

after coming from Babylon. They had agreed to correct the situation by putting away the strange wives. The priests mentioned in verse 15 took active charge of the ceremonies, but the transaction needed to be "checked" by other and superior men. For this work Ezra took some chief fathers and sat down to the task of reviewing the work that had been done. They began their work the 1st day of the 10th month. It had been started about the 20th of the 9th month (V. 9), which means that Jonathan and his helpers got a 10-day start ahead of Ezra's review work.

Verse 17. *First day of the first month* means, of the next year following the arrival in Jerusalem; so that we see the work of Ezra in examining the work of Jonathan required two months. All of this shows that care was taken in this serious business, so that the national personnel would again be pure.

Verse 18. As a rule, what is wrong for one man is wrong for another. A thing may be a greater wrong in one man, though, than in another, from the standpoint of his influence. For instance, a priest was more prominent in his position with the congregation, hence a wrong committed by him would be more outstanding. This is the reason this verse names certain men in the priestly group who had taken strange wives. The priests were expected to teach the people the law (Lev. 10: 11; Deut. 17: 9; Mal. 2: 7), therefore their sin was the less excusable.

Verse 19. The priests *gave their hands* which is a phrase that means they made a solemn promise to correct their wrongs. That was done first by putting away their strange wives; but that did not clear them before God. The law of Moses made provision that certain sacrifices should be offered to atone for sins called trespass. (Lev. 6: 6.) This service was performed by these men because they were *guilty*.

Verses 20-22. This paragraph is a continuation of the thoughts in verse 19. The same remarks would apply to these priests that were made at the preceding verse. But after having named a few of the priests and describing their actions regarding the strange wives, the inspired writer considered that to be a precedent for other like cases, hence the list making up this paragraph with nothing specified but their names.

Verse 23. All priests were Levites,

but not all Levites were priests. The preceding paragraphs listed the names of some Levites who were priests. The men named in this were Levites but not priests. It would be taken for granted they would follow the example of other Levites in the disposal of their wives, and in other duties.

Verse 24. David had formulated a group of Israelites whose special part of the services was the singing. In 1 Chr. 6: 31 a reference is made to certain men whom he had set over the service of song in the house of the Lord. Their exercises were accompanied with instrumental music generally. Among the units connected with this service were the *sons of Asaph* (1 Chr. 25: 1), and the classification of singers finally became very distinct. The fact accounts for their being specifically mentioned in the list of men we are now considering. The porters composed another special group of servants about the buildings of the Lord. Their work was equivalent to gatekeepers or janitors. They were somewhat prominent and thus became entitled to special mention in the account of the irregular marriages.

Verses 25-43. This long list of names has been grouped into one paragraph because nothing peculiar to any one of them is said. The list starts with the words of *Israel*. That means that after the mention of the special classes included in the preceding verses, all the rest to be named as being guilty were Israelites in general.

Verse 44. One statement was made that was common to all of this long list; they had taken strange wives. The specification for some of them was that they had children by these wives. That, in fact, was one of the main objections to these unlawful marriages. God had promised to Abraham that he should have a numerous race of descendants, through whom a seed would be given to the world for a universal blessing. Also, these descendants were to compose a nation that was to possess the land to which he was being led. In order to accomplish the two promises to the patriarch, it was necessary to keep the blood line pure, unmixed with that of outside races. That is the special reason it was forbidden to beget children by wives of an alien nation.

NEHEMIAH 1

Verse 1. Make the following notation in the 6th column of the chart: "20th

year, Nehemiah is permitted to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem." Since the events of the preceding book, 13 years have rolled away. (Ch. 2:1.) We are told in direct language that Nehemiah is the author of this book. We will not be confused, therefore, by the use of the pronoun in the 3rd person. *Shushan* was another form of *Susa*, which became the capital of the Persian Empire from the days of Darius Hystaspes. At the time our subject opens, Nehemiah was in this city a personal attendant of the king Artaxerxes.

Verse 2. Nehemiah asked about the Jews who had *escaped*. We ordinarily think of that word as meaning one who had to elude his captor and get away without leave. It does not mean that in this place. The word is from an original that is defined "deliverance" in the lexicon. It is said with reference to the Jews who had been in captivity, but had been given their freedom by the ones who had them in their control. Many of these were in Palestine and living in the vicinity of Jerusalem; concerning them Nehemiah made his inquiry of some individuals who had returned to Persia.

Verse 3. The report given to Nehemiah was very disheartening. Mention was made of the condition of the walls. In the time of Zerubbabel (Ezr. 4:12) we read that the walls were set up, having been thrown down prior to that, and the present account sounds as if the condition had just been made known. But we should remember that the time of Zerubbabel was almost a century before this experience of Nehemiah, and in that period they had again been let fall into decay. In those times of almost constant difficulties with neighboring governments, a wall about a city was of utmost importance. That is why there is such frequent mention of fenced (walled) cities. We may well understand, then, why Nehemiah was so affected by the report.

Verse 4. *Mourned certain days* merely means he mourned for some time. Fasting was not generally commanded in the law, but was endorsed when done voluntarily. It was common for men to go on a fast when under great concern or anxiety. Of course we would expect a righteous man like Nehemiah to pray also at such times.

Verse 5. To *beseech* means to pray very earnestly. *Terrible God* means he is a God to be respected and rever-

enced. God's mercy is offered on condition of obedience.

Verse 6. No human is absolutely perfect, and a man like Nehemiah would be the last to make such a claim. He therefore expressed his penitence in this prayer. His confession did not mean necessarily that his personal life had been corrupt in the things that brought about the downfall of his nation. It had been about 100 years since the captivity, and he could not have been directly active in the national wrongs. He was speaking rather for the nation as a whole. The New Testament teaches us that the eyes and ears of the Lord are favorable toward the righteous (1 Pe. 3:12). In accordance with that truth, Nehemiah made his prayer to God.

Verse 7. *We have dealt* shows the prayer and confession referred to the nation as a whole, and not to Nehemiah personally. The *commandments* of the Lord mean his law as a whole. The *statutes* were the formal edicts or decrees enacted independent of the conditions, and the *judgments* were the decisions of the Lord rendered upon occasions that came up. However a decision was made on any special occasion, it became a fixed law for all other like cases.

Verse 8. *Commandest thy servant Moses* means he commanded Moses to give it to the people. This is another place that shows the error of those who try to distinguish between the "law of God" and the "law of Moses." They are the same as far as authority is concerned, so that all that Moses wrote is as much in force today as any certain part of it is. The word under present consideration plainly declared that if the people transgressed the law of God, they would be scattered among the nations. Nehemiah was mindful of the justice dealt out to his people, that it was in accordance with the word of God. But it had a redeeming feature which the prayer included, and it will be shown in the next verse.

Verse 9. On condition of repentance, God has always been willing to forgive his wayward people. Looking to that provision in the divine plan, Nehemiah pled for mercy and help for his afflicted people in Jerusalem. God had promised to recover his people even though scattered afar, when they would have returned to him in their hearts.

Verse 10. The Lord does not need any human information. He knows

who are his people and who are not. The language of Nehemiah, therefore, was a part of an earnest prayer for divine guidance. He expressed his belief in the great power of God.

Verse 11. Most of this verse is the same as the preceding ones in its sentiments. Nehemiah had been praying for the help of God and in general terms. He now came to particulars and asked that God cause mercy to be shown him by *this man*. The antecedent of the pronoun is the king of Persia as the closing sentence shows. A *cupbearer* is described in Smith's Bible Dictionary as follows: "An officer of high rank with Egyptian, Persian, and Assyrian as well as Jewish monarchs. 1 Kings 10: 5. It was his duty to fill the king's cup and present it to him personally."

NEHEMIAH 2

Verse 1. It will be well to consult the chart again, noting that we are in the 20th year of the reign of Artaxerxes. *Wine was before him* means he was having an indulgence of his favorite refreshment. At such times Nehemiah performed his personal duty, to fill a cup and hand it to the king. Such a service was not a difficult one, and to render it to a king with the temperament this king seemed to possess would be a pleasant task. For these reasons Nehemiah had never shown such a state of sadness as he did at this time, which attracted the attention of the king.

Verse 2. Having noticed the expression on the face of Nehemiah, that it was unusual, the king made some remarks about it. He knew that his servant was not sick physically, therefore concluded the condition to be one of the heart. That was what he meant by the expression *sorrow of heart*, that it was a condition of great worry. Sore afraid means he was greatly concerned. He had not realized how much the worry of the report had affected his general attitude and facial expression.

Verse 3. With all due respect for his king, Nehemiah told him the cause for his sorrow. The place of burial was always considered as something sacred even by the heathen. It was an important explanation, therefore, for Nehemiah to make this report.

Verse 4. The king asked him what he wanted to do, and the indications are that he encouraged him to expect great privileges. Upon such a weighty

matter Nehemiah did not feel ready to decide without divine guidance. That is why he *prayed to God*.

Verse 5. After his prayer to God, Nehemiah asked the privilege of going to Jerusalem to have it repaired in the walls.

Verse 6. The request of Nehemiah was granted. The hearing must have been very impressive. Artaxerxes had called for his wife to sit by him while the conversation was had. An esteemed personal attendant upon the king of Persia was about to be given leave of absence for a time, the length of which was to be determined by the servant. Ch. 5: 14 shows the time set was 12 years.

Verse 7. A man who has been in the employ of a great king should not be seen out from his territory without good cause. The secondary officers of Artaxerxes who were in the immediate vicinity of the capital might easily be made to understand why such a servant was at large. It would be different with the ones *beyond the river*, which means west of the Euphrates River. To avoid any difficulty, therefore, Nehemiah asked for letters showing his right to travel even as far as to Judah. Not only that the officers would not try to stop him, but would furnish him a conveyance.

Verse 8. The king granted to Nehemiah the letter he requested, which included the order for material from the keeper of the *forest*. Since this forest was a place of timber, and also since the original word is related to our English word "paradise," the reader might appreciate it if I take some space to quote from the authorities on the origin and meaning of the word, as follows: "PARADEISOS. '(Thought by some to be of Armenian, but by most, to be of Persian origin); 1. Among the Persians, a grand enclosure or preserve, hunting ground, park, shady and well-watered, in which wild animals were kept for the hunt; it was enclosed by walls and furnished with towers for the hunters.'—Xenophon, Cyropedia, 1-3-14; Anab. 1-2-7-9. '2. Universally, a garden, pleasure-ground; grove, park: Josephus, Antiquities, Book 7, Chapter 14, Section 4. Sus. 4-7-15; Sir. 24: 30; and so it passed into the Hebrew language, Neh. 2: 8; Eccl. 2: 5; Song of Solomon, 4: 13; besides in the Septuagint [Greek translation of the Old Testament] mostly for . . .; thus for that delightful region, the garden of Eden, in

which our first parents dwelt before the fall: Gen. 2: 8. 3. That part of Hades which was thought by the later Jews to be the abode of the souls of the pious until the resurrection: Lk. 23: 43. But some (e. g. Dillman) understand that passage of the heavenly paradise. 4. An upper region in the heavens: 2 Cor. 12: 4 (where some maintain, others deny, that the term is equivalent to *HO TRITOS OURANOS* in V. 2): with the addition of *TOU THEOU*, genitive of the possessor, the abode of God and heavenly beings, to which true Christians will be taken after death. Rev. 2: 7.—Thayer. 'Paradise, a region of beauty; Armenian *PARDES*, a garden or park around the house, planted with grass, herbs, trees, for use and ornament. In the Hebrew form . . . , and Greek *PARADEISOS*, it is applied to the pleasure gardens and parks with wild animals around the country residences of the Persian monarchs and princes, Neh. 2: 8; Eccl. 2: 5; Song of Solomon 4: 13; Xenophon *Cycropaedia* 1-3-14. In like manner of the Jewish kings, Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 7, Chapter 14, Section 4. Book 8, Chapter 7, Section 3. Hence in the Septuagint [Greek translation of the Old Testament], of the garden of Eden, *PARADEISOS* for Beh. . . in Gen. 2: 8; Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 3 . . . Hence in the later Jewish usage and in the New Testament, paradise is put for the abode of the blessed after death, viz. 1. The inferior paradise, or the region of the blessed in Hades, Luke 23: 43. Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book 18; Chapter 1, Section 3. 2. Specifically, *HO PARADEISOS TOU THEOU*, the paradise of God, the celestial paradise, where the spirits of the just dwell with God, 2 Cor. 12: 4, equal to *HO TRITOS OURANOS* in verse 3; see Rev. 2: 7 where the imagery is drawn from Gen. 2: 8.—Robinson. '(Pers., in Heb. . .), a park, a forest where wild beasts were kept for hunting; a pleasure park, a garden of trees of various kinds; a delightful grove, Eccl. 2: 5; Song of Solomon, 4: 13; used in the LXX [Septuagint] for the garden of Eden, or of delight, Gen. 2: 8; in the New Testament, the celestial paradise, that part of Hades in which the souls of believers enjoy happiness, and where God dwells. Lk. 23: 43; 2 Cor. 12: 4; Rev. 2: 7.'—Greenfield. Note: from above it can be seen that *PARDES* in the Old Testament is similar if not equivalent to *PARADEISOS* in the New Testament. We know that the parks of the Persians have been dis-

carded or will be, yet no one argues from that fact that the Paradise of God, whose name has been taken from those parks, will ever be discarded. A similar line of reasoning should be had with reference to the origin of the Greek word for Gehenna, which will be introduced in the New Testament Commentary. A word may originate from some thing or practice that finally ceases to exist, and yet still be applied to something that is permanent or endless in its existence.

Verse 9. Artaxerxes was very considerate of Nehemiah. He not only gave him letters of introduction to the governors west of the Euphrates, but furnished him a military escort. The preceding verse explains this all to have been the hand of God.

Verse 10. Sanballat was a Persian ruler under the authority of Artaxerxes, stationed in Samaria. Tobiah was a Samaritan by race, and a slave of Sanballat. The two were united in their opposition to the work of Nehemiah. They were unfriendly toward the Jews, and hence felt grieved to see anyone doing something in their behalf.

Verse 11. The situation was somewhat tense, so Nehemiah was not hasty in starting operations; he waited 3 days after arriving in Jerusalem.

Verse 12. Nehemiah knew that he would likely be opposed in his work. He did not want to expose himself to the enemy any more nor any sooner than necessary. His first investigation, therefore, was in the night. He went about it very quietly. He took a few men with him, evidently for protection only. He did not tell them what he had in mind, and did not let them have horses to ride. They had to go on foot while he alone had the use of a horse.

Verse 13. Of course we would not expect Nehemiah to make a minute inspection of all the parts of the wall, especially at night; he made a general survey. The cities with walls had gates at certain places where special interests would draw crowds. And the gates would be named after these special interests, or perhaps be located by some natural significance. The *dragon well* was a fountain having that name, for what reason we are not told. Since this fountain would be visited frequently, a gate was made in the wall at that place. One gate was called *gate of the valley* because it opened out near one of the depressions near the city. *Dung port*. The second

word means "gate." The first is from SHEPHOTH and Strong defines it, "a heap of rubbish or filth." Smith's Bible Dictionary says the following about the subject: "The uses of dung were twofold—as manure and as fuel. The manure consisted either of straw steeped in liquid manure, Isa. 25: 10, or the sweepings, Isa. 5: 25, of the streets and roads, which were carefully removed from the houses, and collected in heaps outside the walls of the towns and fixed spots—hence the dung-gate at Jerusalem—and thence removed in due course to the fields." All of this information explains why there would be a port [all] or gate at this spot and be so named. Nehemiah made inspection at these places and found the walls and gates in a dilapidated condition.

Verse 14. Such places as fountains and pools would be visited frequently, which would call for the convenience of a gate. Nehemiah tried to inspect some of these spots but they were not passable for his horse.

Verse 15. He came up from another angle; by the brook. From here he examined the condition of the wall, then retraced his journey. He re-entered the city at the gate of the valley, the place where he had begun his tour of inspection (V. 13).

Verse 16. The persons named were outstanding citizens of the country. The priests were a religious class and the others were assorted according to either social or industrial classification. Nehemiah kept his preliminary investigation unknown to all of them, until he had returned.

Verse 17. After returning within the limits of the city he made known the conditions. We understand that the ruins of the wall were visible, so that the writer could refer to the various gates and other parts of the wall or structure. But the ruin was so great that it would be necessary to rebuild it as if it never had existed.

Verse 18. Nehemiah told his fellow Jews of the encouragement he had, both from God and the king of Persia. The effect of his report on the conditions, together with the encouraging assurances, was immediately favorable. They proposed going right to the work of building. *Strengthened their hands* means they took courage and resolved to take hold of the work with a willing mind.

Verse 19. The population of the

country was a mixture of the various peoples since the days of the captivity. Sanballat had been placed in a position of authority under the Persians, Tobiah was a slave of his. The Arabians came from Ishmael, son of Abraham, but had become a race to themselves. They were known as foreigners to the pure stock of Israel. The whole group here named became concerned over the activities of Nehemiah. When Zerubbabel started his work about a century before, the "outsiders" offered to help but were rejected. Doubtless that had been recorded and Sanballat knew he would not be permitted to have anything to do with it. These enemies, therefore, took an attitude of "sour grapes" toward the work. *Laughed us to scorn* means they derided or made fun of them. *Despised us* means they belittled them, and in a flippant spirit accused them of rebelling against the king.

Verse 20. The attitude of the enemies did not discourage Nehemiah. He did not honor them even by denying their foolish accusation. Instead, he affirmed that God would help them so that the building would be done. Moreover, he gave them to understand that they would not be allowed to have any part in the matter.

NEHEMIAH 3

Verse 1. In this great work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, all classes and ranks of men took part. The chapter recounts the order in which the different workmen were located on their jobs at the particular places on the wall. It was necessary to describe the separate parts one at a time, and in the order in which they were placed. But we should understand that all of the parts were built up at the same time (Ch. 4: 6). The description of the work started with the *sheep gate*. See my comments at Ch. 2: 13 on the importance of gates. Since this gate was where the description of the work began and ended, it must have been of special interest. I shall quote what Smith's Bible Dictionary says about it: "Sheep-gate, The, one of the gates of Jerusalem as rebuilt by Nehemiah. Neh. 3: 1, 32; 12: 39. It stood between the tower of Meah and the chamber of the corner, Ch. 3: 1, 32, or the gate of the guard-house, Ch. 12: 39; Authorized Version, 'prison-gate.' The latter seems to have been at the angle formed by the junction of the wall of the city of David

with that of the city of Jerusalem proper, having the sheep-gate on the north of it. The position of the sheep-gate may therefore have been on or near that of the Bal el Kattanin." It is easy to understand why the sheep gate would be important. There were thousands of sheep driven into the city each year to be offered in sacrifice. It would be natural, then, that a place would be sanctified or devoted to such a sacred purpose. *Tower of Meah . . . Hananeel*. Towers were fortified structures elevated on the walls of cities and other places requiring defense. They served also as lookouts against any approaching enemy. There were no less than 6 of these towers on the wall of Jerusalem, two of which are named in this verse. These towers were given individual names, but the origin of such names is not told us.

Verse 2. Citizens from various cities came in a body to the work. The men of Jericho were given the place next to that of the high priest.

Verse 3. Smith's Bible Dictionary says that among the purposes of the gates of eastern cities was that of public markets. We understand, therefore, that the fish gate was the place where fish were bought and sold. That part of the wall was built by the sons of Hassenaah. Since the work was extensive and many workmen were needed, the mention of the men in given cases may be all we can know of them. The part mentioned indicates that a gate of such walls that surrounded the great cities had a very complete formation. They had to be made strong against the battering rams of an invading force attempting to overthrow the structure.

Verse 4. The simple information in this verse is the fact that *Meremoth*, *Meshullam* and *Zadok* each were placed in order upon the repair work of the wall.

Verse 5. Certain groups came in a body to the city to join in the work. These groups would be assigned to their proper places on the job, and it would then be up to the group to make their own distribution of the workers as to turns. The unit as a whole would get the credit for assistance in the project, although certain individuals in the unit might be shirkers. So in this place, there was the work of the Tekoites, people of Tekoa. The common people among them worked on the job, but the nobles or the ones who

thought they were more important, felt above the work.

Verse 6. We have no information especially applicable to the *old gate*. It was doubtless so called because it was among the first to be built, and made on the general requirement for gates. Two men, *Jehoiada* and *Meshullam* were assigned this old gate.

Verse 7. A throne does not always signify the place of a monarch. The original word here is also translated by seat and stool. It means the headquarters of the man who was the governor of the province. It was near the wall and the persons named worked on that span of it that extended between this seat and the old gate.

Verse 8. The wall was evidently heavier or broader in some places than in others. Such parts would need no special fortification, but would be a fortification in itself. The tradesmen mentioned in this verse added certain fortifications to their repair of the wall, until it reached to the *broad wall* as stated above.

Verse 9. A *ruler* of the kind mentioned here does not mean specifically an official in the ordinary sense of the word. It is from *SAR* and Strong defines it, "a head person (of any rank or class)." It has been rendered by captain, chief, general, governor, keeper, lord, master, prince and steward. The meaning is, this man had a high prestige over one half of the city. It would be significant, therefore, that such a man contributed to the humble work of rebuilding the wall, consisting of manual labor.

Verse 10. *Jedaiah* lived either within the limits of Jerusalem, or near it on the outside. He was assigned that part of the wall near his house.

Verse 11. *Malchijah* repaired the *other piece*. That means the second section of the part that was repaired by Hattush in the preceding verse. One of the towers described previously in this chapter was near the furnaces or ovens. That would be an important point because of its connection with the provisions for the tables. It was necessary, therefore, that one of these fortifications be near these ovens.

Verse 12. Verse 9 told of one man with certain influences over half of the city. This verse tells of the other half of the city under a like oversight, represented by Shallum and his daughter.

Verse 13. *Valley gate* was so named because it opened out upon one of the

depressions near the city. The work of these people reached from this gate to the *dung gate*. See Ch. 2: 13 for comments on this place. Hanun's work stopped at this last gate.

Verse 14. The *dung gate* itself was repaired by Malchiah. He had a position similar to these other rulers already described. His home community was at Beth-haccerem which was near Bethlehem.

Verse 15. This fountain is referred to in Ch. 2: 14. It was a place of much water for Nehemiah's horse could not pass over the spot. A gate was to be built there and the work was in charge of Shallum. This man was another ruler of the vicinity of Mizpah. Siloa is another form of "Siloam," and we recall that a pool was at that place (John 9: 7). The king also had a garden near the spot, and in connection with all these interesting things were some steps constructed leading from the district of Jerusalem called Zion or the city of David. The part of the wall enclosing all these objects was in charge of this same man, Shallum.

Verse 16. The name *Nehemiah* is a coincidence with the author of this book. He was another one of the kind of rulers that means men of influence. His territory was half of the town of Beth-zur. His work on the wall reached from that of Shallum to the part of the city where the burial ground of David was. His span of the work also passed the pool (2 Ki. 20: 20), and the *house of the mighty*, which was an arsenal.

Verse 17. The two Levites were Rehum and Hashabiah. The last named was another ruler, or man of personal influence, and his part of the territory for such prestige was half of the town of Keilah.

Verse 18. Bavai was the ruler having the other half of Keilah. He and several others named in the chapter were Levites.

Verse 19. Another *piece* means another section of the wall. *Armoury* is from NESHEQ and Strong defines it, "military equipment, i. e. (collectively) arms (offensive or defensive), or (concretely) an arsenal." *Turning of the wall* means the corner of it. This man repaired that part of the wall that went near the arsenal and on to the corner of the enclosure of the city.

Verse 20. Baruch had a section of the wall beginning at the corner that

we have just turned, and reaching as far as the opening made for the house of the high priest.

Verse 21. The house of the high priest would certainly not be of excessive length. Yet Meremoth was assigned only that much of the wall as reached from the door of this house to the end of it.

Verse 22. *The priests* who worked on this job were the ones of the descendants of Aaron who were eligible for the office. There were a great many of them by this time. Not all who were thus qualified were in active priestly service, but all of them would be called *priests* as regards the work on the wall. However, the unit of these priests who worked on this section of the wall were the ones from a distinct locality called *the plain*. The singular pronoun is used when we know that a number of men worked. That is because each group would be under the foremanship of one man.

Verse 23. The three men named in this verse lived near the wall and they were assigned the section nearest their homes. That was not only a gracious provision, but it enabled them to lose less time getting to their work. It was necessary for them to go to their houses occasionally (Ch. 4: 23).

Verse 24. Certain men had homes near the wall, and their houses were used as the marking place of beginning of some section of the wall. Binnui had the section extending from the spot near the home of Azariah to the next corner of the structure.

Verse 25. This section was repaired by two men, and the part of their assignment began just at the corner that was left by Binnui, and extended past one of the towers described previously. This tower was especially important, because it overlooked the house of the king that was near the prison.

Verse 26. The *Nethinims* were a class of servants that originated in the days of Solomon. The objects that located the section assigned to them were, one of the gates and one of the towers referred to above. This particular tower was for the defense of this water gate, and it was on the east side of the city.

Verse 27. *Ophel* was a ridge of ground inside Jerusalem, and it was the site of certain dwellings. *Wall of Ophel* just means that part of the wall reaching that far. The *Tekoites* were inhabitants of Tekoa.

Verse 28. Some more of the priests (descendants of Aaron), lived near the wall connected with the horse gate. This was a gate used for the entrance of these animals when they were to be brought in for any purpose. These priests were permitted to have this portion of the wall. It would give them the same advantages mentioned in V. 23.

Verse 29. Zadok was another man who lived near the wall, and he had his work there, which joined up with the work of the priests. The man who worked near him was the janitor of the east gate. Such men were sometimes called porters.

Verse 30. The section of the wall considered in this verse was repaired by three men. The last one named lived near the wall. See comments at V. 23.

Verse 31. The section of the wall considered in this verse reached from the spot near the chamber or house of Meshullam to the corner of the wall. This span went near one group of the Nethinims; a location of merchants; and one of the gates of the city. This particular gate was named Miphkad for some reason not given in the history.

Verse 32. This section reached from the corner to the sheep gate, the place of the beginning. The last phrase means the beginning of the chapter and thus the beginning of the description of the project. The work was all in operation at the same time (Ch. 4: 6). We are not given any information as to the comparative extent or difficulty of the various sections of the wall referred to in this chapter. Neither do we know the exact number of men who worked on any given part. But since the whole work went up together, we must conclude that proper consideration was given to the subject. Just the right men and number of them, and with the proper qualifications, would be assigned to the several divisions of the great wall, so that no confusion or misfits would occur. The project went forward as one grand piece of work until it reached a harmonious and complete whole.

NEHEMIAH 4

Verse 1. Sanballat was the man who expressed his displeasure at first hearing of the coming of Nehemiah. He had no good feeling for the Jews and was grieved at the mere thought that anyone would do a favor for them.

Now he was still more worked up over the fact that the wall was being built. He knew of the letters of authority that Nehemiah had from the king, and knew he would have no right to interfere. But he mocked or made fun of the work.

Verse 2. Sanballat feared lest his people become interested in the project of the Jews and perhaps lend them moral support at least. To prevent this, he tried to belittle the work, or to make it appear that they were undertaking that which was impossible. *Make an end in a day* is figurative, and implied that Nehemiah expected to accomplish the work in a very short time. He intimated that it would be an almost endless task to clear away the rubbish and get such a great wall built again. He failed to consider that the Jews had a God who was above all others, and that he would be a source of strength to his people in times of need or adversity.

Verse 3. It is almost amusing to observe how the enemy tried to encourage each the other. They were really feeling sorry for one another, but pretended to think the work of the Jews was a useless fabrication. Tobiah was near Sanballat when he was making his belittling speech. So he added his mite of condolence with the extravagant statement that a fox could overthrow the work. When a man will make such a ridiculous statement as that, it is evident that he is really concerned about the very thing he is belittling and pretending to regard as of no importance.

Verse 4. *We are despised* means they were being treated with contempt. Nehemiah heard of the reproachful sayings, and prayed to God that their reproach be turned back upon themselves. That is, be made to feel the sting of their own spiteful words.

Verse 5. The Bible teaches that God will always forgive when the guilty ones become penitent and comply with the terms of pardon. These enemies of the Jews were not God's people and would not be inclined to make the proper approach to him for the securing of forgiveness. If God did cover or blot out their iniquity and sin, it would be by sheer favor. Such forgiveness was what Nehemiah prayed God not to grant them.

Verse 6. *All the wall was joined together unto the half thereof*. Moffatt's translation words this, "So we built the wall to half its height all round."

The versions are both correct, but having the two, the thought is more clarified. The meaning is that all the parts of the wall were joined together as the work progressed. At the time referred to, the wall had been built up to half its proper height. The explanation for the success was the fact that the people *had a mind to work*. And it does not mean simply that they were active in the sense of being work-frenzied, but they were in tune with each other and cooperated in the whole proposition. Had that not been the case, the wall would have been built up at places, and lagging at others. As it was, every man worked in fellowship with his neighbor, and hence the wall was *all joined together*. This is a wonderful lesson to us on the advantage of cooperation in the work of the Lord. See Rom. 12: 16; 1 Cor. 1: 10; 3: 9; 2 Cor. 13: 11.

Verse 7. The persons named were a mixture of various clans and tribes of idolatrous people inhabiting Palestine at the time Nehemiah came to repair the walls. They had been living in unmolested enjoyment of the country for many years, and it grieved them to see the prospect of having their reign of iniquity disturbed. *Were made up* does not mean the walls were completed. The marginal translation combines the three words into one word, "ascended," and the lexicon agrees with it. Also, it agrees with the language in the preceding verse. Seeing the successful progress of the wall, these men were filled with wrath.

Verse 8. To *conspire* means to join together for some unlawful purposes. In this case it was with intent of fighting against the work at Jerusalem.

Verse 9. This verse combines the same items as a command of Christ to his disciples in Matt. 26: 41. One duty cannot take the place of another, and in spiritual matters the same person can watch and pray at the same time. But there was a special reason for different forces to be assigned to the separate items in the case of Nehemiah. The work was of a material nature, although being done for the sake of the Lord's cause. The watching, therefore, was also literal, because they had to be on the alert for a possible physical attack from the enemy.

Verse 10. Even some of the Jews became discouraged. They imagined that the work of removing the rubbish was too strenuous for those who were supposed to carry it away.

Verse 11. Nehemiah had to hear the boasts of the enemy as well as the complaints of the men of Judah. They said that before the Jews realized it, they would be among them to kill the workmen and thus put a stop to the work.

Verse 12. There were some Jews living by the enemies referred to in the preceding verse. They caught the discouraging spirit of the enemy and came to Nehemiah with their tale of woe. *Ten times* is figurative, meaning they repeated their disconsolate speech over and over again. I like Moffatt's rendering of the latter part of this verse, which is as follows: "they kept telling us, 'They are gathering against us from all quarters.'"

Verse 13. Nehemiah was not entirely indifferent to the threats of the enemies. He began to strengthen his defenses by placing some families in the low and high places, and armed them with swords and other means of combat.

Verse 14. Nehemiah spoke to the heads of the people in behalf of their families. Having them there in their sight, they should be impressed with the necessity of defending them. He bade them trust in the Lord who is great. Under him they could fight for their wives and children, with assurance that victory would be theirs.

Verse 15. The "war scare" was over as soon as the enemy learned that the Jews were preparing for the worst. They ceased their threatening for the time being, and the men resumed their work on the wall.

Verse 16. While Nehemiah was not frightened by the threats of the enemy, he decided not to take any chances. From that time he used a special plan for the work. It was especially arranged for the men of Judah to strengthen their morale, as they were the ones who had been foremost in the complaints. As a greater precaution, half of the servants of Nehemiah were released from active duty on the wall so that they could be on constant guard. They were prepared for this defense with various weapons, and also were covered with a habergeon. That was a sort of metallic coat that was worn over the other clothing for protection from the darts of the enemy.

Verse 17. There were the masons and others who worked on the wall. They had to be furnished with materials that were borne on the shoulders

of men called "burden bearers," and some others were needed to lay the materials on the shoulders of the bearers. These three classes of workmen are meant in the forepart of this verse. Even all of these men were directed to carry a weapon in one hand. That would explain why they needed some to lay the load on the shoulders of the carriers.

Verse 18. We thus see that all the classes of workers, whether engaged directly on the wall or in attending on them, were armed and prepared to fight if need be, as well as to work. The same principle is taught in the New Testament. Christians are commanded to work (Phil. 2: 12), and to fight (1 Tim. 6: 12). The use of the trumpeter standing by Nehemiah will be shown in the following paragraph.

Verses 19, 20. The wall was very great and the workers were necessarily scattered so that not many would be in any one section. Should the enemy observe that fact, he might select some one of the more scattered groups and direct his attack there. The trumpeter was therefore expected to sound an alarm and all the others were to rush to the place attacked and help in the defense. This is another principle taught in the New Testament. See Rom. 12: 15; 1 Cor. 12: 26; 1 Th. 5: 14. Nehemiah taught his people the idea of being coworkers with God; that man's efforts were required, but they alone would not win. Hence they were told that "our God shall fight for us."

Verse 21. The spears were already mentioned in V. 16. The added detail is given here as to the hours put in at the work. They were from daylight to full darkness. There was no such thing as "overtime" on that project.

Verse 22. When active duties had subsided on account of the nightfall, there was still the necessity for the presence of the servants to act as guards. There never was a time when they could be said to be free from danger of the enemy. That is the same lesson that is taught in 1 Peter 5: 8.

Verse 23. The emergency created by the necessity of washing their clothes is what was referred to at Ch. 3: 23. See the comments at that place.

NEHEMIAH 5

Verses 1, 2. *We take up* means they needed corn for their children. They complained that the need was urgent

because there were many of them. For this great need they were crying to Nehemiah.

Verse 3. Some of the people claimed they had to mortgage their properties because of the shortage, to get food for their families.

Verse 4. Still others complained that they could not pay the tax required by the king, until they borrowed money. And the loan had to be secured by their land and vineyards, the very sources of their living.

Verse 5. The poorer Jews were being thus oppressed by their more fortunate brethren. They protested having their children, which they called their own flesh, to be placed at the mercy of their brethren. They insisted, and with truth, that the flesh or bodies of them and their children was just the same as that of their more fortunate brethren, as far as value was concerned. They declared that their plight was not to be helped, on account of the hold the lenders had on them.

Verse 6. Nehemiah was righteously indignant at the heartless treatment of his poor brethren. He felt that no reason existed for their actions.

Verse 7. *Consulted with myself* means that he thought over the subject, to determine what to do and say. He then rebuked the guilty ones and accused them of *exacting usury* of their brethren. The law forbade taking usury from the brethren (Ex. 22: 25), and these nobles were violating that law. Nehemiah then assembled a numerous throng to oppose this cruel disregard for the divine ordinance that had been given from Sinai.

Verse 8. *Redeemed our brethren*. When Nehemiah came back to Palestine he found that some of their brethren had been sold to the heathen. He had managed to buy a great many of them back. Now the Jews were putting their own people into the same kind of reproach through their financial dealings. By taking advantage of their straitened circumstances, they were making slaves of them just as certainly as the heathen had done. When Nehemiah caused them to see their transactions in the true light, they were made speechless, doubtless, from a feeling of shame.

Verse 9. It is always right to do right regardless of any other consideration. But an added reason exists in the fact that one's conduct is observed by the public. The heathen who were

in Palestine had known about the close dealings of heartless characters. Now if they beheld these Jews mistreating their own brethren, it will cause them to think of their profession of religion with contempt. This idea is taught in the New Testament. See Rom. 12: 17; 14: 16; 2 Cor. 6: 3; 1 Th. 4: 12.

Verse 10. Had it been right to exact payments of food from the people, Nehemiah and his servants would have had much the better claim for such a privilege. He was not doing so, and exhorted them not to do so any more. That is, not to take usury of their brethren for the loans they were making.

Verse 11. When a man goes into the commercial or industrial world to make a financial investment, it may be perfectly just. But that does not prove that it is right to make a profit off of those whose bodily needs call for assistance. Nehemiah knew that the whole situation was brought by the sore need of the poor brethren, and not as a legitimate business investment. He therefore bade the creditors restore all the money and properties that had been exacted as security.

Verse 12. We cannot but admire the spirit of these creditors. They evidently had not realized the real principle involved in their dealings, for they promptly agreed to do as Nehemiah requested. And to make the matter binding, he called for the priests who had the authority to administer an oath. Under oath the men were caused to promise to carry out the requirements of Nehemiah.

Verse 13. Shaking his lap was a physical illustration to signify the complete undoing that was to come to all who would break their oath. After the demonstration and comments thereon, the whole congregation voiced approval. We have the gratifying information that the promise was carried out.

Verse 14. This verse gives the information on the time that Nehemiah set under the king in Ch. 2: 6. He had been made governor over the land of Judah, to act under authority from Artaxerxes. Special provisions were made for whosoever was the acting governor of the country, and Nehemiah could have eaten of them lawfully. But he and his brethren supported themselves through the entire period of 12 years. He considered the straitened circumstances of the people and did not have the heart to take

advantage of his rights under the legal setup.

Verse 15. Judea (Judah) was a province of the Persian Empire after the fall of Babylon. Such distant units of that vast monarchy had to be under the supervision of local governors, and such officers drew their support from the money raised by taxation. The men who held that position before took advantage of that, and could do so lawfully as far as that was concerned. Nehemiah would have been lawfully entitled to the same privileges, but was so compassionate that he drew on his own private funds in order to relieve the poor people of the burden of taxation. The former governors not only made use of the tax money, but became oppressive in the exercise of their authority, and suffered their own servants to domineer over the people. The fear of God caused Nehemiah to have regard for his fellowman.

Verse 16. *Neither bought we any land.* This means that Nehemiah did not take advantage of the financial straitness of the people. They might have been compelled to sell their land to get their tax money, and Nehemiah could have obtained it under the terms of forced "tax sale," and thus to have enriched himself at the expense of the unfortunate. That would have put him in the class of the heartless characters spoken of by Christ (Matt. 23: 14) who would "devour widows' houses."

Verse 17. Nehemiah supported a large number of his own nation, and was so hospitable that many of the foreigners were invited to eat at his table.

Verse 18. *Prepared for me.* The last 2 words are not in the original. This vast amount of food was prepared for Nehemiah and his guests. A question may be in the mind of the student about where he obtained such a great supply of goods if he did not draw on the taxes of the land. We should remember that the Jews had been a free people for about a century. Their service to the king or other ruler was that of "hired servants." Nehemiah had a very high position of employment, in that he was a personal attendant of the king, with the honorable duty of serving him his wine. All the circumstances show that he stood high in the estimation of his royal employer, and it is reasonable to conclude that he received a liberal salary.

Verse 19. The prayer of Nehemiah for God's favor was based upon the good he was doing. That is the way it always has been with man's relation to the Lord. God is no respecter of persons, but does regard those who do good.

NEHEMIAH 6

Verse 1. In Ch. 4: 6 we learned that the wall was built up all around at the same time. That is what is meant in this verse by the words *no breach*. While the gates were not yet hung, the body of the wall was complete as far as it went.

Verse 2. The enemies had tried various means to hinder the work. They tried laughing at them (Ch. 4: 3), threatened to fight them (Ch. 4: 8), and next they tried to divert their attention by inviting them to a friendly meeting in one of the plains. Regardless of their purpose for such a meeting, had Nehemiah heeded their invitation it would have meant the loss of some time in the work of the Lord. Whatever time or effort is given to the cause of an enemy of the Lord, it is bound to be at the expense of the works of righteousness and to the advantage of evildoers.

Verse 3. The brief reply of Nehemiah is centered in the words *I am doing a great work*. There is no work possible as great as that of the Lord, and to switch from it to anything else whatsoever would be a downward move. That is why Nehemiah refused to come down to the enemies. Moreover, he said that he would not leave it and come down to them. That means that if a person devotes any of his time and effort to a work that is not the Lord's, he must necessarily desert that of the Lord; he cannot work at both at once. Christ taught the same thing in what he said about it being impossible for a man to serve two masters (Matt. 6: 24).

Verse 4. Persistence is a strong force and often will accomplish success when a single effort will fail. Sanballat knew this and tried it in his attempt to hinder the work on the wall. He made his proposition 4 times and was refused each time, so that his own persistence was matched by that of Nehemiah.

Verses 5, 6. The next move was to make a charge against Nehemiah and his brethren, that they were plotting a rebellion. They thought to strengthen the accusation by quoting

a man named Gashmu. He was an Arabian and was supposed to add weight to the report. But it did not, for he was only a famous gossip. The foolish statement was made that Nehemiah was building the wall with a view of becoming a king.

Verse 7. Everyone would know it to be a serious thing to make a prediction such as charged against Nehemiah. There was no truth in the accusation, but perhaps he might suspect that some of his over-zealous friends were doing such preaching unknown to him. If such should be going on it would reach the ears of Artaxerxes, and that would mean serious trouble. Now if Sanballat could influence Nehemiah to think such reports were going the rounds, he would become concerned and want to talk it over. So it was proposed that they take counsel together.

Verse 8. But Nehemiah understood the scheme and hurled back the accusation that Sanballat was making the report himself. He did not merely accuse him of helping to scatter a rumor that someone had started, but that he was the one who started it out of his own heart. That would mean that he was a wicked falsifier.

Verse 9. *They all made us afraid* is to be understood as meaning they thought to frighten them. They did not succeed as they hoped, for Nehemiah had faith in God. However, he was not blind to the wickedness of his foes, and felt the need of divine help. He therefore prayed to God for strength.

Verse 10. The agitation seemed to have some effect on one of the prophets. Shemaiah had shut up himself in his house, which means he was keeping himself close because of fear, real or pretended. Nehemiah had learned about it, and entered his house to have a talk with him. When he got on the inside, Shemaiah suggested that they seek a safer place for protection and named the temple. He pretended that it would be a better place at night because it was not a private residence.

Verse 11. Nehemiah had two reasons for not doing as Shemaiah requested. He was not frightened; and besides that, if he were he would not enter the holy building for personal protection from bodily harm.

Verse 12. By this time Nehemiah realized that this professed prophet had accepted money from Sanballat

to pay him for making the false report.

Verse 13. The object was to get Nehemiah to take refuge in the sacred house, which would have given room for reproach against him. The temple was not built to be used as a fortress. Its purpose was religious only, and for Nehemiah to have fled therein for fear of these heathen would have been to desecrate it. Such an event would have been a sweet morsel for the enemies of the Lord to boast about.

Verse 14. This verse shows that it was some of the professed people of God who were being used by Sanballat as tools for his opposition against the work of Nehemiah. But he made his appeal to God, asking him to take notice of the conduct of these false servants. Even the prophetess Noadiah sold herself to the service of God's enemies, and tried to intimidate Nehemiah.

Verse 15. As this verse is so practical and literal, there is little that needs to be said by way of comment. However, the fact that such a vast project could be brought to completion in less than two months is a wonderful tribute to the unity of operations. What adds to the merit of the work is the fact that it was performed in spite of the constant opposition and attempts at discouragement. Perhaps the key to the success was in the expressions: "The people had a mind to work," and "We made our prayer unto our God." (Ch. 4: 6, 9.) It reminds us of Paul's language in Rom. 8: 31, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Verse 16. It would have been a wonderful feat to build such a wall in that length of time, had there been no opposition, and had everyone helped what he could. But it was a still more marvelous thing to accomplish it in spite of their activities in trying to make the whole project a failure. That was why the heathen hung their heads in shame and disappointment. They were forced to admit (to themselves) that these Jews had accomplished the work by the help of their God.

Verses 17-19. This paragraph is a reflective picture of what had been going on while the wall was in building. The writer had just recorded the successful completion of the work, notwithstanding the interference of the enemies, and he then wished to have a renewed picture of the opposition in direct connection with the final report. In that manner the immensity of the

accomplishment could be the better realized. These nobles of Judah were influenced through some intermarriages with the heathen. In the heat of turmoil over Nehemiah's work there was much gossiping back and forth, and some attempts at fattling to him. The object of it all was to put him *in fear*, but their expectation failed as we have seen.

NEHEMIAH 7

Verse 1. The doors could not be hung until the wall was completed to its full height. Thus the order of the services would be as it is stated in this verse. The porters were the janitors or gatekeepers, and they could not be appointed to their several places until the gates or doors were ready for service. The singers were expected to do part of the religious exercises. That was according to an institution of David (1 Chr. 25: 1; 2 Chr. 35: 15). The Levites were the original ones to have the supervision of the sacrificial part of the services. All of these appointments were made by Nehemiah when the building work was completed.

Verse 2. Two men are named yet a singular pronoun is used. The idea is that Hanani was the principal one considered, and Hananiah was associated with him as a helper. The second man had been in charge of the palace. The reason given for the appointment of Nehemiah's brother is significant; it was because he feared God. What a wonderful motive for selecting a man to have an important work. No personal preference or feeling of relationship entered into the consideration. If a man fears God more than others fear Him, that shows a qualification that outweighs all others.

Verse 3. The gates were not to be opened until it was far into the day. While waiting for that hour to come they must be guarded. That is the meaning of *while they stand by*. Since it would be daylight the public would be stirring, and hence the gates should be secured. The porters were therefore ordered to see that they were shut and barred. In addition to the men on duty right at the gates, the inhabitants on the inside of the city were to be called upon for guard duty. Each man was to be assigned that part of the wall nearest his own home.

Verse 4. This verse explains the precautions required in the preceding ones. The area enclosed by the wall was large and not many residences

had yet been built. For that reason it was necessary to make wise distribution of the forces available. After all the attempts at preventing the work while it was in progress, Nehemiah did not wish to take any chances for violence now that the work had been completed.

Verse 5. *My God put it into my heart* means that God spoke to Nehemiah and directed him to do the thing described. The importance of keeping the line of the generations as pure as possible was the purpose of all such transactions. Had the Jews never been taken from their own country, the danger of blood mixture would not have been so great. But the 70 years of captivity, and the period of almost a century that followed, had brought them into contact with the heathen. The precaution that Nehemiah was told to take had been followed out by Zerubbabel 90 years before, and now it was deemed well to repeat the investigation. For this purpose Nehemiah summoned a gathering of the people including the leaders among them. All of these people were to be "checked" according to the official register. At this time Nehemiah found the list that had been made at the first, and the examination was to be made according to that.

Verses 6-73. These verses are an exact reproduction of those at Ezra 2: 1-70. As I have commented at some length on the verses at that place, the student is asked to turn to it for his information on this paragraph.

NEHEMIAH 8

Verse 1. The people responded to the call of Nehemiah when he wished to investigate their "registration number." Now they have assembled again and are seeking information. They met in the street that was near a very important gate. It was the one opening out near the water supply of the city. That was why it was called the *water gate*. The information sought this time was different from that wanted when Nehemiah called them together. They wanted to hear from the book of the law. What a wonderful motive for coming together! Also, we are told that all of the people were in this gathering, and that they had met as *one man*. Ezra was the man called for and it was for a good reason. All of the copies of the law were made by hand, and the men who did that were called scribes, in which occupation

Ezra was engaged. He was also a priest (Ezra 7: 11), but his position as a scribe also was what caused him to be called this time. As his work was to reproduce the law, he certainly would have a copy of it, and also would know how to read it. The reader should note that the *law of Moses* was what the Lord had commanded to Israel. This is another rebuke for those who try to make a difference between the authority of Moses and that of the Lord.

Verse 2. While Ezra as a scribe would be expected to have a copy of law at hand, there was a reason also for calling on him as a priest. Lev. 10: 11; Deut. 17: 9 and Mal. 2: 7 shows that they were counted on to be ready to teach the people the knowledge of God's Word. *Hear with understanding* is rendered "listen intelligently" by Moffatt's translation. The word for *hear* is from SHAMA, and Strong's definition is, "a primitive root; to hear intelligently (often with implication of attention, obedience, etc.; causatively to tell, etc.)." *Understanding* is from BRYN and Strong's definition is, "a primitive root; to separate mentally (or distinguish), i. e., (generally) understand." This information will show us that it was no supernatural gift that was meant in the description of the ones expected to receive the law. The Word of God is a plain book, and was intended to be grasped by any person with intelligence enough to be responsible. But even such minds will be expected to give earnest attention and exert some effort in order to comprehend the meaning. In other words, they are supposed to "consider," which Isa. 1: 3 says certain ones did not.

Verse 3. The reading of the law lasted from daylight until noon. That was a sufficient length of time for one session, for it was then necessary to look after the needs for physical food. But after stating to begin with how long the reading lasted, the writer described the manner of the forenoon's procedure in the course.

Verse 4. *Pulpit of wood* was the same as a platform or rostrum. It was necessary to stand in such a place, because the audience was great and it is always better for the hearers to be in view of the speaker and vice versa. No reason is given why the men named stood on the right and left hands of Ezra while he read the law. Some of them were priests, and their presence

in that attitude would show great respect.

Verse 5. The writer connects the fact of the book's being opened in the sight of all the people with the other fact that Ezra was above all the people. That agrees with the remarks about a *pulpit* in the preceding verse. We should be impressed with the action of the people at the opening of the book; they all stood up. There could not have been seats for that vast throng, hence they were sitting on the ground. But their reverence for the divine document brought them to their feet. They continued in that posture from daylight until noon. It is remarkable what people will endure if their interest in the subject is great enough.

Verse 6. To *bless the Lord* means to acknowledge him as the source of all blessings or benefits. The people endorsed the words of Nehemiah by saying *amen, amen*. In the Hebrew lexicon the word is defined "truly." The lifting up hands while bowing the heads would form a position of great respect. *Worshipped* is from SHACHAH and Strong defines it, "a primitive root; to depress, i. e. prostrate (especially reflexively in homage to royalty or to God)." The word is used in this place with regard to the posture of the body, that it was one with the face to the ground. That could not mean that the face was in contact with the ground, for the people were standing. It means their faces were toward the ground in a pose of respect.

Verse 7. The men named were Levites, therefore the words following, *and the Levites*, means "who were Levites." Being of that tribe it is clear that they would be the ones to cause the people to understand the law. The explanation of the law intensified the attention of the people so that they stood in their place.

Verse 8. The preceding verse states generally that the Levites caused the people to understand the law; this gives the details. *Distinctly* is from PARASH and is defined, "a primitive root; to separate, literally (to depress) or figuratively to specify."—Strong. *Sense* is from an original that means "knowledge or understanding." We know that more than one man would not be speaking at one time. Ezra was holding the book and doing the first reading. These other Levites would then "separate" the words one from another, and give what we would call

a lexical definition of them. There is an interesting paragraph in a work of secular writing which I shall quote: "During the 70 years captivity, though it does not appear that the Hebrews entirely lost their native tongue, yet it underwent so considerable change from their adoption of the vernacular languages of the countries where they had resided, that afterwards, on their return from exile, they spoke a dialect of Chaldee mixed with Hebrew words. On this account it was that, when the Hebrew scriptures were read, it was found necessary to interpret them to the people in the Chaldean language; as, when Ezra the scribe brought the book of the law of Moses before the congregation, the Levites were said to have caused the people to understand the law, because they read in the book, in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." *Horne*, Introduction, Vol. 1, p. 190.

Verse 9. *Tirshatha* is another word for governor. Nehemiah had been put into that office over Judah (Judea) by the king of Persia. In one sentence the dual position of Ezra, priest and scribe, is stated. It would be well for those marking their Bibles to make note of this subject. The effect of hearing the law was to cause the people to weep. There is little difference between *mourn* and *weep*. There is a slight distinction, however, when used in one sentence. The first has special reference to the state of the mind, the second to the facial and voice expressions. Nehemiah and Ezra meant that so much had occurred for which to be thankful that they should neither mourn or weep, but be joyful instead.

Verse 10. Instead of giving way to mourning, the people were bidden to take enjoyment in the blessings of God. The Jews were forbidden to eat fat, yet they were here told to eat it. The word is from an entirely different Hebrew original, with an entirely different meaning, from the one in the case of the restriction. It is from MASHMAN, and Strong defines it, "fatness; but usually (figuratively and concretely) a rich dish, a fertile field, a robust man." It can thus be seen not to have any relation to the fat of animals that the Jews were forbidden to eat. The people were encouraged to enjoy these good products of the land. They were told also to send portions (rations) to the poor people of the country. It is significant that

the exhortation to send rations to others was based on the fact that the *day was holy unto our Lord*. We here have an approved example of celebrating a day as holy unto the Lord, by making gifts of things for the enjoyment of the body.

Verses 11, 12. The people carried out the instructions of Nehemiah and Ezra. They recognized the day as holy by making gifts of the good things of life. The reason for their response to the words that had been spoken to them was the fact that they *understood them*, an important consideration.

Verse 13. Having been informed about part of the law, the people came together the next day to get more details.

Verse 14. The next thing they learned was about the feast of tabernacles instituted in the law of Moses. That is found in Lev. 23: 40-43, where the purpose of the feast is given. It was to commemorate the fact that Israel had to dwell in tents while going through the wilderness, due to their irregular times for traveling.

Verse 15. The period was observed by cutting branches from several kinds of trees and setting them up into *booths*. The original for this word is defined in the lexicon of Strong, "a hut or lair." The branches were stood up in something like the form of an Indian tepee, thus making a sort of rude and temporary shelter. It was their dwelling for 7 days of the feast, the entire length of that institution. This practice would make them appreciate the permanent homes they had in Palestine, through contrast with the tents they had had to depend on exclusively for 40 years.

Verse 16. There was a general movement of the people to celebrate the great occasion. The different places mentioned were those of convenience for the putting up of such shelters. The houses had flat roofs which would make suitable places for them. The courts were the spaces surrounding them, similar to the "yards" or lawns of modern homes. Some selected the streets near the various gates of the city. After getting these booths or brushy tepees set up, the devout Jews lived in them 7 days.

Verse 17. The writer goes back to the days of Joshua for his comparison. Since his time the Jews had not done as complete a job of keeping the feast as they did this time under the in-

fluence of Nehemiah and Ezra. The experiences of the long captivity had taught them many lessons, and among them was that of appreciation for the blessing of being at liberty in their own land. That appreciation put them in the frame of mind to be "hungry and thirsty for righteousness," and to dig further into the divine law to see what duties were there required that they had been missing.

Verse 18. The feast lasted 7 days according to the law. During that time they had the law read to them. The day following the feast was a special one. *Solemn assembly* means a holy or sabbath day. Keeping it *according to the manner* means according to the ordinances in Lev. 23: 36. It will be well for the student to read carefully the entire 23rd chapter of Leviticus and see the connection with regard to what constituted a holy or sabbath day. In that chapter it can be clearly seen that holy days and sabbath days are the same.

NEHEMIAH 9

Verse 1. *This month* means the 7th (Ch. 8: 14). That was a very important month with the Jews, for in it came the great day of atonement (10th day, Lev. 16: 29), and the feast of tabernacles that we have been considering. Now it was given added prominence by the public reading of the law. On the 24th day of the month the people came together into a voluntary season of fasting and other customary items connected with times of great concern.

Verse 2. The law had restricted them from intimate association with *strangers*, which meant those on the outside of their own nation. They attended to that matter and made the required separation on this day. When the people of God commit a trespass against him, there are two things required to get back into the divine favor. One is to adjust the wrong, the other is to make confession of the same. The children of Israel did both with regard to their unlawful alliances.

Verse 3. Two fourths of a day would reach to midday which would be an occasion for partaking of the necessities of life. Such an observance was had at the first reading of the law (Ch. 8: 3, 9-12). This circumstance teaches us that even our religious activities are not expected to interfere with the actual needs of the body.

Verses 4, 5. In view of the preceding verses, I would conclude that from here on to the end of the chapter the writer is giving us some detailed information regarding the subject matter of those verses. The present paragraph very fittingly states the names of the men who led in the exercises, that they were Levites. That was appropriate in view of Lev. 10: 11; Deut. 17: 9; Mal. 2: 7. I shall make comment on the following verses because of the interesting subject matter. It will be found to be a resume of the dealings of God with his people, beginning with the creation and coming down to the exile in the land of the captivity.

Verse 6. This verse is comprehensive. All of the material things mentioned had been worshiped by the heathen, and the Israelites had been guilty of joining in with the iniquity. They were making confession of that sin, and, as a specific expression to show that their acknowledgement was not only sincere, but that it was logical, they said the things they had been worshiping had been the creation of the one true God, whom they now promised to serve.

Verse 7. *The Lord the God* was not merely a salute of honor, it had a significance based on the practice of the times. Lord means ruler and God means a being to be worshiped. These people had been ruled over by foreigners, and they had been worshiping false gods. This expression, then, was to distinguish between unlawful rulers and false gods on the one hand, and the true One on the other. The mere changing of a man's name might not mean much, but in this place it did. *Abraham* means "father of a multitude," while *Abram* means merely "high father." It was therefore a promotion to have the change made for Abram.

Verse 8. The promise made to Abraham that his descendants were to possess the land was made to him because God found him to be a man of faith. He proved his faith by his works, in that whenever he was told to do a certain thing he always did it. The nations mentioned were heathen people who usurped the possession of land already given to Abraham and his seed. Righteousness was ascribed to God on the basis that he kept his promises to his servants.

Verse 9. The afflictions in Egypt are described in Ex. 1, and the cry by the Red Sea is found recorded in Ex.

14: 10, soon after leaving the land of Goshen.

Verse 10. This goes back to the time prior to the event mentioned in the preceding verse. It refers to the 10 plagues, recorded in Ex. 7 to 12.

Verse 11. This event is recorded in Ex. 14. It has been questioned whether the word *dry* is to be taken literally. The lexicon defines the original word "dry ground," so there should be no difficulty over it. But even that term would not necessarily mean it was 100 per cent free from moisture. We do not always use it in our everyday practice in that way. We could speak of a man's wading out of a stream onto the dry ground even though the ground might be muddy. It was used in the present case with that general meaning. The *persecutors* were the Egyptians whose dead bodies were seen by the children of Israel on the seashore (Ex. 14: 30).

Verse 12. This unusual cloud was not a rain cloud. It was bright on one side and dark on the other (Ex. 14: 19, 20), and kept the Egyptians from approaching near the Israelites all the night as they were marching.

Verse 13. The history is now moved forward to Ex. 19 and several chapters following. From Mt. Sinai God gave his law to the people. Some of these terms are more specific than others. *Judgments* especially refer to divine decisions that were necessary in cases of emergency, *Statutes* mean the formal enactments which God made independent of any certain cases. *Commandments* are more general, including both the other kind. *True laws* is a term whose significance is that the laws of God are in truth.

Verse 14. *Madest known . . . holy sabbath*. This declaration opposes the teaching of sabbatarians, that the sabbath day had been observed from the beginning. Had that been the case there would have been no occasion for God to make it known as late as the gathering at Sinai. Another thing in this verse to notice, is the commandments of God were given by the hand of Moses. That rebukes those who would distinguish between the authority in the law of God and that of Moses.

Verse 15. The *bread* was the manna, and the water was furnished the children of Israel by having a rock at Sinai smitten.

Verse 16. This is an admission of

wrongdoing on the part of the *fathers*, which means their forefathers or early ancestors. Dealt proudly refers to their stubbornness and refusal to yield to the commandments of God. All disobedience may be charged to pride, and Paul teaches that in 1 Tim. 6: 3, 4. *Hardened their necks* is just another phrase for their stubbornness, and a stiff neck is used as a figure of it.

Verse 17. Ingratitude is a common weakness of man, and is one of the most deplorable kind. Being unmindful of the deeds performed by the Lord for his people, the Israelites became restless while Moses was in the mount. *Appointed a captain to return to their bondage*. This was done at the time the spies returned from their 40 days of research. The same is referred to by Stephen in his noted speech to the Jews (Acts 7: 40). He had a different instance in mind from that in Numbers, but it is on the same line of conduct. These people in their wonderful speech acknowledged the mercy of God that was manifested, and that he did not forsake his people.

Verse 18. The history of the molten (cast) calf is in Ex. 32. It would have been foolishly false to make a metallic image to worship only, but it was blasphemous to attribute their miraculous deliverance from Egypt to such a helpless thing. In doing that the children of Israel gave God cause for great provocation, so that it would have been just to cut them off from him entirely.

Verse 19. But God's great mercy tempered his justice, and caused him to continue his divine guidance by use of the supernatural cloud.

Verse 20. The spirit of God directed the sayings of Moses, and he then gave them to the people. In this way the Lord gave his spirit to his people throughout the period of their relations to him in the wilderness. Also, in special instances he gave inspiration to others. See Ex. 31: 1-3; Num. 11: 24, 25. Another reference is made to the miraculous supply of bread and water. The bread was rained down from the skies in the form of manna, and the water was brought out of a dry rock.

Verse 21. The naming of the 40 years as a period of miraculous support does not mean that God did not care for them at other times. But special interest is centered round that subject because the children of Israel were "on the go" during that time,

and did not have time nor opportunity for producing the necessities of life; for that reason God provided them as needed. One method he used in supplying their needs was to prolong the wearing qualities of their clothes. Also their feet did not *swell*. This is from an original that Strong defines to "blister." Having no opportunity for replacing their shoes or sandals, and having to travel on foot, they surely would have become footsore had they not been miraculously cared for.

Verse 22. *Divide them into corners* is rendered by Moffatt's translation as follows: "allotting them every corner of the land," and the lexicon agrees. It means that God gave unto his people the land being held by the heathen. The ones that are named in this verse were east of the Jordan River.

Verse 23. When they entered Egypt they numbered only 70 (Gen. 46: 27), and they increased to over half a million men of war besides women and children by the time they left Egypt (Num. 1: 46).

Verse 24. The promise to give all the heathen nations into the hands of the Israelites was made conditional. They were to make no covenant with those nations, but they did not fully observe the conditions. As far as they did so the Lord drove out the foreigners, and this verse should be understood in that light.

Verse 25. This verse should be understood in the same light or with the same restrictions as the preceding one. *Fat land* means a land that was productive of the good things of life. Moses had promised that they were to go into a land already provided with these desirable things (Deut. 6: 10: 11).

Verse 26. This verse is acknowledging the ingratitude of the nation of Israel. To *cast the law behind the back* means to go headlong in their own selfish way, regardless of the way the law would have them go. *Slew the prophets*. This doubtless took place on numerous occasions, but a noted instance was that by Jezebel in 1 Ki. 18: 4.

Verses 27, 28. This paragraph has special reference to the period covered by the book of Judges. The *enemies* into whose hand God sold his people were the nations in Palestine who were there when they crossed over into that land. They had been warned not to have any covenants with them, but to drive them out. They did not

do so and God then suffered them to oppress his people to punish them. After a while his compassion would assert itself and he would raise up a man to deliver them from their oppressors and rule them for a time. Such men were called judges in that book but are called *saviours* in this paragraph. This in-and-out or up-and-down experience of the nation of Israel continued for 450 years (Acts 13, 20).

Verse 29. *Testifiedst against them* was in order that they could not forget "what it was all about." That made their conduct to constitute a course of conscious disobedience. It placed them in the class of wilful rebels, entitled to the judgments of God. *Withdrew the shoulder* is figurative. Burdens were carried on the shoulders, and to withdraw the shoulder would mean to refuse to perform one's duty or to help others bear the burdens of life.

Verse 30. *By thy spirit in thy prophets*. This teaches that the prophets spoke to the people for God, and in order to do so needed to be inspired. See Heb. 1: 1.

Verse 31. The nation was not utterly destroyed, but it was not because it did not deserve to be. The reason was that God was merciful and not willing to see it given up to complete ruin. That is still the reason that man is suffered to live on in his unworthiness. See 2 Pe. 3: 9.

Verse 32. This plea does not deny any of the sins of the nation for which it had been punished. It is a plea for mercy and relief from the trouble. *Terrible God* means he is a God to be feared or respected, because he is a terror against evil. *Keepest covenant and mercy*. God never breaks his covenant with his people, but they often do so with him. In that case it would be just to reject them, but mercy intercedes in their behalf and gives them another chance to serve the Lord.

Verse 33. The speakers confessed that God was *just* in what he had brought upon them in the way of punishment. That does not mean, however, that they had received all that justice would have demanded. The reason they had not was the mercy of God.

Verse 34. No class of the nation, whether official or private person, had kept the law. This fact will be noticed in many places when we come to the prophetic books. But while all were guilty, the leaders were held chiefly

responsible because of their position of authority which gave them some advantages over the people.

Verse 35. The advantages mentioned in a general way in the preceding verse are specified in this. *Their kingdom and large and fat land* made them especially responsible because of special opportunities for doing the service of God. The same principle was taught by Christ in Luke 12: 48.

Verses 36, 37. *We are servants*; but they were not bondservants. The end of the 70 years of captivity brought an end to their service of that class. But the land was still in the possession of the foreign powers, and the Jews were enjoying it by the favor of those powers. The land was productive after the period of the 70 years of rest. In fact that was the purpose God had for requiring the rest of every 7th year, that the land might become more productive of the necessities of life (Lev. 25: 6). The captivity gave the land this rest so that at the time this great speech was being made the land *yielded much increase*. But the Jews were enjoying it at that time as a favor from the heathen only. That made them virtual servants, whereas they should have been using it as if the land belonged to them. Such a privilege was the purpose of God upon the return from captivity and readjustment of all affairs. That readjustment was to come upon condition of a complete reformation of the nation. Such a work was in the intentions of the nation, and they made their long and penitent prayer and confession preparatory to a solemn covenant (or promise) to comply with the requirements of the law.

Verse 38. The prayer and speech concluded with an expressed determination to make the promise official and binding by *seal* or signatures. That could be done either by literally writing their names to the document, or by publicly authorizing Nehemiah and Ezra to put their names down.

NEHEMIAH 10

Verses 1-8. These men sealed or endorsed the covenant referred to in the preceding chapter. They were all of priestly families except Nehemiah the *tirshatha* or governor. It would seem very appropriate for him to give his name at the head of the list, being the governor appointed over the province and on behalf of the Jews. There are 3 names in the list that are fa-

miliar to Bible students, Jeremiah, Obadiah and Daniel. The similarity is only a coincidence and should not confuse the reader. It was not uncommon in those times for more than one man to have the same name.

Verses 9-27. *And the Levites* is the beginning of this list. All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests; none but the descendants of Aaron. So there was nothing far-fetched in making two separate rolls of the names standing good for the covenant.

Verse 28. We should not conclude that all of the priests and general Levites were named in the first two lists. They were evidently some outstanding men who could be considered responsible persons. Others of the assembly then manifested their approval of the act. The reason they were favorable to it can be seen in the fact that already they had made great reforms in their lives. They had put from them their foreign wives and the children that were born of them. Such conduct was the main idea in the covenant proposed, so that would account for their willingness to cooperate with the endorsers of that great document.

Verse 29. *Curse and oath* are named as separate acts although there is not much difference. When used in one sentence the first means an offer to receive some severe penalty if a certain agreement is not carried out. The second means that the curse was supported by the oath; it was agreed to under oath. *God's law . . . given by Moses* are the terms that catch our eye again. They show that no difference can be made between what Moses wrote and what God spoke with his mouth.

Verse 30. One of the most, if not the most important of the restrictions of the law pertained to the marriage institutions. That was not especially from the legal standpoint, but because of a desire to keep a blood line pure from Abraham to the promised seed. For that reason the marriage with foreigners was forbidden.

Verse 31. It was agreed to observe the sabbath day according to the law of Moses, which included the stoppage of all commercial transactions. *Sabbath or . . . holy day*. There was no difference between the primary meaning of the two words, only that the first usually referred to the 7th day of the week. The phrase might well be worded, "sabbath or other holy

days." *Leave the seventh year* means to let the land rest in that year. It was the violation of that law which brought upon the nation the 70 years of captivity. *Execution of every debt*. In Ch. 5 is an account of the oppressive treatment of the poor. The more fortunate were taking advantage of the others in the matter of lending money. They did so on condition of heavy usury, and to secure the loans they had taken from them their land. All such dealings were to be discontinued under the terms of the covenant.

Verse 32. The contribution stipulated here was voluntary, and in addition to the specific requirements of the law as to their income.

Verse 33. The preceding verse mentioned the service in general, this gives the specific services. The *show-bread* was the unleavened bread that must be placed on the table. It was in 12 loaves and was renewed every weekly sabbath. *Continual* means "regular," and applied to the meat (meal) offerings that were made in connection with other sacrifices. *Continual burnt offering* is a phrase referring to what is commonly called the "daily sacrifice." See Ex. 29: 38-42. *Of the sabbaths* was referring to the doubling of the daily sacrifice on the sabbath days (Num. 28: 9). The new moon was the first of the month (1 Sam. 20: 24, 27), and was always a holy day. The *set feasts* referred to the three annual feasts described in Lev. 23. This voluntary contribution was for the support of any or all of the divine services.

Verse 34. The Levites were not required to produce any materials, because they were not given an allotted portion of the land as were the others of the tribes. But this verse included the people, which accounts for the mention of the wood to be furnished. After it was furnished by the people, the priests and Levites took charge of it and made the proper use in the service of the house of the Lord. Not all of the eligible men would be needed at one time, hence they *cast the lots* to decide the turns of service. The lot was one of the means used in Biblical times to decide questions. See Prov. 16: 33 and Heb. 1: 1.

Verse 35. The law had required that the first of everything be devoted to the Lord. It would include the first of the fruit of trees and of the ground.

Verse 36. *Firstborn of our sons*. The Lord never did require human sacri-

ances, but he did claim all the firstborn of their sons as his special possession (Ex. 13: 2). He later exchanged them for the entire tribe of Levi (Num. 3: 12). After that the Lord required a certain offering to be made upon the birth of the first child (Num. 18: 14-16). That is what these people meant to do when they agreed to devote the *firstborn of our sons*. Also, they owed a certain consideration to the Lord upon the increase of their beasts. All of these things were to be placed at the disposal of the *priests that minister in the house of our God*.

Verse 37. Grain that had been made ready for dough was not to be exempt from the contribution. In addition to the *first* of everything, the *tithe* or tenth of all crops of the ground must be devoted. It was turned over to the Levites because they had no ground of their own for farming.

Verse 38. *Tithes of the tithes*. The Levites had no means of productive income, so they lived on the tithes of the other tribes. They in turn were required to contribute a tithe or tenth of what had been given them by the other tribes.

Verse 39. All of these products were to be brought to the house of the Lord; not expect the priests to come after them. *Priests that minister*. Not all eligible men were acting at one time. Those who were needed for the service at any given time were the ones meant by these words.

NEHEMIAH 11

Verse 1. There were too many of the people for all to reside in Jerusalem, and besides this, they had their individual homes and it was natural for them to want to live there. It was thought necessary, however, for some to remain in the city. So the *rulers* agreed to dwell in the city. That word is from *SAR* and Strong defines it, "a head person of any rank or class." It could thus include men of the various offices if they happened to be outstanding through personal influence and efficiency. But it would be fair for them to have some help in the holy service, and the people agreed to furnish one out of every 10 to join their *rulers* in it. The selection was made by casting lots. See Prov. 16: 33 and Heb. 1: 1.

Verse 2. It was quite a sacrifice to give up their home residences and dwell in the city. That was appreciated by the others who blessed them

(extended best wishes) for the good deed. It was a service that benefited the whole congregation.

Verse 3. This and several verses following will give a list of persons, of the ones to reside in the city of Jerusalem, and the ones to dwell in other places.

Verse 4. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin had possessed the territory that included Jerusalem and that surrounding it, and those tribes naturally felt disposed to furnish a representation for the service. The group of names is given generation by generation to show the lineal connection with an important ancestor. He is here called *Perez*, which is another spelling for *Pharez* in Gen. 38: 29, in which chapter he is seen to have been a son of Judah.

Verses 5, 6. More of the descendants of *Perez* are named, then a summing up is stated of the number altogether which is 468. This will give us some idea of the importance of that son of Judah, conceived and born under such unusual circumstances. See Gen. 38 for the history of the case.

Verses 7-9. The little tribe of Benjamin had become sufficiently numerous to furnish 928 men for the service in the city. This particular group had its own supervisor whose name was *Joel*. The Judah named as second ruler is only another man with the same name as the one heading the tribe and it is a coincidence of names.

Verses 10, 11. There would always be a need for priestly services in Jerusalem. *Hilkiah, Zadok and Ahitub* are among the names with whom we are somewhat familiar.

Verse 12. Since the brethren of the priestly men numbered 822, it is easy to understand why all would not be named. Then another outstanding man is named, *Adiah*, and a few of his lineal ancestors.

Verse 13. The brethren of *Adiah* numbered 242. Next another man is named, *Adaiab*, and a few of his ancestors, engaging in the work about the Lord's house.

Verse 14. The brethren of *Amashai* numbered 128. They are said to have been men of *valour*. This word in the Old Testament always comes from *CHAYIL* and Strong defines it as follows: "probably a force, whether of men, means or other resources, an army, wealth, virtue, valor, strength."

Its outstanding meaning is force or strength.

Verses 15, 16. These additional names of the Levites are given because of special reasons. *Shabbethai* and *Joabab* were among some chief Levites, and they had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God. That is from CHRYSTOWN which Strong defines, "properly the (outer) wall side; hence exterior; figuratively secular (as opposed to sacred)." A system as extensive as the Mosaic would have much need for services on the outside of the capital city and on the outside of the temple that would be considered necessary though not strictly religious. The thought might be compared with the work of a janitor of a church house, keeping up the fires or mowing the lawn. Such work is necessary and yet is considered secular.

Verse 17. *Mattaniah* was a descendant of the sons of Asaph, already known to us as a unit of musical performers in the days of David. This man was appointed as leader of the song and prayer service. He had others associated with him in the exercise.

Verse 18. The *holy city* was Jerusalem, and of the great tribe of Levi 284 were therein. They were there because some services could be lawfully performed only by them; a special consideration occasioned by the event in Ex. 32: 26.

Verse 19. The gates of the city had to be opened and closed at proper times. They were also to be guarded against the entrance of questionable persons. The men with this job were called porters and there were 172 of them appointed.

Verse 20. Most of this chapter has dealt with the groups who were stationed inside Jerusalem. This short verse is given us to keep in mind the fact that the people of Judah not so employed were in order, each residing in his own inheritance.

Verse 21. The writer comes back into the city again to designate the location of some of the classes. *Ophel* is defined by Strong as "a ridge in Jerusalem." Smith's Bible Dictionary says it was evidently the residence of the priests. The *Nethinims* were a special class of servants so designated in the days of Solomon. There were some of them residing in this part of Jerusalem, and Ziba and Gispa supervised them.

Verse 22. *Uzzi* was a sort of over-

seer-at-large in Jerusalem, to direct the services of the Levites. The singers, men following the practice instituted by the sons of Asaph in the days of David, had charge of that service in the house of God.

Verse 23. The singers were to serve in turns and the change was to be made daily. That made it necessary for a goodly number of them to be in the city all the time. *King's commandment*. We do not suppose that Artaxerxes was personally concerned with the religious activities of the Jews. But he had become favorably disposed toward them, and had given orders (Ezr. 8 and 9) that their wishes should be carried out.

Verse 24. *At the king's hand* means about the same as the remarks in the preceding verse. Moffatt's translation expresses the thought in this verse by saying the work was "in the hands of the king's representatives."

Verses 25-35. The subject matter of all these verses is practically the same, hence I have grouped them into one paragraph. It has to do with the more open parts of the country. The fields attached to the towns or villages were for the production of crops and cattle. These members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin had the use of the land by right of inheritance. They were dispersed over the territory at points of advantage. Some of the places mentioned are familiar to us; among them are Kirjath-arba, Beer-sheba, Ziklag, Adullam, Lachish, Michmash, Bethel, Anathoth and Nob.

Verse 36. The Levites were not given landed estates under the law, but were to dwell in cities within the possessions of the other tribes. This verse means that sections of the tribe of Levi were located throughout the possessions of Judah and Benjamin.

NEHEMIAH 12

Verses 1-21. It will help to understand the apparent repetition of all these names to quote, in part, from Smith's Bible Dictionary. "The book of Nehemiah, like the preceding one of Ezra, is clearly and certainly not all by the same hand. By far the most important portion, indeed, is the work of Nehemiah; but other portions are either extracts from various chronicles and registers or supplementary narratives and reflections, some apparently by Ezra." Much of the discussion of this chapter, therefore, should be regarded as information on the state of

affairs at different times. I shall make comments on the merits of the several verses, not always trying to settle upon any specific date for the incidents that may be under consideration.

Verse 22. *Chief of the fathers* is not an official title for these Levites. They had no extra classification under the law except that of having the execution of the law. But in the eyes of the nation in which they were living they were considered in the light of this phrase. That estimate was had of them down to the time of *Darius the Persian*. If the reader will consult the chart (see suggestions for chart at Ezra 3: 8) he will see that this king was reigning from 521 to 484 B. C. This will give us a good view of the light in which the Levites were held by the secular governments.

Verse 23. See comments at 1 Ki. 14: 19 for explanation of *chronicles*.

Verse 24. This special song and praise service was instituted by David, and the account of it is in 1 Chr. 25. *Ward over against ward* means they took their turns.

Verse 25. The porters were stationed at the gates, whence the name of their occupation. But the special task of the porters named in this verse was to guard the treasures coming in through the gate. *Thresholds* is from a word meaning "a collection of offerings," according to Strong's lexicon.

Verse 26. This verse is a statement showing that the various kinds of works described in the preceding verses were performed for several years prior to the time of the writing. The reader is requested to consult again my comments in the latter part of the first paragraph in this chapter. The activities covered the days of Nehemiah and Ezra, the most outstanding men in this part of the narrative.

Verse 27. During the building of the wall most of the congregation were living in their own homes, including the Levites. When the dedication of the wall took place it was especially appropriate to have them present, in view of their official position in the nation. They were counted on to join in the services with the music and singing.

Verse 28. The special group of singers responded to the call from the surrounding territory. *Netophathai* was a district in Palestine and it had a number of villages. The singers in those burghs came to the dedication.

Verse 29. *House of Gilgal* means the families in the neighborhood of Gilgal. That vicinity furnished some singers for the service, as did the families from the fields (country) around Geba and Asmaveth. The persons living in the territories named wished to be in readiness for the call to service. For that purpose they had built themselves villages (small dwellings) around Jerusalem.

Verse 30. The priests were the Levites who descended from Aaron. There were too many of them to be needed in active service at any one time. When the turn of any of the eligible men came, they had to observe the ceremonies of the law as to uncleanness that might have come upon them during the time they had not been serving. While in the exercises of ceremonial cleansing they extended it to include the wall.

Verses 31-37. One group was to climb up to the top of the wall and turn to the right. They were to be distributed along on the wall in the order named, and there they were to engage in praise service.

Verses 38, 39. This group turned to the left and were spread along the wall as far as the *prison gate*, or guard gate.

Verses 40-43. Nehemiah was in the last named group, and both groups halted and all joined in song and praise to God for the great mercies he had given the people.

Verse 44. The service mentioned in this verse has been referred to in previous passages, so nothing new is noted. It is well, however, to observe that some order and system had been arranged. *That waited* means the Levites who "stood by" to be in readiness when called upon to serve.

Verses 45, 46. *Ward* means duty or obligation; the singers and porters (janitors) both did theirs, which was according to the order that had been given by David.

Verse 47. *All Israel* means the congregation in general. They were required to support the service of God with their contributions. That is what is meant by *gave the portions*. The period that was being especially considered by the writer was that in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. A glance at the chart will show that to have comprised almost 100 years.

NEHEMIAH 13

Verse 1. *That day* means the day they had the reading of the law (Ch. 8). The Moabites and Ammonites were descendants from Lot. They had some of the same blood as did those descended from Abraham, but were always counted as enemies of God's people. They were to be permanently rejected from any relation with the congregation. The place where we read this is Deut. 23: 3-5.

Verse 2. The special complaint against these people was their alliance with Balaam, and they also had refused the Israelites the common necessities of life. It was at the time they arrived in the plains of Moab east of Jordan (Num. 22).

Verse 3. The obedience of the people was prompt; it was *when they heard* the law.

Verses 4, 5. There is a break in the narrative here. Sometime after the events leading up to the end of the preceding verse, Nehemiah's term of 12 years expired and he had returned to his duty with Artaxerxes. After he had left Jerusalem, the circumstances of these verses took place which I shall now notice. Eliashib was the priest and should have guarded the house of God with care. But he was influenced by Tobiah, who was a favorite slave of Sanballat, to allow him the special privilege of an apartment in the holy building. He occupied the space that had been devoted to the storing of the articles intended for the sacrifices. This was an awful desecration of the sacred house of God.

Verse 6. The information in this verse is what authorized the remarks at the beginning of the preceding paragraph. After Nehemiah had returned and resumed his service for the king of Persia, he heard of the corruptions that had crept into the service in Jerusalem. The king again favored him with a grant of leave of absence.

Verses 7, 8. Nehemiah again arrived in Jerusalem and found the reports to have been true. He was sorely grieved over the evil conduct of the priest, and cast out all of this heathen's household stuff.

Verse 9. The casting out of the secular materials would rid the place of the actual uncleanness. The law of Moses, however, would not be satisfied until the ceremonial cleansing was done. That was performed at the commandment of Nehemiah.

Verse 10. As a natural result of such an unlawful use of the space given over to Tobiah, the proper support of the Levites and singers had been neglected. Not only so, but the situation had frightened them so that they fled to their private dwellings.

Verse 11. Nehemiah rebuked the men who were guilty of the abuses described above. *Gathered them together* means the Levites and singers who had been crowded out of their rightful place, were all returned and encouraged to expect their support again.

Verse 12. In obedience to the commandment of Nehemiah, the people of the tribe of Judah brought the tithes of the products of the *treasuries* (store-houses) to be used according to the law that was given by Moses.

Verse 13. Nehemiah did not take any risk in the handling of the products. He appointed certain men to supervise them, and the selection was made from those who were *counted faithful*. Since their office (work) was to distribute these necessities of life to the proper persons, it was very advisable to put it in the hands of such men.

Verse 14. Nehemiah was a man of prayer and we read frequently of his turning to God. His prayer that God would not *wipe out* (forget) his deeds for the house of the Lord did not imply that he would be short in his rewarding of merit. The disciples were taught to ask God not to lead them into temptation (Matt. 6: 13). That did not mean that he would so lead them; it was to be their expression of confidence in the good leadership of the Lord. In the same sense, Nehemiah's prayer was his expression of his faith in the divine mercies and reward for righteousness.

Verse 15. The law against manual labor and secular business on the sabbath day was still in force. But Nehemiah found this was being violated and he rebuked the guilty ones while they were in the act.

Verse 16. The violation of the sabbath was not permitted even in the case of the heathen. The evil was made worse by the practice of the Jews, in that they patronized these unlawful transactions.

Verses 17, 18. Nehemiah did not merely rebuke the ones responsible for the corruption, but called their attention to some history. He reminded

them of the punishment that God had brought upon their fathers for just this kind of sin. He accused them of *profaning the sabbath*, which was done by using the sacred day for worldly purposes.

Verse 19. *Gates . . . began to be dark* means that darkness began to fall on the gates. As soon as Nehemiah saw that condition in the evening before the sabbath, he ordered the gates closed to remain so until after the sabbath. As a precaution against any attempt to override the rule and bring in the produce, some guards were placed.

Verses 20, 21. It was well that the watchmen were set at the gates. Some commercial men lingered near them a time or two, hoping doubtless to catch an opportunity for trading contrary to the regulations that had been established. Nehemiah warned them that they would be given rough treatment if they did not leave. They heeded the warning and came no more on the sabbath days.

Verse 22. The Levites were all eligible for the service about the holy city, but ceremonial fitness under the law required them to be entirely separated from any common objects or practices. Hence they were commanded to make the necessary adjustments in their condition, that they could serve as guards at the gates on the sabbath.

Verses 23, 24. A reformation of the marriage situation had been carried out before this (Ezr. 9 and 10), but here were some who either were overlooked at that time, or had relapsed into the unlawful relationship again. And, as usual, when the good associates with the bad, the latter has the greater influence. The children of these unlawful marriages took up the language of the heathen.

Verse 25. *Cursed them* means he described their sinful state to their face. He even used physical punishment on some of them. Since the Mosaic system of government was civil as well as religious, it was fitting that special offenders be so punished.

Verses 26, 27. Nehemiah strengthened his criticism of their conduct by citing the case of Solomon. Even as great a man as he was affected by evil surroundings through his unlawful marriages. *Outlandish* is from *нокра* and Strong's definition is, "strange, in a variety of degrees and applications (foreign, non-relative, adul-

terous, different)." In 1 Ki. 11: 1 Solomon is said to have loved many strange (*нокра*) women. As far as the information goes, all of Solomon's wives were from a land outside of his own proper country. The force of the word may be seen by writing it "out-landish."

Verse 28. There was one special case of unlawful marriages noted by Nehemiah. A grandson of the high priest had gone so far as to marry a daughter of Sanballat, the man who was the enemy of the work from the first. *Chased* is from *BARACH* which is defined as follows: "a primitive root; to bolt, i. e. figuratively to flee suddenly."—Strong. The expression, then, means that Nehemiah used some kind of force that caused this man to run away as in fear.

Verse 29. Nehemiah was especially grieved because the sacred office of the Levitical priesthood had been defiled.

Verse 30. The holy office was rectified by expelling all strangers, people of foreign blood, and placing the *wards* or charges with the proper persons.

Verse 31. Nehemiah completed the reformatory work so that the service could again be pure. He asked to be remembered only in proportion to the good he had done.

ESTHER 1

General remarks: The reader is requested to make the following notation in the sixth column of the chart: "Josephus places the history of Esther in this reign." It is true that most secular authors place the story in the preceding reign. I have accepted the word of Josephus in preference to the others because of the fact that he was an educated Jew, and certainly had better opportunity for understanding such a subject than the others. And especially is that consideration worth much in view of the fact that he lived many centuries ago, when the materials for historic writing were more plentiful than at a later date.

This book, like that of Ruth, contains a very interesting story of love and intrigue, that outshines any mere human composition. However, that was not the main purpose in giving us the book. Like the other book mentioned, it was composed to show the fulfillment of a very important prophecy, all of which will be revealed in course of the story. We should bear in mind that it is an inset historically