing else of him, he was an outstanding man of his generation.
 - c. The genealogies contain sufficient information to confirm the inspiration and reliability of the Bible. One man in Tennessee set out in 1971 to disprove the Bible by finding discrepancies in its genealogical records. Instead of finding data which would discredit the Scriptures, this agnostic discovered the accuracy and harmony of its records, and obeyed the gospel!
 - d. This present chapter is a record of faithful servants of God. God saw fit to identify them by name, making them part of his permanent written chronicle. Mary's good work of anointing the Lord's feet was likewise included (Mark 14:6-9; John 12:1-8). God does not forget our labors of love (Heb. 6:10). The world took little note of these men and women, but God saw their great worth (1 Sam. 16:7).
 - 1) Mark 14:6-9: "And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."
 - 2) John 12:1-8: "Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always."
 - 3) Hebrews 6:10: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

- 4) 1 Samuel 16:7: "But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."
 2. This chapter stands as an illustration of Romans 15:4 (cf. 1 Cor. 10:11; 1:10-13). These men did not know that they were to be made part of God's Book! He used them as examples for all others who would live later to imitate.
 - a. Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."
 - b. 1 Corinthians 10:11: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."
 - c. 1 Corinthians 1:10-13: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"
 3. God is aware of the activities of every individual who serves him faithfully (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12,15; Heb. 11). It may appear to us that no one notices or appreciates our labors, but God knows and approves and will reward.
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."
 - b. Revelation 20:12: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works....And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."
 4. God also keeps a record of those who do not serve him.
 - a. He is impartial in his record-keeping. He recorded in the Bible both the good and the evil acts of Moses, David, Abraham, Isaac, and others. He did the same with the congregations of Asia (Rev. 2-3).
 - b. Nehemiah 3:5: "And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord." Roy Hearn described these shirkers as having "frozen respectability, stiffened with dignity." He further observed that one could just as well expect figs to be produced by thistles as to expect enthusiasm and cooperation from such people. There are those in the Lord's church today who deem themselves too good to work in the Lord's vineyard.
 - c. Ten of the twelve spies (Num. 13-14) were disloyal, giving an evil report of their investigation of Canaan. The names of the ten and the names of the two faithful spies are listed.
 - d. The citizens of Meroz (Judges 5:23) received the divine curse because they did not assist the rest of Israel in fighting the enemy.
 - 1) Judges 5:23: "Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.
 - 2) Matthew 12:30: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."
 - e. John Mark wavered on the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas, turning back from the work (Acts 13:13; 15:36-38). He later regained the approval and respect of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11).
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- 1) Acts 13:13: "Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem."
- 2) Acts 15:36-38: "And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work."
- 3) 2 Timothy 4:11: "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry."
- f. "When OUR third chapter is written, it will contain names of certain people: those who were ready unto every good work, and those who didn't put their neck to the yoke. We need to learn Christ has a yoke: Matthew 11:29" (Roy Hearn, "A Record of Faithful Workers, Nehemiah 3").
5. This chapter also shows the value of an organized and unified work.
 - a. There was a definite need: "And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire" (Neh. 1:3).
 - b. The workers were volunteers; there was not a conscript among them.
 - 1) Nehemiah 2:17-18: "Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."
 - 2) Nehemiah 4:6: "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work."
 - c. Their work was organized and united: each accepted the responsibility for a part of the wall.
 - d. The motive by which they labored was proper: to honor God. Only the highest motivation could have kept them at the work in the face of the ridicule and danger they encountered: "We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1).
 - e. They were successful in their work. The word "repaired" is used 34 times in the chapter: "So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days" (Neh. 6:15).
 - f. The priests worked on the wall: "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel" (3:1).
 - g. Women took part in the work: "And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters" (3:12).

B. Nehemiah 3:1-12: Repairing the Wall from the Sheep Gate to the Valley Gate.

1. Verses 1-2: "Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel. And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri."
 - a. The work was so-divided as to spread it among the many workers. The high priest and his brethren the priests built the sheep gate, and erected the doors; their work continued along the wall to the tower of Meah and the tower of Hananeel.
 - b. "It seems only fitting that the work began with the Sheep Gate, as this was the gate into the city through which the sacrificial lambs were brought. This is the only gate which was said to be

sanctified by the priests. Thus, we are not surprised to see Eliashib the high priest taking charge of this gate and the wall up to the first two towers" (Robin Haley, ADL, p.169).

- c. Next to them, the men of Jericho labored; and next to those men, Zaccur worked.
 2. Verses 3-5: "But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord."
 - a. The sons of Hassenaah built the fish gate, setting up the beams, the doors, the locks, and the bars. Next to these, others repaired the wall. This gate was so-named perhaps because those who sold fish in Jerusalem used it (Neh. 13:16). Fish were caught in the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and the Jordan River.
 - b. The next segment of the wall was repaired by the Tekoites, however their nobles refused to bear their part of the work. The idea about putting not their necks to the work is a reference to being yoked. Compare: "But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein" (Jer. 27:11).
 - c. The work is identified as God's; these men refused to do God's work! If the President of our country were a member of the Lord's church, and performed his Christian duties, he would be working along side of the rest of us; there are no privileged characters in the Lord's kingdom!
 3. Verses 6-7: "Moreover the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river."
 - a. The Old Gate is also known as the Corner Gate, and was located at the northwest turn of the wall. JFB states the parts of the wall on which the various crews worked were those sections nearest to their city or the part with which they were most concerned (p.609).
 - b. The "throne of the governor" was the place where the ruler executed the affairs of his office. Nehemiah describes the ruler as "the governor on this side the river," meaning the Persian authority who represented the Persian King in the province. Later, the Jews were permitted to select their own governor (Clarke, p.767).
 4. Verses 8-12: "Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah. Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahathmoab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters."
 - a. This work proceeded to the broad wall, "or double wall, extending from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, 400 cubits in length; formerly broken down by Joash, king of Israel, but afterwards rebuilt by Uzziah, who made it so strong, that the Chaldeans, finding it difficult to demolish it, had left it standing" (JFB, p.609). The Ephraim Gate is not mentioned by Nehemiah, the only gate he did not name. The tower of furnaces was situated at the southwest corner, near the Valley of Hinnom and the Valley Gate.
 - b. Included in this crew, was a certain goldsmith and an apothecary (one who dealt in drugs, spices, etc.). These men did not feel themselves to be too good to participate.
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- c. Shallum, the ruler of half of Jerusalem, participated in the work, with his daughters also involved. Some commentators think that these ladies were some of the female citizens, not necessarily his own daughters. But we take the text at face value.
- d. "The ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. Compare verse 11. The city itself does not seem to be intended, but rather the territory outside which was considered to belong to the city. This was divided into two portions, under two 'princes' or 'rulers,' Rephaiah and Shallum. Malchijah and Hashub, who are here said to have repaired, not the other piece, but 'a second piece' of the wall, have not been previously mentioned in our present text; whence it has been concluded with reason (Bertheau) that the text is defective, some whole verses having fallen out (comp. ver. 20). The tower of the furnaces is mentioned again in Neh 12:38. Its exact position cannot be fixed" [Pulpit Commentary].

C. Nehemiah 3:13-19: From the Valley Gate to the Armory.

1. Verse 13: "The valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, he locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung gate."
 - a. This section of the wall extended eastward from the southwest corner to the southeast corner, a distance of about 1000 cubits. Zanoah was a city in the territory of Judah (Josh. 15:34).
 - b. "The valley gate. A gate in the western wall....Zanoah was situated to the west of Jerusalem at the distance of some nine or ten miles. It is mentioned in Josh 15:34 as a city of Judah, but was not a place of much importance. We can scarcely suppose that the inhabitants had as much as a thousand cubits of the wall assigned to them, since that is more than a quarter of a mile, and the entire circuit was under four miles. Bertheau suggests that Nehemiah merely means to note that the distance between the two gates, the Valley and the Dung gate, was a thousand cubits, and that he says nothing of the repairs because no repairs were needed" [Pulpit Commentary].
2. Verse 14: "But the dung gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Bethhaccerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof."
 - a. From the time of Josiah, the Valley of Hinnom had been used as the garbage dump of the city, where trash, dead bodies of animals, and other refuse, were thrown. "And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech" (2 Kings 23:10). The Dung Gate apparently gave easy access from the city to the city dump. "This gate is still recognizable and this piece of wall enclosed the pool of Siloam, southeast of the city. From this point we now ascend the eastern side of the city" (Haley, p.171).
 - b. Bethhaccerem was a village of Benjamin (Jer. 6:1).
3. Verse 15: "But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David."
 - a. The Gate of the Fountain was repaired by Shallun; he also rebuilt the section of the wall that ran by the Pool of Siloah (undoubtedly, the Siloam of John 9).
 - b. This part of the wall was also near the King's Garden and the stairs that leads into the City of David. The City of David was that ancient part of Jerusalem which David had taken from the Jebusites, and which served as his capital; this is the "lower city." "In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same *is* the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, *that are* hated of David's soul, *he shall be chief and captain.* Wherefore

they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. So David dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built round about from Millo and inward" (2 Sam. 5:5-9).

- c. "Jerusalem being built on very uneven ground, and some hills being taken within the walls, there was a necessity that there should be in different places steps by which they could ascend and descend..." (Clarke, p.767).
 - d. Commenting on 2 Samuel 5:7, Keil says: "However, David took the citadel Zion, *i.e.* 'the city of David.' This explanatory remark anticipates the course of events, as David did not give this name to the conquered citadel, until he had chosen it as his residence and capital....This was the name of the southern and loftiest mountain of Jerusalem. Upon this stood the fortress or citadel of the town, which had hitherto remained in the possession of the Jebusites; whereas the northern portion of the city of Jerusalem, which was upon lower ground, had been conquered by the Judaeans and Benjaminites very shortly after the death of Joshua (see at Judg. 1:8)" (p.315).
4. Verses 16-19: "After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Bethzur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty. After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part. After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah. And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury at the turning of the wall."
- a. "This pool is probably the cistern built by Hezekiah when he built his 1700-foot conduit from Gihon Springs, through solid rock, into the city. The house of the mighty men was a garrison built by David to house his guard" (Haley, p.171). See 2 Chronicles. 32. The sepulchres that pertain to David were also located at this point.
 - b. These men rebuilt the wall to the armory (arsenal), which was located at a turn in the wall. A tower was likely situated at this site, containing the arsenal and providing protection to the eastern side of the city.

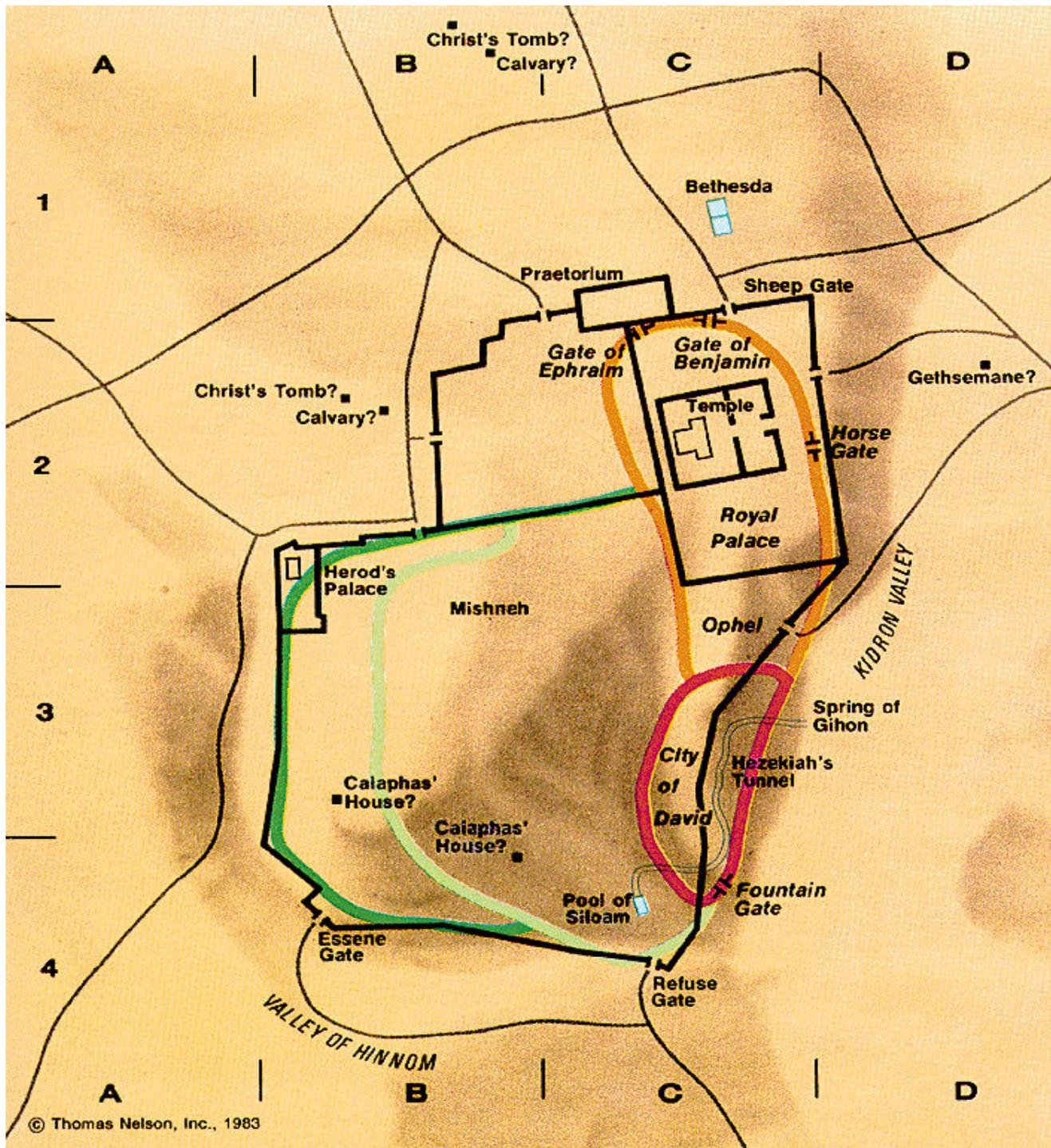
D. Nehemiah 3:20-32: From the Armory to the Sheep Gate.

1. Verses 20-23: "After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah the son of Koz another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain. After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah by his house."
 - a. This next section extended from the turning of the wall (at the armory) to the door of Eliashib's house. The High Priest had his residence adjacent to the wall, or perhaps it was built into the wall. Notice that Baruch "earnestly repaired" this part of the wall. In some fashion, he distinguished himself by the work he did. Perhaps his work was more carefully done.
 - b. Meremoth continued the work from that point to the end of the high priest's house. From the Gate of the Fountain on, "the points of bearing become a bit confusing, especially as to who worked where. It seems that there were groups of Levites and two groups of priests who were working on different sections of the walls with a group of Nethinim in between working on the area of Ophel" (Haley, p.171).
2. Verses 24-28: "After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner. Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning of the wall, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiiah the son of Parosh. Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out. After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. From above the horse gate

repaired the priests, every one over against his house."

- a. Binnui continued the construction from the House of Azariah to the next corner. The house of Azariah apparently is to be identified with the house where the high priest lived.
 - b. Palal worked on the part of the wall which included the corner and the tower, which rose near the king's house, and which was adjacent to the court of the prison.
 - c. The Nethinims were responsible for that part of the wall which included the Water Gate and the related tower. After them, the Tekoites worked from the Great Tower, unto the wall of Ophel. The work (by priests) continued from the Horse Gate, "every one over against his house." The "Great Tower" and the "tower that standeth out" were likely the same edifice.
3. Verses 29-32: "After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate. After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber. After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner. And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants."
- a. Others furthered the work to the next corner, and on to the Sheep Gate. The Gate called "Miphkad" is named after what took place there: "'The place of appointment.' This was a place where the people would assemble for great announcements" (Haley, *ibid.*).
 - b. The goldsmiths and merchants were responsible for rebuilding the final section, which ended at the Sheep Gate.
 - c. The Pulpit Commentary offers this information of the passage:
 - 1) "Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah is very possibly the descendant of David mentioned in 1 Chron 3:22. He must have been an old man, as his son, Hattush, had returned to Jerusalem with Ezra (Ezra 8:2,3); but still he may have taken part in the work. That he was keeper of the east gate does not militate against this hypothesis, for that post was an honourable one, and it is not to be supposed that all the descendants of David were in flourishing circumstances. By 'the east gate' we are perhaps to understand 'the water gate towards the east' of ver. 26.
 - 2) "After him. The traditional text gives 'after me'; and it has been supposed that Nehemiah assigned himself a certain portion of the wall and repaired it, but suppressed his own name through modesty. But, as general superintendent of the whole (Neh 4:13-23), he could scarcely take any special work; and the argument that might have been founded upon a single occurrence of the expression 'after me' is deprived of all force by its double occurrence, here and in ver. 31. Another piece. A Hanun has been mentioned (ver. 13) among the leaders of the working parties, and also a Hananiah (ver. 8); but they were not coupled together; and it may well be questioned whether either is identical with his namesake of this verse....
 - 3) "Malchiah the goldsmith's son. Or 'the son of Hazzorephi.' But the mention of goldsmiths (*zorephim*) in ver. 32 lends support to the rendering of the A. V., which is accepted by most critics. Unto the place of the Nethinims. Rather, 'the house.' The exact position cannot be fixed; but the gate Miphkad must have been situated in the east wall, a little to the south of the sheep gate. The going up of the corner may have been an 'ascent,' like Solomon's (2 Chron 9:4), which was probably a flight of steps....
 - 4) "Unto the sheep gate....The circuit is completed, and the point reached from which the commencement was made. The goldsmiths and the merchants were required to repair the piece of wall immediately to the south of the sheep gate, for which no individual had volunteered. Probably they had houses in the neighbourhood. They consented; and thus the entire wall was taken in hand, and the great work, which Nehemiah had conceived in his heart while still in Susa,

was inaugurated.”



Nehemiah 4

A. Nehemiah 4:1-6: The Enemies Mock and Nehemiah Prays.

1. Verses 1-2: "But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"
 - a. What we know of Sanballat is evil. He was exceedingly angry against the Jews, opposing them with a vengeance. What a sad commentary on a man's life, that his chief claim to fame in historical records is his hatred for God's people and purpose. The animosity that existed on the part of Sanballat and the Samaritans continued down through the centuries: "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4:9). McGarvey found a small group of Samaritans still carrying on their ancient traditions: "The Samaritans, only 130 of whom are left from all those who once inhabited Samaria, have a synagogue in the southwest part of the city, in which are deposited several ancient Samaritan manuscripts, among them the celebrated Samaritan Pentateuch, supposed to be one of the oldest manuscripts in existence. It is difficult to obtain a sight of the latter, as the priests are in the habit of deceiving visitors by showing them one of later date." *Lands of the Bible*, p.298).
 - b. He mocked the Jews, demeaning their efforts. Speaking to his brethren and the Samaritan army, he made the points recorded in verse two. Mockery (ridicule) is one of the most frequently used means of opposition. If a false teacher cannot meet the truth, he often will resort to ridiculing us and the truth we uphold.
 - c. Sanballat rhetorically asked what these feeble Jews intended to do. Did they think they could rebuild the walls in a day? With hundreds or perhaps thousands of workers involved in the project, it may have appeared that they were in a big hurry to complete the venture. He scorned their efforts, asking whether they would fortify themselves from their enemies? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of burned rubble? His sarcasm is intended to ridicule and slander the diligent effort of the Jews.
 2. Verse 3: "Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."
 - a. Not to be outdone, Tobiah now offers his own brand of mockery: "If they succeed in erecting the wall, it will be so flimsy that if a fox climbs it, the wall will come crashing down."
 - b. Scornful words and facial expressions are easily sent forth; they can be terribly hurtful to the victim, and can deter the greatest of works. How many sincere Christians have had their efforts discouraged or stymied by evil words?
 3. Verses 4-5: "Hear, O 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: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders."
 - a. "The imprecations invoked here may seem harsh, cruel, and vindictive. But it must be remembered that Nehemiah and his friends regarded those Samaritan leaders as enemies to the cause of God and His people, and therefore as deserving to be visited with heavy judgments. The prayer, therefore, is to be considered as emanating from hearts in which neither hatred, revenge, nor any inferior passion, but a pious and patriotic zeal for the glory of God and the success of His cause, held the ascendant sway" (JFB, p.611).
 - b. Nehemiah's expressions call for God's enemies to be the victims of their own wickedness. A man
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cannot mock God with impunity; sooner or later, the offender must meet the penalty for his crimes. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

- c. A faithful Christian will not desire the destruction of anyone, but he does want God's will to be done. In the Judgment, even if we should see a loved from our earthly life condemned for sinful conduct, we will be perfectly in agreement with God's wishes; we will be able to comprehend the purity of God, and that nothing impure (not covered by the blood of Christ) should enter into heaven.
 - 1) Revelation 1:5: "And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood."
 - 2) Revelation 7:14: "And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."
 - 3) Revelation 21:27: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."
 - d. The psalmist uttered similar imprecatory statements: "O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps. The dead bodies of thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth. Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and there was none to bury them. We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name. For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place" (Ps. 79:1-7).
4. Verse 6: "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work."
- a. The work had made good progress, with a relatively large army of people laboring daily. The wall was joined together all the way around the city, and had reached half of its planned height.
 - b. The entire project was completed in 52 days (6:15), because "the people had a mind to work." A willing worker can accomplish far more than one who must be driven.
 - c. "The attitude of the people, a mind to work, was truly marvelous as they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. It was this disposition which caused Noah to build the ark, Moses to build the tabernacle, Solomon to build the temple, and the Lord to build the church. In each of these examples great sacrifices were required, yet the work was done. The Bible has no record of anything ever accomplished by a non-sacrificing lazy man!" (J.K. Gossett, ADL, p.179).

B. Nehemiah 4:7-15: A Plot of the Enemy is Defeated.

1. Verses 7-8: "But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it."
 - a. Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites (citizens of Ashdod) were very angry when they learned that the breaches in Jerusalem's wall had been repaired, and that the walls were well on their way to being reconstructed.
 - 1) God's people have always been opposed because the enemy opposes God's way. Noah was opposed; the prophets were hated and resisted; Christ and the apostles met with many hate-filled

- enemies; the church was harshly persecuted.
- 2) Even in our enlightened age, there are many people in our own country who rejoice when any feature of God's way faces difficulty. Phil Donohue and his biased audience rejoiced when an apostate member won a lawsuit against the Lord's church.
 - b. Nehemiah's enemies conspired to wage war against the Jews. The pattern they followed is instructive and typical. First, they offered their ridicule; next, they sought to oppose them physically. When these efforts failed, they later tried compromise.
 - c. Evil men are often able to hinder God's cause today, following the same schemes Nehemiah's enemies tried. All efforts to disrupt or destroy God's way will ultimately meet with utter failure, but in the meantime, if our faith wanes, God's work will suffer. We must be alerted to the means our enemies use, realizing that eventually, even in our time and place, our faithfulness will one day meet with physical opposition.
2. Verse 9: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."
 - a. Nehemiah understood the means to a successful defense: prayer and watchfulness. Either of these works without the other would have proved fruitless. It was right for them to pray for God's help, but they must also do what they could do to protect themselves.
 - b. God has never done for man, what man could do for himself. This is a simple truth, ignorance of which has caused many to give up their faith. We are told to ask God for our daily sustenance, but we must do our part to produce or provide for it. God's providence takes care of the parts of the process which are beyond our knowledge and power.
 - c. A Christian can protect himself from the evils and dangers of the world—up to a point; God is able to so direct our paths as to lead us past certain dangers and problems. Hence we pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
 - d. With watchfulness on their part, and with God's providential help, Israel's security was insured.
 3. Verses 10-12: "And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you."
 - a. Despite their prayers and watchfulness, ordinary problems continued to develop. Those who were removing the rubble and bringing up the building materials grew tired. The only way this problem could be solved was by divine power or human effort; the workers were doing the best they could, but their strength was soon jaded. But it would have been a misuse of miraculous power to remove the rubbish and deliver the material supernaturally. These works were to be done by the people.
 - 1) This problem had to be met by the workers. Greater effort was necessary; a continuing belief in the rightness of the project must be maintained. The Lord never promised that the way would be easy. It was the sinfulness of their ancestors which had caused their removal from the land of promise, and only by God's mercy were they able to return. The way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. 13:15); the consequences of sin afflict other people and later generations: "Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 20:5).
 - 2) They could complain about the hardness of their way, but it was sin (not God) which caused the problem. Our many difficulties in life often discourage us, causing frustration and dismay; we must not blame God or our fellow man, but realize that sin is in the world, causing inevitable
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trouble, even for the most godly.

- b. The adversaries planned a sneak attack, which would enable them to fall upon the Israelites when least expected. "We will be on them and slay them, and put an end to their work, before they know what has happened!" The problems Nehemiah faced were serious and unrelenting, and came from many directions. Sanballat's scheme appeared foolproof; the workers were so busy, and were so unprepared for any sudden attack, that they would easily be overwhelmed.
 - c. Verse twelve is difficult, but Clarke's interpretation appears eminently correct: "The Jews which dwelt among the Samaritans, &c., came often to Nehemiah from all quarters, where they sojourned, and told him the designs of his enemies against him: therefore, he set people with their swords, spears, and bows, to defend the walls" (p.770).
 - d. "When the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times (i.e., repeatedly). From all places whence ye shall return unto us, they will be upon you. The plot being discovered, Nehemiah adopted the most energetic measures for ensuring the common safety as well as the uninterrupted building of the walls. Hitherto the governor, for the sake of despatch, had set all his attendants and guards on the work—now half of them were withdrawn to be constantly in arms. The workmen laboured with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other; and as, in so large a circuit, they were far removed from each other, Nehemiah, who was night and day on the spot, and, by his pious exhortations and example, animated the minds of his people, kept a trumpeter by his side, so that on any intelligence of a surprise being brought to him, an alarm might be immediately sounded, and assistance rendered to the most distant detachment of their brethren. By these vigilant precautions the counsels of the enemy were defeated, and the work was carried on apace" [Jamieson, Biblesoft].
4. Verses 13-15: "Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work."
- a. Nehemiah knew the solution to the problem: arm the workers and set them on guard. The workers were now soldiers, and were stationed at the ground level behind the walls, and others were positioned on the walls; each was properly armed.
 - b. He prepared the leaders and the people by showing them the real situation. He reminded them that there was nothing to fear; they were to remember the Lord, and that he was on their side; the Lord was well-able to help them in the struggle. With God's help, and with each citizen doing his part in the fight, victory was sure. He also reminded them that the safety and welfare of their brethren, their sons and daughters, their wives, and their houses, depended on their willingness to fight.
 - c. God's providence had provided Nehemiah with advance information of the scheme for the sneak attack. With that intelligence, he developed the plan for defending the city. When the enemy learned that their plot had been uncovered, they had to give up their plan. Nehemiah then sent the workers back to the wall.

C. Nehemiah 4:16-23: Precaution Against an Attack.

1. Verse 16: "And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah."
 - a. The threat of attack had been lessened; it had not been ended. An armed guard was needed in case the enemy should try an assault. Liberty and security from the enemy depend on unceasing vigilance.
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- b. Nehemiah armed half of the workers to guard the other half who continued their labors. Some were armed with bows, others with spears; they also had shields and habergeons. Clarke identifies a habergeon as a coat of mail designed to protect the chest and neck (p.770).
- c.
2. Verses 17-18: "They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me."
 - a. Even the workers were armed; with one hand they did the work, and in the other hand, held a weapon. The description may be more graphic than literal. It would be difficult to lift a heavy stone and place it in the wall, using only one hand.
 - b. The point may very well be that they worked, but were armed in case of an attack. We speak figuratively of keeping one eye on a certain activity and the other on something else; such would literally be impossible.
 - c. Clarke quotes a poem which illustrates the point:

"If streaming blood my fatal letter stain,
Imagine, ere you read, the writer slain.
One hand the sword, and one the pen employs,
And in my lap the ready paper lies."

- d. Nehemiah, in charge of the overall operation, had the man who sounded the trumpet at his side. They had made the best arrangements to continue the construction with as much security as was possible.
 3. Verses 19-20: "And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us."
 - a. Since the work was spread out, and the workers were relatively few for the size of the job, they could not defend every foot of the wall. The plan was: If the enemy attacked, the trumpet would be sounded at the point of attack; the workers were to rush to the defense of that place.
 - b. God would be on their side, doing whatever was necessary to effect their safety.
 4. Verses 21-23: "So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing."
 - a. The work continued under those circumstances, with half of the men serving as guards, while the other half did the work. We may presume that the men changed places on some regular schedule.
 - b. They were on the job from early morning until the stars appeared in the evening. Dedicated workers are neither time servers nor clock watchers. A place of business had this sign posted above their time clock: "This clock will never be stolen; the workers watch it all the time."
 - c. Nehemiah 7:4 shows that the city was large and the dwelling places had not yet been built. Nehemiah called on him who lived elsewhere to remain in the city, along with his servant, during the night. There was a need to mount a guard during the night as well as day. The people served double shifts: working during the day, and sharing time on guard duty at night.
 - d. The verse [23] is said to be difficult to translate; some of the scholars think the meaning is that the workers wore their clothes except at such times that they were taken off to be washed. The reading
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of the KJV indicates that the workers kept their clothes on, except on those occasion when they took a bath. The point of the verse is to show the diligence with which the work was done. The project was a tremendous undertaking, requiring great sacrifice on the part of all for it to have been completed in only 52 days: “So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days” (Neh. 6:15).

Nehemiah 5

A. Nehemiah 5:1-5: Complaints of Suffering and Usury.

1. Verses 1-2: "And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live."
 - a. The ASV gives this rendering of verse 2: "For there were that said, We, our sons and our daughters, are many: let us get grain, that we may eat and live."
 - b. When good people are trying to live right, the devil seeks to disrupt them in every way. Soon after the beginning of the Lord's church, there were complaints that the Grecian widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6). It is unlikely that the brethren deliberately ignored those needy ladies; it is more likely that it was an oversight or the work was just too great for those tending to it.
 - c. A similar situation arose here, although the problem was deliberate. Those people with large families were having a difficult time getting by. A famine was in progress (verse 3); the king still demanded his regular tribute (verse 4); in addition to those problems, they were working full-time in rebuilding the walls. They were compelled to borrow from their wealthy brethren in order to subsist (verse 3).
 - d. It seems that when times get difficult, everything seems to go wrong, even the weather. Often, during a cruel war, sometimes the weather seems to worsen. Such times and circumstances will surely try men's souls.
 2. Verse 3: "Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth."
 - a. The famine had intensified the suffering and want. The heavy burden of rebuilding the walls taxed their time and strength, leaving them with little ability to tend to their ordinary needs. To survive, many had to mortgage their lands, vineyards, and houses, so that they could buy food.
 - b. "Others, who were indeed possessed of fields, vineyards, and houses, had been obliged to mortgage them, and could now reap nothing from them. *`aarab* (OT:6148), to give as a pledge, to mortgage. The use of the participle denotes the continuance of the transaction, and is not to be rendered, We must mortgage our fields to procure corn; but, We have been obliged to mortgage them, and we desire to receive corn for our hunger, because of the dearth. For (1) the context shows that the act of mortgaging had already taken place, and was still continuing in force (we have been obliged to pledge them, and they are still pledged); and (2) *niq^achaah* (OT:3947) must not be taken here in a different sense from v. 2, but means, We desire that corn may be furnished us, because of the dearth; not, that we may not be obliged to mortgage our lands, but because they are already mortgaged. *baaraa`aab* (OT:7458), too, does not necessarily presuppose a scarcity in consequence of a failure of crops or other circumstances, but only declares that they who had been obliged to pledge their fields were suffering from hunger" [Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament: New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.].
 3. Verse 4: "There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards."
 - a. Some of them had borrowed money in order to pay the king's tribute, using their lands and vineyards as collateral. There is an old adage which affirms that death and taxes are always dependable. The taxman is usually without patience and mercy.
 - b. "The king's tribute. Judaea, like other Persian provinces, had to pay a tribute, partly in money and partly in kind, yearly to the Persian monarch (see the comment on Ezra 4:13); but there is no reason
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to believe that this burthen was generally felt as oppressive, nor that it was heavier in Judaea than elsewhere. But by the very poor even a small amount of direct taxation is felt as a grievance; and the necessity of meeting the demands of the tax-gatherer was in the ancient world often the turning-point, which compelled the contracting of a debt (Liv., 2:23); and so it seems to have been with these complainants" [Pulpit Commentary, Biblesoft].

4. Verse 5: "Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards."
 - a. Those who were doing the oppressing were wealthy Jews, who seemingly took advantage of the misery of their poverty-stricken brethren. It is not likely the Samaritans would lend money to the Jews.
 - b. A rich man loves his children and wife no more than a poor man loves his family. A poor man's family has to eat just as does a rich man's.
 - c. Already, some of these who had mortgaged their property had lost it; some of their daughters had already been forced into service as servants. The victims had no means of redeeming either their lands or their offspring.

B. Nehemiah 5:6-13: The Evil Corrected.

1. Verses 6-7: "And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them."
 - a. Nehemiah, recognizing the vulture syndrome when he saw it, became very angry with the wealthy Jews for this heartless practice of preying on the misfortunes of others.
 - b. He meditated on the issue for a time, and rebuked the nobles and rulers, on account of the usury they had been exacting from their less fortunate fellow-citizens. Nehemiah conducted the affair in such a way that the great assembly of the people was turned against these leading Jews.
 - c. Usury is interest. The Law forbade the Israelites to charge usury of their brethren.
 - 1) Exodus 22:25: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury."
 - 2) Leviticus 25:36-37: "Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase."
 - 3) Deuteronomy 23:19-20: "Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it."
 - d. They could charge interest on loans made to strangers (Gentiles). These wealthy Jews were in violation of God's law, and deserved the strongest rebuke on that account. But they also were guilty of failure to love their neighbors: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:18).
 - e. "The term usury originally meant any interest charged for the 'use' of money transferred as a loan from one person to another; later, its use was restricted to the meaning of excess of interest beyond what was considered a fair degree. Although the charging of interest was a well-established practice in the commercial civilization of Mesopotamia, it was considered wrong in the agricultural civilization of Palestine; hence, the Bible forbids the taking of any interest ['usury'—*neshech*] in the case of loans. The sole exception was that of the 'stranger' (*nochri*), who might be charged interest, presumably because there was some risk involved in the loan (Ex. 22:24; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:20-21)"

(Gossett, ADL, p.190; quote from *Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*).

- f. The Mosaic prohibition against charging interest does not apply under the Christian system (Col. 2:14). The Lord described himself and his servants in the parable of the talents, rebuking the one talent man for not having put the money into a bank so that at his return he could have had his money returned to him with usury (Luke 19:23; cf. Matt. 25:27). However, extortion is sinful; taking advantage of another's misfortune as a means of enriching one's self is sinful. Christians are to follow the law of love.
 - 1) Luke 19:23: "Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?"
 - 2) Matthew 25:27: "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."
 - 3) Luke 6:32-36: "For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."
 - 4) Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."
2. Verses 8-9: "And I said unto them, 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? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?"
 - a. God forbade the Israelites to own a fellow Israelite as a bondservant (Lev. 25:42-49). If one of them, because of poverty, became a bondservant to a Gentile, his kinsmen were to buy his freedom. These wealthy Jews of Nehemiah's time had violated this precept of the Law. "For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen. Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God. Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour. And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself"(Lev. 25:42-49).
 - b. Nehemiah states that he and other Jews had redeemed some of their brethren from the heathen, evidently while they were still in the land of captivity. But these men he was addressing had caused some of the Jews to become bondservants.
 - c. There was nothing these wayward Israelites could truthfully say in their defense—they were guilty; they knew they were guilty; Nehemiah and the other Jews knew they were guilty. A gain-saying excuse was out of order; repentance was needed.
 - d. Continuing his rebuke, Nehemiah shows them that they needed to walk in the fear of God on account of the reproach their misconduct would incite among their enemies. The enemy was opposing them

in every way; in view of these troubles, they needed the assistance of God, which they could have only if they were obedient. Further, when the enemy detected any faulty practice on the part of the Jews, they would use that violation as a means to bring greater reproach upon Israel.

3. Verses 10-11: "I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them."
 - a. The ASV has a clearer statement of verse 10: "And I likewise, my brethren and my servants, do lend them money and grain...." Because of this, they had the authority to demand repayment (in money and grain), but they did not do so. Nehemiah's practice was consistent with what he demanded of these wealthy Jews. He charged them to leave off this usury.
 - b. The process of their repentance required restitution. Nehemiah commanded them to restore to the unfortunate Jews their lands, vineyards, oliveyards, and houses. Also, the interest they charged was to be remitted. The interest was probably charged at the rate of 1% per month (Keil, pp.211f). The interest on the grain, the wine, and the oil exacted from the poor was to be restored; this interest was probably collected in the items, rather than in money.
4. Verses 12-13: "Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise."
 - a. The guilty parties, acknowledging their guilt, promised to restore to their debtors in accordance to Nehemiah's directions; and they would cease to charge usury in the future.
 - b. Taking no chance on their failing to fulfill the stated intention, Nehemiah required an oath of them, taken in the presence of the priests.
 - c. To emphasize and illustrate the serious nature of the problem, Nehemiah shook his lap, declaring that God would thus shake from his house every man who failed to perform his promise. This was an impressive demonstration, and one which moved the entire congregation to give their audible approval to the plan.
 - d. Nehemiah concludes the passage by stating that the people did according to their promise.

C. Nehemiah 5:14-19: Nehemiah's Own Example.

1. Verses 14-15: "Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God."
 - a. At the time those events were recorded, Nehemiah had been in the land for 12 years, from the 20th to the 32nd year of the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus. During those years, neither Nehemiah nor his brethren had partaken of the bread that pertained to the governor, which office he held. The purpose of the statement is to underscore the fact that he did not derive any financial profit from the people, who were obligated to furnish his upkeep.
 - b. The former governors had received bread and wine from the people, plus forty shekels of silver (estimated to be about \$9,000). The servants of the former governors had also exercised authority over the people. Because Nehemiah feared God, he declined to take this food and money, and those with him did likewise.
 2. Verse 16: "Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants
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were gathered thither unto the work."

- a. He continued in the work on the wall, with his servants participating in the labors. Neither he nor his servants were a burden to the people.
 - b. Although Nehemiah had the right and the means to purchase land, he did not do so. Why? He was not there to enrich himself. Evidently, his position as cupbearer paid handsomely. He had redeemed some of his enslaved brethren; he received no wages from the Jews; he could have bought land; and he fed a large number of Jews.
3. Verses 17-18: "Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people."
- a. He set a daily table for 150 Jews, plus however many others who lived out in the countryside among the heathen people. In our society, it is the common practice of the majority to eat three meals daily. The Jews may have only eaten twice, as was the case in 5th century Greece: "All in all, the Greek is a moderate eater, and contents himself with two meals daily. 'Yet there are many,' says Hippocrates, 'who, if accustomed to it, can easily bear three full meals a day'" (Will Durant, *The Life of Greece*, p.270).
 - b. Each day, one ox and six choice sheep were prepared to be served as food; they also ate fowls; and once each ten days all sorts of wine were served. This would provide enough food for perhaps several hundred meals.
 - c. Despite this great outlay, Nehemiah did not accept the benefits that were due his office; he refused to be a burden to the people, but rather tended to the needs of a great many of them. He was very much unlike those wealthy Jews who preyed on the unfortunate.
4. Verse 19: "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."
- a. His prayer to God was that the Lord might think on him. Nehemiah is not interested in the rewards that men can give; he does desire the blessings and help of God.
 - b. To be found pleasing in God's sight is the greatest honor. His prayer requests that God remember him, and provide him with such things as he had need. "He does not offer his good deeds to God in extenuation of his sins, or as a compensation for the heaven he expected. Nothing of the kind: he simply says what any good man might say, My God, as I have done good to them, so do good to me..." (Clarke, p.774).
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Nehemiah 6

A. Nehemiah 6:1-4: A Conference is Requested.

1. Verse 1: "Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates)."
 - a. By diligent, united, and continuing effort, the Jews under the leadership of Nehemiah completed the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. At this point in time, however, the doors of the gates had not been erected. All of the breaks in the wall had been rebuilt, and except for the gates, Jerusalem was now secure. Vigilant guards could easily protect these openings.
 - b. When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of the enemies learned that the work had progressed to this point, they developed another scheme by which to overcome the Jews.
2. Verse 2: "That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief."
 - a. Having tried ridicule and physical violence to defeat Nehemiah, they now concocted a plot by which to get him to compromise. If the meeting they proposed had been conducted as they sought, Nehemiah would have had to compromise with them; he had nothing to gain and everything to lose; the Samaritans had everything to gain, and nothing to lose by meeting with Nehemiah.
 - b. Their proposal was for Nehemiah to come to the plain of Ono, and have a meeting with Sanballat and Geshem. The offer was one in which they seemingly extended the right hand of fellowship. "They wished to effect their purpose rather by treachery than by open violence" (Clarke, p.774).
 - c. The plain of Ono was in Philistia, about twenty-five miles from Jerusalem. They left the exact place for the meeting up to Nehemiah, perhaps to give him a sense of security, but he knew that they intended to do him mischief. We are not told how he knew this, or whether he merely sensed it; however, in view of the certainty with which he stated the fact, this information was sure. The greatest blow they could have dealt to the Jewish cause was to kill Nehemiah, who was their preeminent leader at the time.
3. Verse 3: "And I sent messengers unto them, saying, 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?"
 - a. His reply is classic! He wisely did not mention the fact that he saw through their scheme. To have revealed this fact might have driven them to some drastic action, such as beginning an all-out war against Jerusalem. His response was one to which they could not easily reply.
 - b. His answer stated his belief in the supreme importance in the work he was engaged in, which left him without the right to abandon it while he made the trip to meet with them. He politely, but very positively, declined their offer to compromise.
 - c. Again, notice the pattern adopted by these evil men to destroy Nehemiah's great work. (1) They ridiculed the endeavor as worthless; (2) they plotted to destroy it by physical attack; (3) they tried to get Nehemiah to compromise himself by a unity meeting; and (4) in offering the plan to discuss their differences, they actually were planning to abduct or assassinate him.
 - d. Attacks against the Lord's church have followed this basic pattern, in the first century and in modern times. Speaking of modern errorists, Foy Wallace observed: "Thus did these digressive dividers who later, after much scoffing, attempted to sustain their cause in debate. They launched a mighty fight. Their greatest men labored hard to uphold the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church, battling for the music to the tune of arguments on the Greek verb 'psallo,' which by their own testimony did and did not prove it, for it was at best only a with or a without argument. So they

abandoned the idea of fighting, debating, and the like, and now, like the strategy of Sanballat, they proposition us: 'Come, let us meet together.' Now they would just 'love it out,' and cloud the issue with compromises. But Nehemiah said, 'They thought to do me mischief' and sent back the word, 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease whilst I leave, and come down to you?' The strategy of these digressive Samaritans and Sanballats today from first to last has been uniformly true to form. Strategy has ever been the weapon of digression. It was such as that which brought the wily schemes of digression leaders into the open fifty years ago when the church in Texas was ripped apart by meetings conducted under the misnomer of 'Unity Conferences.' They are up to no good thing now in the promotion of such efforts through certain self-appointed leaders in the churches of Christ" (*Bulwarks of the Faith*, pp.21f, 1946).

4. Verse 4: "Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner."
 - a. The enemy was persistent, making the same incessant offer four times, and four times Nehemiah gave them the same reply.
 - b. False teachers today are persistent and adamant in pressing their errors upon unsuspecting souls. The reason many of these sectarian groups are increasing in size and influence is due to this obdurate and overbearing approach; they simply break down their victim's defenses, and make him double the child of hell that they are. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15).

B. Nehemiah 6:5-9: A False Charge is Presented.

1. Verse 5: "Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand."
 - a. Sanballat was insistent on getting Nehemiah to join in the "unity meeting" in the plain of Ono. Making a fifth attempt, he sent his servant to Nehemiah with an open letter, this time taking a threatening tone.
 - b. If a child of God compromises one principle of truth, he comes under the control of the devil. Many of our present generation of the church have compromised with sectarianism, destroying their own souls and misleading the precious souls of those under their influence. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 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 9-11).
 2. Verses 6-7: "Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together."
 - a. Citing a report that he claimed had been circulating among the heathen, Sanballat's letter asserted the belief that the Jews were preparing to revolt against the Persian king. The basis for the accusation was the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall. Gashmu, who is cited as the source of the charge, is the same person called Geshem the Arabian in verse one.
 - b. The letter further accused Nehemiah of seeking to become the new king of Jerusalem. This accusation was as foolish as it was faulty. Nehemiah was in excellent standing with the Persian King; it was only with his blessing that Nehemiah had been able to come to Jerusalem; his purposes in the excursion were fully revealed to the king before the journey was commenced. The charge (in verse seven) that Nehemiah had appointed prophets to preach that Nehemiah was to be king was also false.
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- c. Possibly, Sanballat had heard about Zechariah's prophecies concerning the Messiah, and perverting the prediction, made it seem that Nehemiah was behind the message, with himself as the promised king.
 - d. Sanballat asserted that these charges would be revealed to the Persian King. With this threat as the motivation, he demanded that Nehemiah come and "let us take counsel together." This was attempted blackmail. It was to Sanballat's advantage that Nehemiah agree to meet; he had everything to gain and Nehemiah had everything to lose.
 - 1) If he entered the meeting safely, his position with the Jews would have been compromised; his people might lose heart in continuing the struggle if their leader saw fit to enter discussions with the enemy.
 - 2) More than likely, Sanballat planned to capture or assassinate Nehemiah.
3. Verse 8: "Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart."
- a. The time for soft words was past. Nehemiah strongly denied the charges and bluntly accused Sanballat with having manufactured them in his own heart.
 - b. An aggressive false teacher understands and respects only strength; one cannot discuss an issue with such a person except from a position of strength. A false teacher will take advantage of our simple kindness.
 - c. The tactics had now followed this course:
 - 1) Ridicule.
 - 2) Violence.
 - 3) Compromise.
 - 4) Slander.
 - 5) Threats.
 - d. Nehemiah saw through all of their schemes, and opposed each attempt.
4. Verse 9: "For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands."
- a. The design of this new attack was to intimidate the Jews, and thus weaken their hands from completing the work on the wall. The wall had been erected, but the gates had not been set in place.
 - b. Recognizing the danger of the occasion, Nehemiah again showed his faith and courage; he prayed to God for strength in meeting this new attack, and refused to melt before Sanballat's hot threats.
- C. Nehemiah 6:10-14: Treacherous Counsel Within the City.
1. Verse 10: "Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee."
 - a. Nehemiah talked with Shemaiah, who suggested that they go into the temple and close the doors, so that the enemies could not assassinate Nehemiah. This Shemaiah lived a sequestered life, indicating that he was in close communion with God. He claimed to be a prophet. "Having been secretly bribed by Sanballat, he, in his pretended capacity of prophet, told Nehemiah that his enemies were that night to make an attempt upon his life..." (JFB, p.615).
 - b. The suggestion was one that would have demonstrated cowardice on the part of Nehemiah had he agreed to the plan. Think of the effect his hiding would have had on the people; they would have correctly perceived that he acted out of cowardice. In the past, some who feared for their lives, ran to the tabernacle and took hold of the horns of the altar, thinking their lives would be spared.
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- 1) 1 Kings 1:50-51: "And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and arose, and went, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah feareth king Solomon: for, lo, he hath caught hold on the horns of the altar, saying, Let king Solomon swear unto me to day that he will not slay his servant with the sword."
 - 2) 1 Kings 2:27-34: "So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD; that he might fulfil the word of the LORD, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh. Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD, and caught hold on the horns of the altar. And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the LORD; and, behold, *he is* by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. And the LORD shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing *thereof, to wit*, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab, and upon the head of his seed for ever: but upon David, and upon his seed, and upon his house, and upon his throne, shall there be peace for ever from the LORD. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness."
 - c. To have accepted the plan could have involved Nehemiah in sin. The place in the temple in which Nehemiah was to hide could be the holy place or the most holy place, but he had no right to enter either, since he was not a priest.
 - d. The scheme was foolproof if they could only get Nehemiah to go with Shemaiah to the temple. A report of cowardice or a report of sin would have been in the offing. Since Nehemiah trusted in God, and since Shemaiah claimed to have a message to him from God, it appeared that Nehemiah was sure to be victimized and destroyed.
2. Verse 11: "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."
 - a. Nehemiah's greatness increases with each attempt to deceive him. He realized that he would evince cowardice if he entered the temple; he would not even consider the suggestion.
 - b. His refusal was definite: "I will not go in!" He was not afraid that he might hurt Shemaiah's feelings. Such a man who did what he was attempting to do deserves to have his feelings hurt. The hardest word for many of us to say sometimes is *no*. If we learned to say it with more conviction, many of our troubles would be avoided.
 3. Verses 12-13: "And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me."
 - a. Nehemiah was a very perceptive man, or else he had special information. He perceived that Shemaiah was lying; he could discern the effects of following the plan suggested. He would be seen to be a coward and a sinner; a coward for running from a threat against his person, and a sinner for entering the temple's sanctuary or for acting with cowardice.
 - b. In either case, the report would be used by the enemy to heap reproach upon Nehemiah to destroy his influence; and to ruin his influence was to wreck Israel's security.
 4. Verse 14: "My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear."
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- a. Noadiah is only mentioned here, but in the connection in which her name appears, she was a false prophetess! There were several other false prophets who endeavored to put Nehemiah in fear. He was not taken in by their sly attempts.
- b. Again, the great man calls on God to remember these enemies, and to reward them according to their works. There is scarcely a sorrier person on earth than one who pretends to be serving God, but in fact is working to destroy the cause of God.

D. Nehemiah 6:15-19: Treacherous Correspondence With Tobiah.

1. Verses 15-16: "So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God."
 - a. The great construction project was finally completed; the wall was standing and the gates set up; the city was now secure from any overt attacks by their enemies.
 - b. The construction required only 52 days of work. It was completed on the 25th day of Elul, which corresponds to our August-September. They did not have to completely rebuild the old wall, since parts of it were still standing. Some of the old stones were laying nearby, and could see service again.
 - c. The many schemes the enemy had invented had all failed. Now they were cast down in their own eyes. They were able to perceive that God had been with Nehemiah and the Jews, and that disturbed them greatly. It should have brought them to repentance.
 2. Verses 17-18: "Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah."
 - a. The completion of the wall did not mean there were no more troubles for Nehemiah. Tobiah had connections with some of the Jews in Jerusalem, and had received letters from them secretly. These traitorous Jews were passing information to Tobiah concerning Nehemiah, which perhaps could be turned against him.
 - b. These people, purporting to be Nehemiah's friends, attempted exalt Tobiah to the governor. These people are called *nobles of Judah*. Remembering Nehemiah 3:5, some nobles refused to participate in the work. In chapter 5, some of the wealthier Jews had abused some of the poor citizens; these men had been rebuked by Nehemiah. It may be that the present conspirators were from among these two groups.
 - c. Tobiah had easy access to some of the Jews on account of families ties. He was the son-in-law of Shechaniah; and his son had married the daughter of Meshullam.
 3. Verse 19: "Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear."
 - a. These citizens tried to build Tobiah up in Nehemiah's eyes, and reported Nehemiah's words (or matters, margin) to Tobiah. But obviously Nehemiah was aware of what they were doing, and forewarning permits preparation.
 - b. Using these means, the enemy was attempting to intimidate Nehemiah, but this great man would not be stampeded into any kind of rash or sinful action.
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Nehemiah 7

A. Nehemiah 7:1-4: The City Carefully Guarded.

1. Verses 1-2: "Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed. That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many."
 - a. The great project had now been completed, so certain arrangements were called for in order for the city to be properly protected and operated.
 - b. The porters, the singers and the Levites were commissioned to perform the services pertaining to the temple. Hanani (Nehemiah's brother) and Hananiah (who was in charge of the palace) were selected to be rulers over Jerusalem. One of these men is specifically described as "a faithful man, and feared God above many." Which man is meant? Nehemiah knew his brother; it was from him that he had learned of the condition of Jerusalem while yet he served as the king's cupbearer (1:1-3). Neither of these men would have been given the responsible position without possessing such qualifications as those named—being loyal and reverent to God. The application of these attributes to his brother would secure Nehemiah from any charge of nepotism, and would enhance the influence of both of these two rulers.
 - c. It is thought by some scholars that the appointment of these men as rulers of the city indicated that Nehemiah was preparing to return to Shushan, in accordance with his promise to the king (2:6).
2. Verses 3-4: "And I said unto them, 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. Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded."
 - a. In a move to secure the inhabitants of the city, Nehemiah directed the rulers of the city to keep the gates closed during the hours of darkness, opening them only after the sun was fully risen. Watchmen were to be appointed during each watch; the people guarded that portion of the wall which lay adjacent to their houses.
 - b. Some of the houses had been rebuilt, but only a relative few. The work of guarding the city had to be spread among the people, with each family sharing the work-load.

B. Nehemiah 7:5-65: The Genealogy of Zerubbabel's Caravan.

1. Verse 5: "And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein."
 - a. Nehemiah was an inspired man. God revealed to him the instructions indicated here, which called for a gathering of the people so that they could be accounted for according to their lineage.
 - b. He found a register of the genealogy of those who had previously returned from captivity; the following list gives their names.
 2. Verses 6-64: "These *are* the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city; Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number, *I say*, of the men of the people of Israel *was this*; The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two. The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred *and* eighteen. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Zattu, eight
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hundred forty and five. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight. The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two. The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven. The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven. The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four. The children of Hariph, an hundred and twelve. The children of Gibeon, ninety and five. The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, an hundred fourscore and eight. The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. The men of Bethazmaveth, forty and two. The men of Kirjathjearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three. The men of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. The men of Michmas, an hundred and twenty and two. The men of Bethel and Ai, an hundred twenty and three. The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one. The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty. The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen. The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, *and* of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four. The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred forty and eight. The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, an hundred thirty and eight. The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth, The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon, The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmi, The children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, The children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phaseah, The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephishesim, The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, The children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Tamah, The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha. The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida, The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Amon. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, *were* three hundred ninety and two. And these *were* they which went up *also* from Telmelah, Telharesha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not show their father's house, nor their seed, whether they *were* of Israel. The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two. And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took *one* of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called after their name. These sought their register *among* those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.”

3. Verse 65: "And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim."
 - a. The Urim and Thummim was a device used in earlier days as a means of obtaining divine guidance. It is not clear exactly how these devices operated.
 - b. **“Urim and Thummim** (Hebrew *Urîm wəṯhummîm*, meaning unknown), according to the Old Testament (see Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8), two objects used in divination. Perhaps precious stones and presumably different from one another in appearance, they were placed ‘in the breastpiece of judgment’ worn by the high priest of Israel. From other biblical evidence, it seems possible that one symbolized ‘yes’ and the other ‘no.’ In response to a question so formulated as to be answerable in the affirmative or the negative, one or the other answer would somehow be indicated, perhaps by the

emergence of the appropriate object from a pouch in which both were shaken. The emergence of both might have meant that the divine decision was being withheld. The 1st-century AD Jewish historian Flavius Josephus stated that divination by Urim and Thummim ended during the 2nd century BC." ("Urim and Thummim," Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia).

C. Nehemiah 7:66-69: Servants and Animals.

1. Verses 66-69: "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore. Beside their manservants and their maidservants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing men and singing women. Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five: Their camels, four hundred thirty and five: six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses."
 - a. "The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore. It makes against the view of Bishop Patrick and others, who regard Ezra's list as made at Babylon, some time before the final departure, and Nehemiah's as made at Jerusalem, after the arrival of the exiles, that the sum total is in each case the same (see Ezra 2:64)" [Pulpit Commentary].
 - b. "Two hundred and forty-five singing men and singing women. Ezra says 200; but this must be a round number. 1 Esdras confirms Nehemiah (Neh 5:42). The numbers of the animals are identical in Ezra and Nehemiah. The apocryphal Esdras has an enormous and most improbable augmentation of the number of the horses (7036 for 736)" [ibid.].

D. Nehemiah 7:70-73: Gifts into the Treasury.

1. Verses 70-71: "And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work. The Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basins, five hundred and thirty priests' garments. And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pound of silver. And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pound of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments."
 - a. *The Tirshatha*, being a Persian title of authority and dignity, may be a reference to Nehemiah.
 - b. "This is additional to the information contained in Ezra, who does not separate Zerubbabel's offering from that of the other heads of families (Neh 2:69). The account of the oblations is altogether more exact in Nehemiah than in the earlier historian" [ibid.].
2. Verse 73: "So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities."
 - a. "The document found by Nehemiah (ver. 5) probably ended with these words (comp. Ezra 2:70); and ch. 7. should here terminate, as it does in the Septuagint. Having completed the account of what happened in the sixth month, Elul (ch. 6:15), and transcribed the register which he had the good fortune to discover at that date, Nehemiah proceeds to relate events belonging to the seventh month" [ibid.].
 - b. "Nehemiah found the register, i.e., the genealogical registry, of those who came up at first (from Babylon). *baari'shownaah* (OT:7223), at the beginning, i.e., with Zerubbabel and Joshua under Cyrus (Ezra 2), and not subsequently with Ezra (Ezra 7). 'And I found written therein.' These words introduce the list now given. This list, vv. 6-73 a, is identical with that in Ezra 2..." [Keil & Delitzsch Biblesoft].

Nehemiah 8

A. Nehemiah 8:1-3: The Time, the Place, and the Reading.

1. Verse 1: "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."
 - a. The Israelites gathered themselves together on the street near the water gate, and requested that Ezra the scribe speak to them from the book of the law of Moses. This shows their sincere interest in learning the will of God more perfectly.
 - b. The book of the Law of Moses is a reference to the Pentateuch, the sacred writings God gave through Moses. The contents of this book had been commanded to Israel; it listed their obligations and benefits.
2. Verse 2: "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month."
 - a. Ezra is identified as both a scribe and a priest, which gave him the authority to take charge of such a teaching occasion as the one described in the context.
 - b. The book was brought before the congregation, an assembly including both men and women; the occasion was on the first day of the seventh month.
3. Verse 3: "And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."
 - a. The reading required the hours extending from morning to midday. The great audience listened with rapt attention. Children who were capable of understanding the reading apparently were present also.
 - b. In ancient days, there were few who could read, and there were few copies of the inspired books. Public reading of the word of God was a very important part of the teaching process.
 - 1) Colossians 4:16: "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."
 - 2) 1 Thessalonians 5:27: "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren."
 - 3) 1 Timothy 4:13: "Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. "

B. Nehemiah 8:4-8: The Method of Procedure.

1. Verse 4: "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam."
 - a. The pulpit was more of a platform or scaffold on which stood Ezra and thirteen others. This lofty position would enable the assembly to see the participants and to hear the reading better.
 - b. Since the reading was lengthy, these other men named here may have participated in the reading. It is unlikely they were on the platform merely for the sake of appearance. Verse 8 indicates that more than one person did the reading.
 2. Verse 5: "And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up."
 - a. On the lofty stand, Ezra opened the book of the law of God in the sight of all the people. Verse three evidently gave a preview of the events, with the verses which follow providing the details.
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- b. When Ezra opened the book, the people stood up, perhaps to better hear, but more likely out of reverence for him whose word was about to be read.
3. Verse 6: "And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground."
 - a. Ezra, as priest, blessed the great God. He praised Jehovah, and perhaps requested the blessings of the Lord for Israel. The exalted nature of God is expressed by his being described as "the great God."
 - b. At the conclusion of this expression of praise from Ezra, the people said "Amen," with uplifted hands and bowed heads and faces pointed toward the ground. Again, the demeanor of the people denoted the reverence which they held for the Lord.
4. Verse 7: "Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place."
 - a. Those men identified participated in the activities of the occasion, in causing the people to understand the law of God. Perhaps as certain portions were read, one or another of these men expounded the meaning.
 - b. The purpose of preaching is to impart God's word to the minds of the audience so that they may know and understand their obligations and blessings.
 - c. During the proceedings, the people continued to stand where they were, listening and learning with rapt attention.
5. Verse 8: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."
 - a. In a clear declaration, inspiration depicts the purpose of publicly preaching God's word. Our preaching has failed if it does not cause accountable souls to grasp the meaning of the will of Jehovah.
 - b. The reading was done distinctly; the sense of the reading was given; and the people understood the reading. This is one of many passages which exposes the error of the Calvinistic doctrine that the heart of the hearer must be supernaturally opened by the Holy Spirit before one can comprehend the word of God. Here, the word was clearly read, the teachers expounded the reading, and the people understood. This is the way it has always been.
 - c. Some scholars try to make the verse say that Ezra read in the Hebrew language, and his helpers merely translated the reading into the vernacular (see JFB, p.618).

C. Nehemiah 8:9-12: The People are Comforted.

1. Verse 9: "And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."
 - a. Nehemiah 8:9: "And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto Jehovah your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law" (ASV). *Tirshatha* means *governor* (ASV). Nehemiah was involved in the proceedings.
 - b. At the reading of the law, the people wept. They were aware of their sinful past, and were tearfully ashamed; they recognized the great value of God's word, causing mournful tears to fall.
 - c. These penitent Israelites were admonished not to mourn or weep, because the occasion was one which the Lord had ordained, a day for renewal and rejoicing. The past was over and gone, and beyond changing; the present hour gave them opportunity to renew their devotion to God, and be forgiven for their past excesses and short-comings.
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- d. There is a time for tears, but there is also a time for rejoicing and happiness. "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing" (Eccl. 3:1-5; cf. Romans 12:18).
 2. Verses 10-11: "Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto 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. So the Levites still all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved"
 - a. The people are instructed to prepare a feast, using such food and drink as they had. Those who were able were to prepare portions for those who had nothing.
 - b. The occasion was one for rejoicing and happiness. Their attention was directed to the blessings and help which the Lord gave.
 3. Verse 12: "And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."
 - a. Being instructed correctly, the people complied with fervor. They understood and believed what they were told, and obeyed.
 - b. A man will usually act in harmony with what he believes. If one believes the day will bring rain or cold, he will prepare himself accordingly. If one believes the Bible, he will do what it says. If one does not believe, or if his faith is weak, he will not obey, and he will make excuses.
- D. Nehemiah 8:13-18: The Feast of Tabernacles is Observed.
1. Verse 13: "And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law."
 - a. The chief men of the people, the priests and the Levites assembled on the second day to be instructed more fully in the words of the law. These men apparently were sincere in learning their obligations before God, so as to better do their duty to the people.
 - b. As water cannot rise above its source, so a society of people cannot rise above its leaders. "Like priests, like people." When the leaders of Israel corrupted themselves by rebelling against the will of God, the nation itself was soon polluted. When elders in a local congregation become corrupted with sin or error, their condition soon contaminates the rest of the congregation. If elders are afraid to take charge of the church, fearing loss of members if they do what is their God-given responsibility to do, their dereliction of duty will corrupt the whole congregation. If the congregation will not follow godly elders, the elders will be forced out or will be forced to compromise.
 - c. These leaders in Israel were intent on learning and discharging their responsibility. Only with leaders such as these will it be possible for the Lord's church today to be what it must be to be saved.
 2. Verses 14-15: "And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written."
 - a. Ezra taught the leaders about observing the feast of tabernacles. "And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall
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- dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 23:40-43).
- b. The purpose of this ordinance was to stamp indelibly on the Jewish mind the great story of Israel's struggles in the wilderness as God delivered them from Egypt. This knowledge was essential if they were to maintain their standing with God. Similarly, it is crucial to our faithfulness that we keep the sacrifice of Christ alive in our memory.
 - c. During the activities of this feast, the people constructed and dwelled in temporary shelters, made of branches. This would make them appreciate the struggles of their forefathers in the wilderness, and cherish the blessings which God had granted to them.
3. Verse 16: "So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim."
- a. With the leaders informed concerning the feast, they were able to lead the people in its proper observance. They could have argued, saying they could not see any practical advantage to be gained.
 - b. Because God had given the obligation, the people obeyed; they erected booths, some on the roofs of their houses, or in the courtyards, or in the street. The enemy was still present outside the city, and would have taken advantage of them had they built the booths out in the countryside.
4. Verse 17: "And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness."
- a. The people in Joshua's day had observed this feature of the law (Judges 2:7-15), but it had fallen into ill favor with the people during the intervening years. Evidently, the subsequent generation thought the observance was beneath their dignity!
 - b. They also failed to observe the requirements the law gave in keeping the sabbatical years. "To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (2 Chron. 36:21).
 - c. The feast of tabernacles was to be kept at the appointed place and time.
 - 1) Exodus 34:23-24: "Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year."
 - 2) Deuteronomy 16:16: "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty."
5. Verse 18: "Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner."
- a. During the festive week, Ezra continued to read from the book of God's law. Notice the descriptive phrases used in the chapter concerning this book. In this verse and in verse eight, it is styled "the book of the law of God." In verse one, it is called "the book of the law of Moses." Contrary to sabbatarian assertion, the law of Moses is the Law of God! They are identical.
 - b. On the eighth day, a solemn assembly was held. The observance of the feast must have been a very moving experience for the participants, and would have had a unifying effect on the nation.
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Nehemiah 9

A. Nehemiah 9:1-3: A Penitent Assembly.

1. Verse 1: "Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them."
 - a. The month was the seventh (7:73). The events of chapter eight were during this same month. On the twenty-fourth day of the month, the Israelites assembled again, this time the purpose was not for festivities, but for fasting.
 - b. Sackcloth was a rough garment, sometimes made from animal hair. Clothed with such garments, they sat on the ground, and sprinkled dust (earth) on their heads. Often it is said that they sat in sackcloth and ashes.
 - c. Being clothed in such garments and with dust or ashes upon their heads represented mourning or penitence; their outward appearance represented the inner condition of grief or contrition.
2. Verse 2: "And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers."
 - a. The faithful of Israel separated themselves from the strangers in the land, those other people who were not true Israelites.
 - b. In this separated state, they confessed their sins and acknowledge the iniquities of their forefathers. With a sore awareness of sin, in their forebears and in themselves, they repented. Repentance is a very significant act of admitting wrongdoing to one's own heart and to God; it is produced by a sincere sorrow over this sinful condition (2 Cor. 7:10), and is followed by a reformed life (Acts 26:20).
 - 1) 2 Corinthians 7:10: "For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (ASV).
 - 2) Acts 26:20: "But declared both to them of Damascus first and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judaea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance" (ASV).
 - c. The process of conversion is a drastic procedure, which grows out of faith, includes the action of repentance, and culminates in baptism.
 - 1) Mark 16:15-16: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."
 - 2) Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."
 - 3) Acts 3:19: "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."
 - 4) Matthew 18:3: "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."
3. Verse 3: "And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God."
 - a. They stood for a fourth part of the day (three hours), listening as the word of God was read to them; they spent another fourth part of the day confessing their sins and worshipping God.
 - b. These people hungered and thirsted for the word of truth.
 - 1) Matthew 5:6: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be

filled."

- 2) 1 Peter 2:1-2: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

B. Nehemiah 9:4-38: A Prayer of the Levites.

1. Verses 4-6: "Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee."
 - a. The Levites identified in verses four and five stood upon a raised scaffold, possibly the pulpit of Nehemiah 8:4, and addressed the people. The Levites were charged with the obligation of knowing, keeping, and teaching the law.
 - 1) Leviticus 10:11: "And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses."
 - 2) Deuteronomy 17:9: "And thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment."
 - 3) Malachi 2:7: "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."
 - b. These Levites asked the people to stand and praise the Lord. Adam Clarke, who preached in nineteenth century England, lamented the fact that many of his brethren remained seated while they sang hymns (p.782), thinking that we are somehow obligated to stand when we sing. Verse five does not bind standing as the proper bodily position; the Old Testament is not the law under which Christians serve God. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:14-17; cf. Heb. 8).
 - c. In the prayer of praise they offered, the Levites glorified God for having made heaven, the heaven of heavens, the earth, and all that is in them.
 - 1) "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is " (Deut. 10:14).
 - 2) "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (1 Kings 8:27).
 - 3) "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1).
 - d. God made the physical heavens, the atmosphere where the birds fly, and outer space where the planets and stars are situated. God cannot be limited to these spheres. The planets and stars are sometimes called *the hosts of heaven* in the scriptures.
 - 1) God made heaven, where his throne is located, and all the angelic beings were created by his divine power. This place apparently is *the heaven of heavens* of the text. God is not limited to heaven, but exerts his power and influence everywhere he wishes. The angelic host praises him.
 - 2) God made the earth and all that is in it (Gen. 1-2):
 - a) "Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever"

(Ps.146:6).

- b) “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:15-17).
- 3) God preserves all life (Acts 14:17; 17:22-31; 1 Tim. 4:10). No earthly life could have ever been without his act of creation; no earthly life could be sustained without his natural laws and bounties.
 - a) Acts 14:17: “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”
 - b) Acts 17:22-31: “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”
 - c) 1 Timothy 4:10: “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.”
- e. The Israelites owed a great debt of gratitude to God. Because of his benevolence toward man, and his awesome power demonstrated in the creation and operation of the universe, he deserves the praise of man.
2. Verses 7-8: "Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous."
 - a. Calling attention to the roots of their nation, the Levites noted that God had called Abram forth from Ur of the Chaldees, and changed his name to Abraham (Gen. 12-17).
 - b. Abraham's heart was found right in God's sight, and the Lord initiated a covenant with that great man, giving to him the land that had earlier been occupied by the Canaanites. The land was given to him in promise, with his descendants taking possession of it following the four hundred years of Egyptian bondage.
 - c. God fulfilled his promise because he is ever righteous.
 - 1) 1 Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God

is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*."

- 2) Hebrews 6:10: "For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister."
3. Verses 9-12: "And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; And showedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go."
 - a. Hearing the cry of Israel, God delivered them from Egypt by means of his mighty works, which included the division of the Red Sea, which permitted their escape from the land of their bondage. The persecutors were overcome in the sea.
 - b. God obtained great respect from those who beheld his miraculous powers; a measure of this fear obtained even to that present day when the Levites offered the prayer. The supernatural acts included other heavy judgments upon Pharaoh and his people.
 - c. God continued to operate in behalf of his people as they made their way through the wilderness after leaving Egypt. Using a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day, God guided and led the nation.
4. Verses 13-14: "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."
 - a. God communicated with Israel from atop Mount Sinai, speaking to them from heaven. He gave them right judgments, true laws, good statutes, and commandments. These included the decalogue, instructions relative to the tabernacle and its services, plus regulations and directions that governed their civil, social, and religious activities.
 - 1) Psalms 19:8-9: "The statutes of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD *is* clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD *are* true *and* righteous altogether."
 - 2) Psalms 119:39: "Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments *are* good."
 - 3) Psalms 119:43: "And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments."
 - 4) Psalms 119:142: "Thy righteousness *is* an everlasting righteousness, and thy law *is* the truth."
 - 5) Romans 7:12: "Wherefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good."
 - b. By the hand of Moses, God revealed to them at Sinai his holy sabbath. The information concerning the sabbath had to be made known to them, otherwise they would have known nothing about it. Prior to this revelation, mankind knew nothing of the sabbath; it was a feature only of the Jewish economy, and had never been revealed or bound until the time of Moses.
 - c. Despite the assertions of the sabbatarians, God had not bound sabbath-keeping from the time of Genesis 2:2-3: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." The passage teaches that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day some time after he had rested on that day. He did not do so prior to or during that first seventh day. There is no hint of evidence to suggest that anyone from Adam to Mount Sinai knew anything about or observed the sabbath.

- d. Sabbatarians argue that there is a difference between the law of God and the law of Moses, that the former is the ten commandments and the latter encompasses the so-called "ceremonial law." There is no such distinction made in the Bible! The argument is an attempt to explain Colossians 2:14 and other similar passages which note the removal of the Old Covenant, while holding on to the sabbath.
- e. Romans 7:1-7: "Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."
- 1) To this point in the chapter, the apostle has not specifically identified the law which has been removed. He does so in plain words here! The law that was removed was the law that said, "Thou shalt not covet." The law that made that statement was the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) and the rest of the Mosaic Law was removed.
 - 2) Is the law from which we have been delivered sinful? God forbid! He answers an objection that someone might raise: "If you are correct in saying that the Law encouraged sin by its prohibitions, and provided no relief therefrom, are you not also saying that the Law was sinful?" Paul strongly denies such a conclusion. His full statement not only identified the Law he is discussing, but it also defends it as being in the best interest of its subjects.
 - 3) He states that he would not have known what is sinful without the information given in the Law which identifies sin. He gives one specification: I would not have known that it was wrong to lust, except by the commandment of the Law prohibiting such.
 - 4) The Decalogue as a code has been removed. This set of precepts form the basis of the entire Law of Moses. Sabbatarians try to make a distinction between the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial parts of the Law; they assert that only the ceremonial law was taken away, and that the Ten Commandments are still in effect, including the Sabbath. Their theory is utterly demolished by Paul's affirmation here! The entire Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, has been removed, being replaced by the New Testament. The entire Law of Moses was the Law of God.
 - a) 2 Chronicles 34:14: "And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a book of **the law of the LORD** given by Moses."
 - b) Ezra 7:6: "This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he *was* a ready scribe in **the law of Moses**, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him."
 - c) Nehemiah 8:1: "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."
 - d) Nehemiah 10:29: "They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in **God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God**, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes."
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- 5) Nine of the Ten Commandments have been incorporated into the New Covenant, with the fourth (dealing with the Sabbath) excluded. These nine involve principles that have always been true; for example, it has always been right for a child to honor his parents, and always wrong to dishonor them. It is still wrong to covet because lust has always been prohibited and because it is forbidden by the law of Christ.
- 6) The Law of the Sabbath was given only to the Israelites:
 - a) Exodus 31:13: "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that *ye* may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you."
 - b) Deuteronomy 5:3: "The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *even* us, who *are* all of us here alive this day."
 - c) Nehemiah 9:13-14: "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."

The Ten Commandments and the New Testament

Exodus 20:1-17

Old Testament Code	New Testament Counterpart
1. No Other Gods—Ex. 20:2-3	Matt. 4:10; John 4:23-24; Rev. 22:8-9
2. No Graven Images—Ex. 20:4-5	1 John 5:21; 1 Cor. 10:7, 14; cf. Col. 3:5
3. Not Take God's Name in Vain—Ex. 20:7	Matt. 5:33-37; Jas. 5:12
4. Keep Sabbath—Ex. 20:8-11	Sabbath Not Bound Under the New Testament
5. Honor Parents—Ex. 20:12	Eph. 6:1-3
6. Not Kill (Murder)—Ex. 20:13	Matt. 19:18; 1 John 3:15; Matt. 5:21-22
7. Not Commit Adultery—Ex. 20:14	Matt. 5:27-28
8. Not Steal—Ex. 20:15	Eph. 4:28
9. Not Bear False Witness—Ex. 20:16	Col. 3:9; Rev. 21:8
10. Not Covet—Ex. 20:17	Eph. 5:5; Heb. 13:5; Luke 3:11

5. Verses 15-20: "And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; Yet thou in thy manifold mercies

forsook them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldst not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst."

- a. God gave them certain definite blessings and promises.
 - 1) He provided bread from heaven.
 - a) Exodus 16:14: "And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground."
 - b) John 6:31: "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat."
 - 2) He gave them water from a rock when there was no other source of water. "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel" (Ex. 17:6).
 - 3) He promised them that they would receive a homeland, originally promised to Abraham. "Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them" (Deut. 1:8).
 - b. However, the people responded to God's goodness with pride and stubbornness, refusing to heed the commandments and directions God gave them. "We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly" (Ps. 106:6).
 - 1) This foolish action resulted even though God had shown them tremendous supernatural works. It seems very strange to us that people who had witnessed some of the most astounding miracles of the ages could forget the one who wrought them. This suggests an important matter concerning miracles: if they were done frequently, they would soon lose their influence on the hearts of men.
 - 2) They reached the height of their rebellion when they appointed a captain to lead them back into their bondage. "And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt" (Num. 14:4).
 - 3) Only because God is ready to pardon, slow to anger, gracious and merciful and kind, did he not abandon them in the wilderness.
 - c. Even when they made a molten calf, and honored it by claiming that it had been the source of their deliverance from Egypt, God did not forsake them to a harsh death in the wilderness, despite this terrible provocation. He did not remove the pillar of cloud that led them by day, or the pillar of fire that furnished them light and guidance by night: "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, *from* before the people" (Ex. 13:21-22). His mercy was bountifully shed upon Israel.
 - 1) Numbers 14:18: "The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*."
 - 2) Psalms 86:5: "For thou, Lord, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee."
 - 3) Joel 2:13: "And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for *he is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."
 - d. Verse 20. "Despite their mutiny, their Loving and Living God did not withhold his manna for their food or water to quench their thirst. Moreover, he gave them his good Spirit to instruct them."
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- 1) Numbers 11:17: "And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone." The 70 elders were given the ability to substantiate Moses' authority (cf. Num. 11:11-30). "Then he remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him?" (Isa. 63:11).
 - 2) Zechariah 7:12: "Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts." The Holy Spirit provided the instruction indicated in our text by the influence he wrought upon the prophets.
 - 3) 2 Samuel 23:1-2: "Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."
 - 4) Acts 1:16: "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus."
 - 5) The statement affirms the inspiration of Moses and other prophets sent to Israel.
6. Verses 21-25: "Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, *so that* they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess *it*. So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness."
- a. As Israel traveled and abode in the wilderness forty years, God sustained them with even the smallest of their necessities. He caused their clothes to withstand the wear and tear of their travel and travail. Even their feet were protected so that they did not swell (blister).
 - 1) Deuteronomy 2:7: "For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing." Deuteronomy 8:4: "Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years."
 - 2) Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." We have even more reason to believe God than did the Israelites, although we have not seen any miracles; we have the complete record of all the supernatural activities we need to know, plus the revelation of the will of God, from beginning to end, according to our need. Cf. John 20:30f; Ephesians 3:1-11.
 - b. "Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and peoples, which thou didst allot after their portions: so they possessed the land of Sihon, even the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan" (verse 22, ASV).
 - 1) As Israel made their journey into Canaan, they conquered Heshbon and Bashan, kingdoms situated on the east side of Jordan.
 - 2) God enabled this conquest, and divided these kingdoms among certain of Israel's tribes. "And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but
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we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders. And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon. Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon. Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of the Amorites. We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba. Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there. And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei. And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land" (Num. 21:21-35).

- c. God blessed Israel with many offspring, causing their numbers to increase greatly. There were 70 of Abraham's descendants to go down into Egypt, but after their sojourn in that land of bondage, they left with the number of men (twenty years old and older) being put at 603,550. "So were all those that were numbered of the children of Israel, by the house of their fathers, from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; Even all they that were numbered were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty" (Num. 1:45-46).
 - d. So great were their numbers, together with the awesome power of God which accompanied them, that the people of Canaan trembled in fear: "And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:9-11)."
 - e. Relying on the power of God, they entered Palestine, defeating the inhabitants, and taking possession of the land with all its fruits. They conquered strong cities and took ownership of vineyards, olive groves, and orchards. They failed, however, to take to heart the strong warning issued to them by Moses: "And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deut. 6:10-12).
7. Verses 26-28: "Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and according
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to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest *them* from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies."

- a. Ignoring or being unaware of the warnings, Israel rebelled against God. Mankind generally will be more serious about spiritual matters in times of adversity and less interested in these verities in times of prosperity and peace. They cast God's law behind them, as one who throws away that which is valueless to him.
 - b. In the wilderness, they cried to God when they needed food and water, or protection from an enemy; but on entering the land of promise, they began to partake of the bounties of that fertile land, and grew prosperous and self-sufficient. They thought they were able to provide for all of their necessities and desires, and saw no need for God's help. "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deut. 32:15; cf. Deut. 8:1-20).
 - c. When they turned from God, he sent prophets to them to correct them and call them back to the right way. These prophets they often rejected, and sometimes killed them (1 Kings 18:4; 19:10; 2 Chron. 24:20-21; Matt. 23:37; Acts 7). It was extremely dangerous to be a preacher of truth in ancient Israel!
 - 1) 1 Kings 18:4: "For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water."
 - 2) 1 Kings 19:10: "And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."
 - 3) 2 Chronicles 24:20-21: "And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD."
 - 4) Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"
 - d. The events of the book of Judges illustrate verses 27 and 28. Time and again, Israel descended into sin, and were punished by attacks from their enemies. Realizing their dilemma was beyond their solution, they would cry unto God for deliverance; God would send someone to bring about their freedom. But they soon fell into sin again! "Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him with their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry" (Ps. 106:43-44).
8. Verses 29-30: "And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands."
- a. When Israel departed from God, he would send prophets to them to show them the error of their way, and to lead them back into God's fellowship. The reference is probably to the time of the kings when Nathan, Elijah, and other great prophets were sent.
 - b. God testified against them by means of the Holy Spirit who inspired the prophets to receive and present their many utterances, both oral and written. "Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone,
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lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets: therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts" (Zech. 7:12).

- c. Zechariah 7:11: "But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear." To "pull away the shoulder" has reference to "giving someone a cold shoulder" or refusing to "put the shoulder to the wheel." The statement of our text (and that of Zechariah 7:11) is intended as a rebuke, and is parallel to their hardening their neck and refusal to hear God's warnings.
 - d. God is longsuffering toward mankind.
 - 1) Romans 2:4: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"
 - 2) 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."
9. Verses 32-38: "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. Howbeit thou *art* just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. Behold, we *are* servants this day, and *for* the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we *are* servants in it: And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we *are* in great distress. And because of all this we make a sure *covenant*, and write *it*; and our princes, Levites, *and* priests, seal *unto it*."
- a. The Levites (who delivered this inspired discourse) seem amazed that God could have been so longsuffering with those rebels. God did not consume them completely, as he could have done, but rather continued to show mercy to them. Our ingratitude toward our benevolent Father does not lessen his love for us; it adds to our vast assortment of sin!
 - b. "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and lovingkindness, let not all the travail seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day" (verse 32, ASV).
 - 1) The plea is one for mercy in behalf of the Jews of Nehemiah's time. They prayed that God would not consider the turmoil through which the past and present generations of Israel had passed to be *little*. God had the power to bring far greater punishment upon them; this they knew, hence they acknowledged his power as great, mighty, and terrible.
 - 2) The trouble Israel had invited upon themselves had been upon them, to one degree or another, from the time of the kings of Assyria unto the present time.
 - c. Notwithstanding the severity of the punishment God had brought to bear upon Israel in the Babylonian invasion, conquest, and captivity, his discipline had been entirely just; they had deserved the treatment they received.
 - 1) Their violations of God's law had been at least equal to the punishment they received. God had a right to utterly destroy them, but would not do so because of his (1) inherent mercy and (2) to fulfill the promises he had made to Abraham.
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- 2) Confessing the crimes against God, they admit that all had been guilty; from the king on the throne to the lowliest peasant or servant, they had rebelled against the will of God.
 - 3) Israel had been wonderfully blessed by having a nation separate from the heathen and by being given a very fertile land in which to dwell. Yet, they had ignored the great goodness of God as seen in these blessings, and did that which pleased themselves, and refused to turn from their wicked works.
- d. Beginning in 606 B.C., the Southern Kingdom had been assaulted and conquered by Babylon; after 70 years in captivity, they were permitted to return to Palestine, but even then, they were under the control of a heathen kingdom.
- 1) They were servants in the great land God had granted to their forebears. Whereas their forefathers had lived in freedom in the land, and conducted their business affairs according to their own wisdom, the present generation was hardly more than slaves, serving a pagan king and paying tribute to his government.
 - 2) Also, their cattle belonged more to that king than to themselves. They were bound to serve that king, according to his pleasure. The increase of the land was his, not theirs.
 - 3) Adding to their tenuous situation, they lived in great distress due to their enemies in the land. Earlier chapters of the book have detailed some of the difficulties caused by these deadly foes.
 - 4) What was the cause of these straits? It was all caused by "our sins."
- e. They had learned a hard lesson through the harsh circumstances of the past and present. They were now ready to officially bind themselves to a commitment to do better in the future. They made the covenant in writing, and sealed it with a public vow (Neh. 10:1ff). Since the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews have not had a significant problem with idolatry; however, the descendants of that generation fell into a vast assortment of sins, as attested by subsequent history.
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Nehemiah 10

A. Nehemiah 10:1-27: The Parties Who Sealed the Covenant.

1. Verse 1: "Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah."
 - a. Beginning in this verse and extending through verse twenty-seven, a list of more than eight-score names is given. These men are those who affixed their names to the covenant drawn up in the previous chapter, which committed them to be obedient to God's word.
 - b. As the leading citizen in civil affairs, Nehemiah the Tirshatha (the governor) signed it first. He demonstrated his determination to serve God in being the first to sign, setting the example for the others.
 - c. "The signing ceremony took place in full view of the assembly. It must have been solemn and impressive as each leader took writing instrument in hand and put his name to the document. The purpose was to let the people see their guides signing the covenant and thereby encourage the masses to fidelity to the law of God" (Dobbs, ADL, p.237).
2. Verses 2-27: "Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these *were* the priests. And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Bani, Beninu. The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zathu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur, Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabeel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub, Hallohesh, Pileha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, Baanah."
 - a. The twenty-one men of verses 2-8 plus Zidkijah (verse 1) were priests.
 - b. The seventeen men of verses 9-13 were Levites.
 - c. The forty-four men named in verses 14-27 were the heads of the prominent families.

B. Nehemiah 10:28-39: The Statutes Which They Covenanted to Keep.

1. Verses 28-31: "And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes; And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons: And *if* the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, *that* we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and *that* we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt."
 - a. All of the rest of the people, who are identified by various categories, clung to their leaders, entering into the oath of allegiance to God's law. All of these individuals, who are not identified by name, are described as having knowledge and understanding. They entered into the covenant with full awareness and dedication.
 - b. The pledge they made must have been oral, since it is not specified that they signed the document. The agreement is called a curse and an oath. It was a legal commitment, the violation of which would entail a curse being brought to bear as punishment.
 - c. Notice that God's law is described as having been given through Moses, the servant of God. The Law of Moses is simply another name for the Law of God. No one was permitted to append anything to
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that law, or remove anything therefrom, or make any changes to it.

- 1) Deuteronomy 4:2: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”
 - 2) Proverbs 30:6: “Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.”
- d. As important as the Old Law was, it is surpassed in glory by the New Law!
- 1) 2 Corinthians 3:9-18: “For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”
 - 2) Hebrews 8:1-13: “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.”
 - 3) Hebrews 2:1-4: “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?”
- e. The covenant which the leaders signed and to which the rest of the nation pledged their allegiance was a public affirmation they each would do everything required of them in God's law. Partial
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obedience is useless; it has always been vain to obey only that part of the law that pleases the individual.

- 1) Matthew 23:23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."
 - 2) James 2:10: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."
- f. They further resolved that they would refuse to allow their sons and daughters to intermarry with the people of the land. This had been a major problem which Ezra addressed (Ezra 9-10).
- 1) Exodus 34:16: "And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."
 - 2) Deuteronomy 7:3: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son."
- g. Also, they pledged that they would do no business with the pagans who tried to sell their merchandise on the sabbath or any other holy day.
- h. They also committed themselves to observe the sabbatical year (every 7th year). "To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years" (2 Chron. 36:21).
2. Verses 32-37: "Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; For the showbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy *things*, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and *for* all the work of the house of our God. And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring *it* into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as *it is* written in the law: And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD: Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as *it is* written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God: And *that* we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage."
- a. They agreed that they would pay an annual tax of one third shekel to finance the temple service: for the various offerings and feasts. In Exodus 30:13-16, the law specified that one-half shekel was to be paid. Compare: "And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute *money* came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee" (Matt. 17:24-27).
- 1) How do we account for the difference in the amount? Clarke thought that the lesser amount was decided on because of their present reduced circumstances. However, that did not give them the right to make a change to a definite requirement of the law. Dobbs says that the original half-shekel tax was payable only on the rare occasions when the people were numbered (p.245), and that this one-third shekel tax was above and beyond that original assessment. This is the better explanation.
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- 2) “‘The "half-shekel of the sanctuary,’ as it is called, being only payable on the rare, and forbidden, occasion of a census of the whole people (Ex 30:13-16), could not possibly have served for the ordinary support of the temple service; but it was calculated to suggest to thoughtful minds the need of some regular fund, and the persons on whom the obligation lay to provide it. While the Jews were an independent nation, with their own kings and their own revenue, no difficulty had been felt in keeping up the service, since the kings easily provided for it; but in the existing condition of affairs the case was different. A ‘governor’ was not like a king; he was responsible; he was removable; he was bound to remit the great bulk of the taxes to the court. Under these circumstances, and probably in connection with an immediate need, the idea arose of a special (voluntary) tax, to be paid annually by all adult males, for the support of the service, the continual provision of the morning and evening sacrifice, the incense, the shew-bread, the red heifers, the scape-goat, the numerous victims, and the numerous meat and drink offerings required on various occasions, and especially at each of the great festivals.... With regard to its proper amount, that had to be fixed by a consideration of existing needs in comparison with existing means. The third part of a shekel was determined on, as sufficient at the time; but it was not long ere for the third part the half-shekel was substituted, a return being thus made to the standard fixed by the law, and an ample provision made for the maintenance of the established rites in full completeness and efficiency (comp. Matt 17:24-27)” (Pulpit Commentary, BibleSoft).
 - 3) “The third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God. The law required every individual above twenty years of age to pay half a shekel to the sanctuary. But in consequence of the general poverty of the people, occasioned by war and captivity, this tribute was reduced to a third part of a shekel” [Jamieson, BibleSoft).
 - 4) The tax would take care of the daily requirements of the temple services. Someone had to provide flour for the showbread. Today, there is the need for someone to do the little things that are usually taken for granted, and hardly noticed until they are left undone. Our faithfulness is measured especially in the little things. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10).
 - b. In Israel's early days in the land, the Gibeonites were used as hewers of wood and drawers of water (Josh. 9:17-27). It may be, as Clarke suggested, that there were few of these servants present to tend to cutting the wood for the altar, and other such tasks. Lots were cast to select those who would perform these necessary works. The firstfruits of the crops needed to be collected and transported to the designated place; men were selected to see to this job. It is likely that the lots determined the order in which the various people participated in these works.
 - c. The law required that the Israelites devote their first born sons to the Lord, and redeem them by sacrifice (Ex. 13). God reserved the right to have the firstborn sons of the people to serve him in the tabernacle, but instead of using these, he chose the tribe of Levi to fill these holy purposes. To help finance the Levites and the temple services, the first born among men and animals were to be redeemed.
 - 1) Exodus 34:20: "But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty."
 - 2) Numbers 18:15-17: "Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou
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shaltsprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD."

3. Verses 38-39: "And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God."
 - a. The Israelites were obligated to finance the Levites who tended to the work of the temple; tithes were taken for their support. Tithes were paid also for the temple services. A tenth part of their increase was given for this work. The "tithes of the tithes" has reference to the tenth part of the tithes which went to the priests (Clarke, pp.788f).
 - b. Christians have a divinely-given requirement to financially support the local church, including any monetary support given to preachers and elders.
 - 1) 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."
 - 2) 1 Corinthians 9:9-10: "For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope."
 - c. "The farmer had better take good care of his ox—not for the sake of the ox but for the sake of the farmer. The disciple in the local congregation had better take good care of the teacher who serves the interest of his soul—not for the sake of the preacher but for the sake of the saints" (Dobbs, p.248).

Nehemiah 11

A. Nehemiah 11:1-2: The Plan Adopted.

1. Verse 1: "And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities."
 - a. The rulers of the nation were stationed in Jerusalem, as was fitting and logical. By casting lots, the remainder of the people were assigned their places to live: ten percent were selected to live in Jerusalem, and the other ninety percent to occupy the outlying cities and villages.
 - b. In ancient times, even the farmers lived in cities and villages, going forth by day to tend to their duties on the land. This arrangement offered protection to all the people, for there is greater strength and safety with many than with few.
2. Verse 2: "And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem."
 - a. Those who were selected to dwell in Jerusalem received the approbation of the others. If being chosen to live in Jerusalem was considered an honor, the others did not resent those who were chosen; if Jerusalem was not viewed as the honored place to live, the ninety percent expressed gratitude and encouragement to those chosen to abide there.
 - b. Jerusalem was not likely a pleasant place to live, owing to the ruins and rubble that undoubtedly still abounded there, the economics of the time were in a state of depression (Neh. 5:1-13), and the enemies were still capable of fomenting turmoil in the city.
 - c. In the original division of the land under Joshua, some of those picked to inhabit Jerusalem may have had ties to rural areas, but due to the current demands, were called on to live in the capital city. It may be the case that many of the original families which occupied Jerusalem had been wiped out in the destruction of the Babylonians, and perhaps some of them had not yet returned from captivity.

B. Nehemiah 11:3-24: A Register of the Chiefs in the City.

1. Verses 3-4: "Now these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants. And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uzziyah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez."
 - a. The chief men of the province dwelt at Jerusalem; their names are listed. The province is the land of Palestine as designated by the Persian government.
 - b. The returnees generally settled on the land originally given to their ancestors. The people in general, the priests, and the Levites occupied the land and cities given to their forefathers. The Nethinims and the descendants of Solomon's servants also took up residence in the outlying districts.
 - c. *Israel* is a reference to the nation itself, disregarding the division that separated the ten tribes from the two tribes following Solomon's death. The use of the term recognizes the fact that the returnees were from, not only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, but from the ten other tribes as well.
2. Verses 5-24: "And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem *were* four hundred threescore and eight valiant men. And these *are* the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah. And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight. And Joel the son of Zichri *was* their overseer: and Judah the son of Senuah *was* second over the city. Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin. Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, *was* the ruler of the house of God. And their brethren that did the

work of the house *were* eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah, And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two: and Amashai the son of Azareel, the son of Ahasai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, And their brethren, mighty men of valour, an hundred twenty and eight: and their overseer *was* Zabdiel, the son of *one of* the great men. Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, *had* the oversight of the outward business of the house of God. And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, *was* the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer: and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. All the Levites in the holy city *were* two hundred fourscore and four. Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, *were* an hundred seventy and two. And the residue of Israel, of the priests, *and* the Levites, *were* in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance. But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziha and Gispa *were* over the Nethinims. The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem *was* Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers *were* over the business of the house of God. For *it was* the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day. And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabeel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, *was* at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people."

- a. The *residue* of Israel dwelled in the cities of Judah, according to the original division of the land in Joshua's time.
 - b. The Nethinims dwell in Ophel, and were governed by Ziha and Gispa. The overseer of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi. The singers were over the business of the temple. The Persian king had authorized that the singers should be supported on a daily basis. Some scholars think the king referred to in verse 23 was David, but the context indicates the Persian king. One of the Jews was situated at the king's hand to represent Israel.
3. Verses 25-36: "And for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjatharba, and in the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and in the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and in the villages thereof. And at Jeshua, and at Moladah, and at Bethphelet, And at Hazarshual, and at Beersheba, and *in* the villages thereof, And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and in the villages thereof, And at Enrimmon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam, and *in* their villages, at Lachish, and the fields thereof, at Azekah, and *in* the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beersheba unto the valley of Hinnom. The children also of Benjamin from Geba *dwelt* at Michmash, and Aija, and Bethel, and *in* their villages, *And* at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen. And of the Levites *were* divisions *in* Judah, *and* in Benjamin." The Pulpit Commentary offers this information:
- a. The writer here at last passes away altogether from Jerusalem, and proceeds to speak of the country population of Judaea. This was chiefly located in villages or hamlets, to each of which was attached a territory suitable for cultivation. The principal of these settlements are now enumerated, and will be found to comprise seventeen places belonging to Judah, and fifteen belonging to Benjamin. Of these thirty-two, a considerable proportion had subordinate hamlets attached to them. Kirjath-arba, or Hebron. During the captivity the old name had reasserted itself (see Josh 14:15). Dibon is not the important Moabite town whence came the famous "Moabite Stone," but the city anciently called Dimonah, which is coupled with "Kabzeel" and "Moladah" in Josh 15:21-26. Jekabzeel is no doubt the ancient "Kabzeel" (Josh 15:21).
 - b. Joshua is a place not mentioned anywhere but here. Moladah occurs in Josh 15:26; Beth-phelet, no doubt the same as Beth-palet, in Josh 15:27.
 - c. Hazar-shual and Beer-sheba are united in Josh 15:28, and were no doubt near together. Hazar-shual

means "the village of foxes."

- d. Ziklag is celebrated as the town given to David by Achish king of Gath (1 Sam 27:6), and soon afterwards taken by the Amalekites (ibid. 30:1). Mekonah is a name which occurs only in this place.
 - e. En-rimmon, "the spring of Rimmon," is to be identified with the "Ain and Rimmon" of Josh 15:32 — two neighbouring villages, which ultimately grew into one. Zareah is no doubt the "Zoreah" of Josh 15:33, which was in the Shephelah, or low coast tract. Jarmuth is the town of Piram, who warred with Joshua (Josh 10:3-27). Like Zareah, it lay in the low coast tract (Josh 15:35).
 - f. Zanoah and Adullam appear in close connection with Jarmuth in Josh 15:34,35. Zanoah was not a place of any importance, but Adullam, near which was David's cave, is often mentioned. It had its own king in the time of Joshua (Josh 12:15), was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron 11:7), and remained a city of some strength under the Maccabees (2 Macc. 12:38). Lachish is a place even more celebrated than Adullam. Its king, Japhia, warred with Joshua (Josh 12:3-16). It was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron 11:9). Amaziah took refuge there when conspiracy threatened him at Jerusalem (2 Kings 14:19); and Sennacherib "besieged it with all his power" (2 Chron 22:9). Azekah is joined with Jarmuth and Adullam in Josh 15:35. Like Adullam and Lachish, it was fortified by Rehoboam (2 Chron 11:9). They (i.e. the children of Judah) dwelt from Beer-sheba to the valley of Hinnom. The southernmost and the northernmost parts of Judaea are here mentioned.
 - g. The children also of Benjamin from Geba dwelt at Michmash. Rather, "Also the children of Benjamin dwelt from Geba to Michmash, and Aija, and Bethel," etc. Geba was reckoned an extreme city of Benjamin towards the west, and consequently occurs last in the first list of Joshua (Nehemiah 18:24). Its proximity to Michmash and Aija (Aiath) appears in Isa 10:28,29. All three places were in the near vicinity of Bethel.
 - h. Anathoth was on the road from Geba to Jerusalem (Isa 10:30), and was a Levitical city (Josh 21:18). Nob was still nearer to the capital, which could be seen from it (Isa 10:32). It was famous for the massacre of the priests by Doeg (1 Sam 22:18,19). Ananiah is mentioned only in this place.
 - i. Hazor occurs as a Benjamite city here only. Ramah is the famous town, now er-Ram, so often mentioned as a little to the north of Jerusalem (Josh 18:25; Judg 4:5; 1 Kings 15:17; Isa 10:29; Jer 31:15). Gittaim is mentioned as a Benjamite town in 2 Sam 4:3.
 - j. Hadid is joined with Lod and Ono in Ezra 2:33 and Neh 7:37. It is probably the modern Haditheh, three miles east of Ludd or Lod, in the Shephelah. Zeboim is not elsewhere mentioned as a town, but we hear of a "valley of Zeboim" in 1 Sam 13:18, which seems to have lain east of Michmash, in the bleak country towards the Jordan. Neballat is not elsewhere mentioned.
 - k. Lod, now Ludd (called in the Acts of the Apostles Lydda), was at the eastern edge of the Shephelah, or low maritime plain, and about nine miles to the S.E. of Joppa. Unimportant during the early times, it became a place of considerable note under the Maccabees (1 Macc. 10:30, 38; 11:28, 34, 57, etc.), and so continued till the taking of Jerusalem by Titus, soon after which its name was changed to Diospolis. Ono is first mentioned in 1 Chron 8:12 in combination with Lod, with which it is also joined in Ezra 2:33 and Neh 7:37. We do not know how it came to be called "the valley of craftsmen."
 - l. Of the Levites were divisions in Judah and Benjamin. The exact sense is obscure, but we may gather from the passage that a certain number of Levites were dispersed among the Benjamite cities. They were not now numerous enough to have any cities to themselves.
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Nehemiah 12

A. Nehemiah 12:1-26: A Register of Priests and Levites.

1. Verse 1: "Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra."
2. Verses 2-22: "Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah, Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These *were* the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua. Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, *and* Mattaniah, *which was* over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, *were* over against them in the watches. And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada, And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua. And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; Of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; Of Melicu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; Of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; Of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; Of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; Of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; And of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; Of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; Of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel. The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, *were* recorded chief of the fathers: also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian."
3. Verses 22-26: "Of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel. The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, *were* recorded chief of the fathers: also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian. The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, *were* written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise *and* to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, *were* porters keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates. These *were* in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe."

B. Nehemiah 12:27-43: The Walls Are Dedicated.

1. Verse 27: "And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps."
 - a. To mark the official completion of the walls, a dedication service was planned, with the Levites taking the leading part.
 - b. "The nexus [connection, link] of this passage seems to be with Neh 11:36; and we may suppose that originally it followed immediately on ch. 11—the lists (Neh 12:1-26) being a later insertion. The author, having (in Neh 11:36) told us of the wide dispersion of the Levites, now notes that they were summoned from all the places where they dwelt, and brought (one and all) to Jerusalem for the solemnity of the dedication. To keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgiving and with singing, etc. Solomon's dedication of the temple was the pattern followed. As he had made the service altogether one of praise and thanksgiving (2 Chron 5:13), and had employed in it cymbals, trumpets, psalteries, and harps (ibid. ver. 12), so Nehemiah on the present occasion" [Pulpit Commentary, BibleSoft].
 - c. Jamieson has this information:
 - 1) At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. This ceremony of consecrating the wall and gates of the city was an act of piety on the part of Nehemiah, not merely to thank God in a general way for having been enabled to bring the building to a happy completion, but on the special ground of that

city being the place which He had chosen, and its containing the temple, which was hallowed by the manifestation of His presence, and anew set apart for His service. It was on these accounts that Jerusalem was called the holy city; and by this public and solemn act of religious observance, after a long period of neglect and desecration, it was, as it were, restored to its rightful proprietor.

- 2) The dedication consisted in a solemn ceremonial, in which the leading authorities, accompanied by the Levitical singers, summoned from all parts of the country, and by a vast concourse of people, marched in imposing procession round the city walls, and, pausing at intervals to engage in united praises, prayer, and sacrifices, supplicated the continued presence, favour, and blessing on the "holy city." The assembly convened near the Jaffa Gate, where the procession commences. Then (Neh 12:31) I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall (near the valley gate), and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the Dung Gate (through Bethzo). And after them went Hoshaiiah, and half of the princes of Judah. And (Neh 12:37) at the Fountain Gate, which was over against them, they (descending by the tower of Siloam on the interior and then re-ascending) went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the Water Gate eastward (by the staircase of the rampart, having descended to dedicate the fountain structures). And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them (both parties having started from the junction of the first and second walls), and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall (beyond the corner gate). And from above the Gate of Ephraim, and above the Old Gate (and the Gate of Benjamin), and above the Fish Gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the Sheep Gate; and they stood still at the prison gate (or High Gate at the east end of the bridge). So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and half of the rulers with me (having thus performed the circuit of the investing walls), arrived in the courts of the temple' (Barclay's 'City of the Great King').
 2. Verses 28-30: "And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall."
 - a. This being considered a special occasion, the priests and Levites were purified according to the ceremonies of the Law. They also purified the people, the gates and the wall of the city.
 - b. The wall was constructed in fifty-two days (Neh. 6:15). The people were settled in the land before the dedication service occurred.
 3. Verses 31-36: "Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate: And after them went Hoshaiiah, and half of the princes of Judah, And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets; namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph: And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them."
 - a. Nehemiah placed certain leading individuals on the wall, who apparently led other prominent people around the city, walking on top of the wall. Two great companies were appointed, one going in one direction upon the wall, and the other in the opposite.
 - b. These were accompanied by others bearing the trumpets, and were led by Ezra the scribe. They went around the wall to stairs of the city of David.
 4. Verses 37-43: "And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the
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city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward. And the other *company of them that gave thanks* went over against *them*, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall; And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the prison gate. So stood the two *companies of them that gave thanks* in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, *and* Hananiah, with trumpets; And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah *their* overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."

- a. The second company went in the other direction ("over against" the first company). Nehemiah followed this second company.
- b. "The first group, with Ezra, traveled counterclockwise (vv. 31-37). The other group, with Nehemiah, traveled clockwise (vv.38-42). Both groups ascended the wall on the western side near the modern Jaffa gate and faced the city and the temple. The group on the right commenced the circuit of the southern wall. The group on the left marched around the northern wall. Both groups met on the eastern wall, between the water gate and the prison gate" (Whitlock, ADL, p.254).
- c. Nehemiah reports that great sacrifices were offered. The singers sang loudly. The people rejoiced so that their sound was heard "even afar off." The pomp, ceremony, and rejoicing made the occasion a memorable day.

C. Nehemiah 12:44-47: Keepers of Tithes Appointed.

1. Verse 44: "And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited."
 - a. Practical arrangements were made to fulfill the requirements of Numbers 18:21-24 and Leviticus 8:14-22, which gave the responsibility to Israel to support the Levites from the tithes and offerings.
 - 1) Numbers 18:21-24: "And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance."
 - 2) Leviticus 8:14-22: "And he brought the bullock for the sin offering: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock for the sin offering. And he slew it; and Moses took the blood, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about with his finger, and purified the altar, and poured the blood at the bottom of the altar, and sanctified it, to make reconciliation upon it. And he took all the fat that was upon the inwards, and the caul above the liver, and the two kidneys, and their fat, and Moses burned it upon the altar. But the bullock, and his hide, his flesh, and his dung, he burnt with fire without the camp; as the LORD commanded Moses. And he brought the ram for the burnt offering: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram. And he killed it; and Moses sprinkled the blood upon the altar round about. And he cut the ram into pieces; and Moses burnt the head, and the pieces, and the fat. And he washed the inwards and the legs in water; and Moses burnt the whole ram upon the altar: it was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet

savour, and an offering made by fire unto the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses. And he brought the other ram, the ram of consecration: and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram.”

- b. Certain men were selected to gather and store the offerings, firstfruits, and tithes, enabling the priests and Levites to discharge their offices.
2. Verses 45-46: "And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God."
 - a. The singers and porters *kept the ward of their God*: they maintained the requirements of their office, which included singing and observing the regulations which pertained to purification.
 - b. From the days of David and Asaph, singers were appointed to take charge of singing praise and thanksgiving to God.
 - c. The time then present was one in which the Israelites took heed to walking in the old paths, in distinction to the practice of their forebears: "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6:16).
 3. Verse 47: "And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron."
 - a. During the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah, Israel gave as they were taught in the Law. It seems to be implied that they did not do so in the interim between Zerubbabel and Nehemiah.
 - b. Now, for a time at least, Israel was faithful and happy, serving God with gladness and success. However, before long, troubles arose.
 - 1) Nehemiah 13:11: "Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place."
 - 2) Malachi 3:8-10: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye *are* cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, *even* this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*"

Nehemiah 13

A. Nehemiah 13:1-3: Separation From the Moabites and Ammonites.

1. Verse 1: "On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever."
 - a. Was this occasion still the day of the dedication of the walls? Clarke thought that the present time was after Nehemiah had gone back to Babylon and returned to Jerusalem (p.795). Verse six tells of Nehemiah's return to Artaxerxes in Babylon, and after certain days he obtained leave of the king (to return to Jerusalem). It appears that he was not present at Jerusalem on the occasion described in verses one through three. Notice that the report states that they read.
 - b. On the day of the text, they read in the book of Moses; all the people were present. They found in the Law that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not be received into the congregation of Israel at any time.
 2. Verse 2: "Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing."
 - a. When Israel was enroute to their new home in Palestine, neither the Moabites nor the Ammonites welcomed them. These two nations were *cousins* to Israel, having descended from Abraham's nephew Lot by his two daughters: "And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters. And the firstborn said unto the younger, Our father is old, and there is not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth: Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night: and the firstborn went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the firstborn said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, and lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose. Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father. And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day. And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day" (Gen. 19:30-39).
 - b. The king of Moab sought to bring a curse upon Israel by Balaam, but this effort was fruitless; God was able to turn the curse into a blessing. Then Balaam recommended that the Moabites bring Israel into disfavor with God by getting the Moabite women to snare the men of Israel; this plot succeeded in bringing a severe punishment upon Israel (Num. 25:1-9). Latter day *Balaams* plague those who want to do right. Compare: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Rev. 2:13). The story of Balaam's opposition to Israel is related in Numbers 22-24.
 3. Verse 3: "Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude."
 - a. Intermingled with the Israelites at the time was a *mixed multitude* of other people, obviously including Moabites and Ammonites. "And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle" (Ex. 12:38). These people accompanied Israel in their journey from Egypt to Canaan. Israel separated this mixed multitude from the nation.
 - b. The mixed multitude created problems in the wilderness. "And the mixt multitude that was among
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them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Num. 11:4).

- c. Christians as individuals and the Lord's church [as a whole] must maintain a clear line of distinction between themselves and the sinful people, practices, and doctrines of the world.
 - 1) Romans 16:17-18: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple."
 - 2) 2 Corinthians 6:14-18: "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."
 - 3) 1 John 2:15-17: "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."
 - 4) 2 John 9-11: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. 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."

B. Nehemiah 13:4-9: An Unlawful Privilege of Tobiah Broken Up.

1. Verses 4-5: "And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests."
 - a. Tobiah enters the picture again. He is allied with Eliashib the priest, who had set up Tobiah with a great room in which the supplies for use in the temple and for the Levites and others had been stored.
 - b. The chamber was in the temple. Tobiah's presence in the temple constituted a desecration of that sacred place. This Eliashib is probably the high priest named in Nehemiah 3:1,20.
 - c. "The practice of these mixed marriages, in open neglect or violation of the law had become so common, that even the pontifical house, which ought to have set a better example, was polluted by such an impure mixture. Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of ...our God—the particular chamber or cell at the gates, where all things pertaining to the temple service were kept. Was allied unto Tobiah. This person was the high priest (Neh 12:28; also Neh 3:1), who, by virtue of his dignified office, had the superintendence and control of the apartments attached to the temple. The laxity of his principles, as well as of his practice, is sufficiently apparent from his contracting a family connection with so notorious an enemy of Israel as Tobiah. But his obsequious attentions had carried him much further; because, to accommodate so important a person as Tobiah on his occasional visits to Jerusalem, Eliashib had provided him a splendid apartment in the temple. The introduction of so gross an impropriety can be accounted for in no other way than by supposing that, in the absence of the priests and the cessation of the services, the temple was regarded as a common public building, which might in the circumstances, be appropriated as a palatial residence" [Jamieson, Biblesoft].

2. Verse 6: "But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king."
 - a. Nehemiah had journeyed to Jerusalem during the 20th year of Artaxerxes, and remained there until the king's 32nd year.
 - b. The events being described to this point in the chapter had occurred while Nehemiah was back with the Persian king at Babylon. This verse indicates that after he spent some unspecified length of time there, he obtained permission from Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem.
3. Verse 7-9: "And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense."
 - a. Nehemiah's righteous wrath was stirred when he perceived the evil that Eliashib had done, wherefore he caused all of Tobiah's furniture to be cast out of the temple. Having the chambers cleansed, he brought the vessels of the temple back into their rightful place, along with the supplies for the sacrifices.
 - b. This reminds us of the two occasions when Jesus cleansed the temple of his time of the money-changers and other merchants, who had turned God's house into a den of thieves. He cleansed it toward the beginning of his ministry (John 2:13-17) and again just before his crucifixion (Matt. 21:12-13).
 - 1) John 2:13-17: "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."
 - 2) Matthew 21:12-13: "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

C. Nehemiah 13:10-14: Neglected Tithes Restored.

1. Verse 10: "And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field."
 - a. Eliashib's ungodly action had had a disastrous effect on the work of the Levites and singers; the regular services they performed were no longer being done, since they were not being provided for as the law had required.
 - b. These men had found it necessary to go back to the fields to provide for their families.
 2. Verses 11-13: "Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren."
 - a. The temple services had been neglected; in fact, Nehemiah speaks of the temple as having been forsaken. He brought the rulers together, and "contended" with them over this problem. He "set them in their place."
 - b. The people of Judah began to bring the supplies into the treasuries as they were supposed to do. He set men over the supplies, and distribution was again made to the Levites and others.
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3. Verse 14: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof."
 - a. Once more, the great man offered a brief prayer to God. He was sorely tried by the foolishness of others. It must have been a terrible ordeal for him to endure, for as quickly as he solved one problem, another difficulty arose.
 - b. He asks God to remember the good deeds he had been able to do in behalf of the temple and its various offices. Without his being there, one can well believe that the nation might have fully apostatized in a short time. We have reason to be thankful for those loyal servants who are always on the job, serving faithfully in whatever capacity opportunity gives them.

D. Nehemiah 13:15-22: Sabbath-breaking Broken Up.

1. Verse 15: "In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals."
 - a. The problems were unending! He saw in Judah certain people working and conducting business on the sabbath. The Law was very specific regarding the use of the sabbath day. No work was to be done.
 - b. Nehemiah could have closed his eyes to these offenses, but did not. He testified against the guilty parties. Compare: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul" (Ezek. 3:17-19).
 2. Verse 16: "There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem."
 - a. There were also merchants from Tyre who came to Jerusalem and sold their wares on the sabbath day unto the people of Judah. The law of the sabbath did not pertain to the Gentiles; they did not violate the law because the law did not apply to them: "The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day....And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deut. 5:3,15).
 - b. However, the Jews violated the law of the sabbath by purchasing goods from the Gentiles on that holy day. The Gentiles did evil in that they caused the Jews to commit sin. If it was wrong to buy supplies on the sabbath, it was wrong to sell supplies on the sabbath, in Jewish places.
 - c. Some may try to justify the selling of intoxicants by saying that someone will sell liquor [if we do not]; but if it is wrong to drink liquor, it is wrong to sell it.
 3. Verses 17-18: "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, 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."
 - a. Nehemiah confronted the nobles of Judah over this sinful arrangement. He brought to their attention the fact that they did evil in that they profaned the sabbath day. To profane something holy is to use it in a common way. They made the sabbath day into a common day, and did not keep it holy: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within
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thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8-11).

- b. He reminded them that the terrible evil the Jews had endured, from the time the Babylonians came unto the present, was brought upon them on account of their forefathers having profaned the sabbath. He warned them that their sinful conduct could bring more wrath from God on them.
4. Verses 19-20: "And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice."
 - a. He took direct action to prevent future violations of the sabbath law in Jerusalem. When night drew near just before the beginning of the sabbath, he commanded that the gates of the city be closed, and that they should not be opened until the sabbath had ended. He also placed servants at the gates so that no one would bear burdens on the holy day. The Jewish method of dividing the days seems strange to us. A day began in the evening, not at midnight. The full night portion of the day preceded the full daylight portion, and thus constituted a day. Our modern days follow the Roman pattern—a day starts at midnight and ends at the following midnight.
 - b. After having to remain outside the city a time or two, the merchants soon learned to cease conducting their business on the sabbath!
 5. Verses 21-22: "Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy."
 - a. While the merchants waited outside the walls, Nehemiah threatened them with punishment if he found them there again. From that time forth, they did not come to the city on the sabbath.
 - b. He directed the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and guard the gates, and so to sanctify the sabbath day.
 - c. Again, he calls on God to remember him, and render to him according to the Lord's great mercies.

E. Nehemiah 13:23-31: Heathen Marriages Broken Up.

1. Verses 23-24: "In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people."
 - a. Nehemiah beheld another problem which needed to be corrected. There were Jews who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. This was in violation of the Mosaic Law (see Ezra 9,10).
 - b. The speech of the children was impure; it was half the speech of their mothers and half of the Jewish language. A similar problem develops in the Lord's church occasionally, in which untaught members use terms that are foreign to Biblical phraseology. We must be committed to the proposition of calling Bible things by Bible names, and doing Bible things in Bible ways.
 2. Verses 25-26: "And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin."
 - a. Such a serious problem requires drastic measures to correct. Nehemiah, having civil authority as governor of the province, smote some of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them perform an oath that they would not permit intermarriage with the heathen in the future. He *cursed* them in
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- the sense of strongly exposing their sin; he showed them the terrible consequences of these violations.
- 1) Luke 12:4-5: "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."
 - 2) Hebrews 10:31: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"
 - 3) Hebrews 12:29: "For our God *is* a consuming fire."
- b. He reminded them of the results of Solomon's sins in this same matter. He had taken many wives from among the pagans of his time, and although he had a wonderful standing in the sight of God, he committed grievous sins in marrying those outlandish women (Deut. 7:3-4; 1 Kings 11:1ff). These women were idolaters, and were able to lead even the wise man Solomon to worship idols.
- 1) Deuteronomy 7:3-4: "Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly."
 - 2) 1 Kings 11:1-4: "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father."
3. Verses 27-28: "Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me."
- a. He demanded to know whether he should listen to them, and permit them to continue in this ungodly practice. The choice was to heed the will of God or the wishes of sinful men. The correct option was simple!
 - b. One of the violators was the son of Eliashib the high priest; this man had married the daughter of Sanballat, the avowed enemy of Israel, whose wicked affairs were discussed earlier in the book. Nehemiah chased this son of Eliashib from him. He would no longer be permitted to serve in the Levitical order.
4. Verse 29: "Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites."
- a. The great man prays again, calling on God to remember the evil these men had done his cause; they had defiled the priesthood, the covenant of the priesthood, and the Levitical order.
 - b. Knowing the will of God, and understanding the contaminating nature of sin, Nehemiah's prayer is in the best interest of the nation. Left unchecked and unpunished, the sinful activities described would quickly soil the whole nation, and hinder the purposes of God.
5. Verses 30-31: "Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good."
- a. Nehemiah caused those who had married pagan women to be cleansed (See Ezra 9, 10). These men put away their outlandish wives.
 - b. He set in office those priests and Levites whose responsibility it was to conduct the various affairs of the temple.
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- c. He concludes the book by calling on God to remember him for good.

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