

COMMENTARY
ON



Ezra-
Nehemiah-
Esther



by Clayton Winters

HEB.
ESTHER
UNIVERSITY

COMMENTARY ON
Ezra-
Nehemiah-
Esther

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Clayton Winters



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To Eddy,

*A faithful and dedicated
Christian worker,*

*A true Friend for many
years,*

*And excellent student of
the Scriptures who doesn't
need this book.*

Clayton

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Foreword

(Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther)

I magine the following scenario: A people have served as slaves in a distant land for two generations. They are finally freed from their servitude, and allowed to return to their home. Those who do return find there a struggle to survive. They struggle to rebuild their relationship with God; they struggle to rebuild their fortifications against their enemies; they struggle to rebuild the nation into a strong and independent union. All the people of this nation, whether returned to their homeland, or still in the land of their former servitude, are later threatened with complete extermination.

We would agree that such a scenario sounds dramatic, and has all the elements of a good novel. But the scenario is much more than a good novel. It represents the line of thought that can be found in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

Long overlooked by the average Christian, these three books of history of the Israelite nation deserve to be studied and understood. Much of the later writings of the Bible cannot be fully appreciated until one comprehends these books. And, as Clayton Winters shows in this present volume, their comprehension is not a difficult matter.

But consider, too, that the scenario presented above is not limited to the plight of the Jewish people, following their Babylonian Exile. It is strikingly similar to what happens to many pilgrims, even to this day: People freed from the bondage of sin; people who struggle to rebuild their relationship with God, their fortification against the enemy; people who have upon them the ultimate death threat from the ultimate enemy. Christians today can find valuable lessons in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

Therefore, the value of this commentary by Clayton Winters becomes doubly apparent. Clayton explains the meaning of several important ideas in these books, and sets the background for a proper understanding of the messages of the books. But he also helps to draw from the text lessons that are timely and pertinent for today's pilgrim who struggles to reclaim territory for God.

Let the reader be notified at the outset: This is a commentary for serious students. This is not to say that the reading is difficult or laborious; thankfully, Clayton is a skilled writer, as well as a scholar. But it is to say that the greatest benefit of this volume will come to those who approach the reading with a serious and genuine intent to learn from history lessons that will aid the present and future.

My thanks to a dear friend of many years for this fruit of a lifetime of devotion to the word of God. May it find a warm and widespread reception among all those who love the truth!

Timothy D. Hall
Johnson City, TN

Acknowledgments

It has been both a privilege and a pleasure for me to prepare this **Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther**, but it is not a task that I have accomplished alone. For many years I have gleaned rare jewels of truth from dedicated scholars who have plowed the ground before me—far too many to acknowledge here, even if I still remembered all the sources. All these have had a part in the preparation of this book. Or as one philosopher put it, “The ancients have stolen my thoughts.”

I gratefully acknowledge in a special way the aid of Timothy Hall of Johnson City, TN, a good friend, a fellow-laborer in the gospel, and a dedicated student of the Scriptures. He graciously consented to read the manuscript, and suggested a number of corrections and revisions which I feel has made this a better commentary.

I also thank Brother Bennie Whitehead and **Quality Publications** for inviting me to do this commentary for them. Without their help, it would never have become a reality.

But the greatest debt of gratitude goes to the Broyles Street Church of Christ in Erwin, TN, the congregation for which I have served as minister for the past twenty-three years. They have always encouraged me in both a moral and financial way to use whatever abilities I have to further the cause of Christ in the way I deemed best, and especially so in relieving me from other responsibilities to engage in the time-consuming project of preparing the manuscript for this book. For them, a simple thank you seems vastly insufficient.

But all involved seek only that God and His Son may be glorified, and that the cause of our Lord be advanced because of this effort. If that should be the case, then all of us shall feel amply rewarded for our efforts.

Clayton Winters



Dedicated To

The Members Of
The Broyles Street Church of Christ
Erwin, Tennessee

With Its Elders And Deacons

Background Material For A Study Of Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther

The time period of Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther is long, as much as one hundred and eleven years, from 539-428 B.C.; some suggest an even longer time span. Nor did the events of these books take place in a vacuum: they involve three powerful nations, Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia, in addition to the Holy People of God. In an abbreviated study such as the one before us, this leaves a problem as to where one might most profitably begin, and the minimum amount of related or background material to include. That some such knowledge is mandated in dealing with historical works such as those before us goes without saying, and we will frequently have occasion to refer to such in the commentary proper; but often such isolated references leave the uninformed reader almost totally in the dark. We therefore feel very strongly the need for a general overview of events, something of a working outline, to give the student a context for study. Such an overview we propose to present in the following pages; and we urge the serious student, not only to read it carefully, but to engrave the highlights of this introductory material in his mind. We will have occasion to refer to it often in our notes.

GENERAL GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

The careful student of the Bible needs to learn to study with a good set of Bible maps at his side. These will detail the various stages on which most Bible events were performed, and can be found in almost any Bible, Bible atlas, or Bible dictionary. And while helpful in any Bible study, they are simply indispensable in understanding historical works such as Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther. We trust the reader to have available for himself such an aid, making it necessary for us in this study merely to point to a given area.

In the very early part of the Bible inspiration sets the stage for our present study, and introduces us to the civilizations of the great Tigris-Euphrates valley. "And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a

mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur [most other translations understand this as Nimrod] and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calneh" (Genesis 10:8-11).

Locate on your map the Persian Gulf. At the head of it lies the Ur of Chaldees, early home of the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 11:28,31; 15:7). Farther up the Euphrates River in a north-westerly direction was the land of Shinar, site of the infamous tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1). Shinar is used in later Bible history to designate the entire area of Babylonia (Isaiah 11:11; Daniel 1:2). This area was destined to become the seat of the great Babylonian Empire, a power that would crush the life out of the little Kingdom of Judah in 587 B.C. (Ezekiel 23:11-35).

Farther to the north on the Tigris River, in the area of the Zagros mountain range, Nimrod (as versions other than the AV would indicate) also founded Nineveh. This would mark the site of another great empire, the Assyrian, that would throughout history constantly challenge Babylonia for the supremacy of the East. It was this ruling power that God used to carry out His decree of divorce against the northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. (Ezekiel 23:1-10).

Between the Euphrates and the Tigris lies Mesopotamia (Gk. *mesos*, middle, and *potamos*, river), called in the Old Testament Padan-aram, and birthplace of a number of the patriarchs (Acts 7:2; Genesis 35:26; 46:15). Some of the Jews of the Diaspora were still living there at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2:9).

Beyond the Zagros mountains we locate the land of the Medes; to their south-east, in the area north of the Persian Gulf, you will see the kingdom of Persia. These were destined to combine into a war machine that would roll over Babylon, and dominate the scene in the east for nearly two hundred years, 539-331 B.C. (Daniel 8:2-20). It was under this rule that Cyrus issued his decree of freedom for Israel.

Nearly one thousand miles west of Babylon lies the relatively small country of Palestine, bounded by the Euphrates in the north and the river of Egypt in the south, being the land promised by God to the patriarch Abraham and his seed for an inheritance (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18).

Egypt, though not as important to our understanding of the Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther period as the other nations just mentioned, is, nonetheless, such an important figure in all of Bible history that its location needs to be pinpointed by all Bible students. Bordered by the Red Sea, and nourished by the river Nile, it lies in a south-westerly

direction from Palestine. With the children of Israel squeezed between these super powers of the north and south, the fortunes and feuds of Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt would naturally be of vital significance in the history of the people of God.

THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

The history of Assyria is a long one, but basically for our purpose we need only concern ourselves with the portion of it that reflects that empire's relationship and conflicts with the Holy People of God. The following chart will serve to help us keep these events in their proper chronological perspective.

KINGS OF ISRAEL AND ASSYRIA 786-612 B.C.

KINGS OF ISRAEL	KINGS OF JUDAH	KINGS OF ASSYRIA	PROPHETS
Ahab (873-852)	Jehoshaphat (870-845)	Ashurnasirpal II (883-859)	
Ahaziah (852-851)	Jehoram (850-842)	Shalmaneser III (859-823)	
Jehoram (851-841)	Ahaziah (842-841)	Shamshiadad IV (823-810)	
Jehu (841-814)	Athaliah (841-835)	Adadnirari III (810-781)	
Jehoahaz (814-798)	Joash (835-800)	Shalmaneser IV (781-771)	
Jehoash (798-782)		Ashuridan III (771-753)	
Jereboam II (782-745)	Amaziah (800-791)	Ashurnirari V (753-745)	Jonah (790-750)
Zechariah (745)	Uzziah (791-740)	Tiglathpileser III (745-726)	Amos (760-750)
Shallum (745)			Hosea (750-725)
Menahem (745-736)			Isaiah (740-700)
Pekahiah (736-735)	Jotham (740-735)		
Pekah (735-732)		Shalmaneser V (726-721)	
Hoshea (732-724)	Ahaz (735-715)	Sargon II (721-705)	Micah (735-700)
	Hezekiah (721-686)	Sennacherib (705-681)	
	Manasseh (696-641)	Esarhaddon (681-669)	
	Amon (641-639)	Assurbanapal (669-630)	
	Josiah (639-609)	Asshureliliani (630-620)	Jeremiah (626-586)
		Sinsharishkum (620-612)	Zephaniah (630-625)
		Ashurbanalit II (612-610)	Nahum (625-612)
			Habakkuk (625-605)

We have followed the chronology used by F. F. Bruce in his excellent work *Israel and the Nations*¹ to date the kings of Israel, Judah, and Assyria, as well as those of Babylonia and Persia; and those of Homer Hailey in his *Commentary on the Minor Prophets*² to date the prophets. But the reader needs to bear in mind that there are differences in scholars in dating ancient documents and events, as may well be seen by comparing the above works with *A History of Israel* by John Bright³, and *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History* by Jack P. Lewis⁴. But these slight differences do not at all materially effect their overall value for purposes of comparison and study.

Shalmaneser III, 859-823 B.C. For about two hundred years Assyria had laid somewhat dormant, a nation of relative unimportance. But by the time of Shalmaneser III it had become a force to be

reckoned with by the Syrian states located to the west, because Shalmaneser had carried his campaigns across the Euphrates, all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. His campaigns are not mentioned in the Bible, but from Shalmaneser's own records we learn that Israel under Ahab was one of the states that had felt the sting of his sword. After various conquests Assyria withdrew to her own area, but she had served warning to Israel of a new force that they would have to deal with.

Tiglath-pileser III, 745-726 B.C. Politically speaking, under Jeroboam II Israel flourished. Spiritually, however, the nation was sick. Hosea said, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood" (Hosea 4:1,2). Like an adulterous wife, she had acted shamefully (Hosea 1:5), Ephraim was joined to her idols (Hosea 4:17), her goodness was as the morning cloud and the early dew (Hosea 6:4), and like a silly dove she fluttered between Egypt and Assyria for help instead of turning back to God (Hosea 7:11). Such a breakdown of morality had, by the time of Jeroboam's death, brought the state to the edge of anarchy. Jeroboam's son, Zechariah, succeeded him to the throne, but within six months his blood had been drained by the sword of Shallum (2 Kings 15:8-10). Shallum mounted the throne, but only one month later was assassinated by his successor Menahem (2 Kings 15:13-15).

Tiglath-pileser (also called Pul, 2 Kings 15:19, 1 Chronicles 5:26) moved quickly to take advantage of Israel's weakened condition; and only with a large gift negotiated by Menahem was he persuaded to withdraw from the land (2 Kings 15:18-20). Israel had been spared, but not for long. At the time of Menahem's death Pekahiah his son received the throne, but within two years he was murdered and succeeded by Pekah (2 Kings 15:23-25). Assyria struck out again: "In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abelbethmaachah, and Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria" (2 Kings 15:29). Israel was in imminent danger of being wiped out. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Pekah of Israel, and Rezin of Damascus formed a coalition against Assyria. To strengthen their alliance, they conspired to attack Israel, dethrone Ahaz, and put in his place an ally called the son of Tabeal (2 Kings 15:37; Isaiah 7:5,6). The threat left Ahaz shaking like a tree in the wind, and he wanted to turn to Assyria for help (Isaiah 7:2). Isaiah warned him, however, that Rezin and Pekah were just two tails of smoking firebrands who would soon burn themselves out, and that an

alliance with Assyria would cause more problems than it would solve (Isaiah 7:4-20). But Ahaz would not listen and appealed to Tiglath-pileser: "I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the land of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him: for the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin" (2 Kings 16:7-9). Only the capital city of Samaria with a small section of land around it was left to the Israelites.

Worthy of mention is a policy widely initiated by Tiglath-Pileser: that of the deportation of captives. Most rulers before him would try to keep a conquered area subject by force or brutality; but this Assyrian king initiated a wholesale practice of deporting the leading and influential people to other lands; and in turn peopled the land with his loyal subjects from other places. This was a policy which would have long range ramifications for the people of God, and knowing this helps us to understand the cause of the wide dispersion of the Jewish people at the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Shalmaneser, V, 726-721 B.C. Tiglath-pileser died and was succeeded by his son Shalmaneser V. In the meantime Hoshea had butchered Pekah and claimed the throne of Israel for himself (2 Kings 15:30). Israel was tributary to Assyria (2 Kings 17:3); but Hoshea, evidently seeing some hope of freedom, made overtures to Egypt, and refused tribute payment to Shalmaneser. It was Israel's final mistake: "And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings 17:4-6).

Sargon II, 721-705 B.C. Although Shalmaneser had destroyed Samaria, Sargon II took credit for it, and claims to have carried 24,290 of the Samaritans into captivity. Probably what happened was that when Shalmaneser died, Sargon moved in, completed the mop-up operations, and took credit for the whole. At any rate Israel was no more: "For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; Until the Lord removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets.

So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day" (2 Kings 17:22,23).

Sennacherib, 705-681. When Sennacherib ascended the throne of Assyria, a rebellion broke out in Babylon, and Merodach-baladan, whom Sargon had driven from Babylon earlier, reclaimed his throne. The rebellion spread to the Syrian states, and evidently Hezekiah joined the coalition against Assyria (2 Kings 20:12-18; Isaiah 39). At any rate he lost favor with Assyria and Sennacherib attacked Judah (2 Kings 18:13,14). Heavy tribute was paid by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14-17), but that did not satisfy Sennacherib: he demanded total surrender (2 Kings 18:17-37). Only a miracle could save Judah—and a miracle came. With a hook in his nose, and a bridle in his lips, God led the boastful Sennacherib back to his own land where he died at the hands of his own sons (2 Kings 19:20-37).

Esarhaddon, 681-669 B.C. Judah evidently served faithfully as a vassal state during the reign of Esarhaddon, for the records of Esarhaddon mention the fact that Manasseh, along with other subject states, sent laborers to help in the creation of his palace at Nineveh. However sometime either during his reign or that of Asshurbanapal Manasseh rebelled (or at least provoked in some way Assyria): "Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God" (2 Chronicles 33:11-13). Ezra 4:2 mentions additional people that Esarhaddon had sent to populate the province of Samaria who would prove no little problem to Zerubbabel in rebuilding the temple.

Asshurbanapal, 669-630 B.C. The Assyrian Empire had reached its zenith, but mighty forces were building against her that would eventually bring her to her knees. Of interest here is the fact that both the Medes and Babylonians rebelled against Asshurbanapal. He was able to contain the rebellion at first, but the glory of Assyria was over. Under the nation's succeeding kings, the empire came apart at the seams. Nabopolassar gained the independence of Babylon in 626 B.C., and gradually advanced his domain up the Euphrates River. By 614 B.C. the Medes from the north had stormed Asshur, the ancient capital of Assyria. The Medes and the Babylonians then joined forces, and in 612 B.C. Nineveh came under their control. The prophet Nahum described her demise: "All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into

the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars. . . Thy crowned are as the locust, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathered them. There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" (Nahum 3:12,13,17-19).

THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

Judah may well have rejoiced in the fall of her ancient enemy, Assyria; but another force to the north was quickly swelling its ranks that would burst forth over her land like a flood (Jeremiah 1:13,14). The following chart will assist the reader with the rise and fall of the Babylonian Empire, and related Bible history.

KINGS OF JUDAH AND BABYLONIA 626-539

KINGS OF JUDAH	KINGS OF BABYLONIA	PROPHETS OF JUDAH
Josiah (639-609)	Nabopolassar (626-605)	Jeremiah (626-586) Zephaniah (630-625) Nahum (625-612) Habakkuk (625-605) Ezekiel (593-570)
Jehoahaz (609) Jehoakim (609-598) Jehoiachin (598-597) Zedekiah (597-587)	Nebuchadnezzar (605-562) Evil-merodach (562-560) Neriglissar (560-556) Labashi-Marduk (556) Nabonidus (556-539)	Daniel (605-536)

Nabopolassar, 626-605 B.C. To stop the spread of the Babylonian menace Necho king of Egypt challenged Nabopolassar at Carchemish on the Euphrates. The last thing Josiah wanted to see was an Egyptian victory, so he brought his forces against Necho at Megiddo, and lost his life in the encounter (2 Kings 23:29,30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-24). The people appointed Jehoahaz as king of Judah, but Necho deported him to Egypt, and put Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim (Jehoiakim) on the throne as an Egyptian vassal, and laid heavy tribute on Judah (2 Kings 23:31-35). During this period the balance of power between Egypt and Babylonia remained fairly constant. However all that was about to change, for in 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar attacked the Egyptian forces at Carchemish with a vengeance, and won a decisive victory.

Nebuchadnezzar II, 605-562 B.C. Soon after the victory at Carchemish, Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar withdrew from the

battlefront to assume and secure his throne at Babylon. Jehoiakim at first submitted to Babylon, but a short time later, seeing some hope of regaining independence, he rebelled (2 Kings 24:1). Nebuchadnezzar prepared to attack Jerusalem; but in the meantime Jehoiakim died, receiving the burial of an ass as Jeremiah had predicted (Jeremiah 22:18,19; 36:30), and Jehoiachin assumed the throne (2 Kings 24:5). But within three months (597 B.C.) the city had fallen, and many of the leading citizens including Jehoiachin and his family, were carried captive to Babylon (2 Kings 24:8-16).

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Nebuchadnezzar placed Matthanias his father's brother on the throne, and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17). Nine years later Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, and in his eleventh year (587 B.C.) Nebuchadnezzar leveled the city's walls, robbed and burned the temple, and carried all except the very poorest of the land as captives to Babylon. Zedekiah saw his sons slain in his presence; then he himself was blinded and led in chains to Babylon (2 Kings 25:1-17; 2 Chronicles 36:11-21; Jeremiah 39:1-10). The kingdom of Judah, like its sister to the north, lay in dust and ashes; and its inhabitants had been scattered to the four winds.

Nabonidus, 556-539 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar had built a large and strong empire, but none of his successors were able to hold it together. He was succeeded by his son Evil-merodach, who within two years was assassinated in a palace revolt. Evil-merodach's brother-in-law, Neriglissar, ascended the throne, but death limited his reign to four years. His son Labashi-Marduk became the legal heir, but died at the hands of assassins the same year. His murderers moved quickly to appoint Nabonidus king. One of the official acts of Nabonidus was to establish the god Sin as chief of the imperial pantheon. This reversed the benevolent attitude of the Babylonians toward the Jewish religion, and caused the Exiles to fare badly. But a formidable force closing in on the Babylonian Empire was about to change all that. For the little Kingdom of Media had begun to flex its military muscles, and Nabonidus, to strengthen his kingdom against it, had formed an alliance with Persia. But Persia had its own plans for conquest. Cyrus the Great came to the throne of that country in 559 B.C., and by 550 had defeated Media. In a brilliant diplomatic move he combined the two powers into a dual democracy, each part of which enjoyed equal rights, and built them into a powerful force destined to bring Babylon to her knees. By 539 B.C. Belshazzar (probably a son of Nebuchadnezzar only in the Semitic sense of descendent, and co-regent on the throne with Nabonidus) saw the handwriting on the wall; and Daniel announced that he had been weighed in the balances and found wanting (Daniel 5:5,25-28). That same night Darius the Mede marched into Babylon. Belshazzar was slain, and the Babylonian Empire became the domain of the Medes and the Persians.

THE MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE

With Cyrus the Great on the throne of Babylon and controlling the great Medo-Persian Empire, the stage was now set for the events of Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther. For it was in the first year of his reign from Babylon that the decree of freedom was issued for the Jews of the Diaspora. And while at this point we need not give an extended history of the Medo-Persian Empire (we will however pick up some necessary elements in our introduction to Esther), we at least need to familiarize ourselves with its kings and their dates for a proper historical perspective. That list is as follows:

MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE, 559-331

KINGS OF PERSIA

Cyrus (559-530)
 Cambyses (530-522)
 Pseudo-Smerdis (522-521)
 Darius I (Hystaspis) (521-486)

CONTEMPORARY BIBLE BOOKS

Daniel (605-536)
 Ezra (538-458)
 Haggai (5:20)
 Zechariah (520-518)

Xerxes I (486-465)	Esther (486-465)
Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) (465-423)	Nehemiah (444-420)
Xerxes II (423)	Malachi (440)
Sekydianos (Sogdianos) (423)	
Darius II (Nothos) (423-404)	
Artaxerxes II (Mnemon) (404-359)	
Artaxerxes III (Ochos) (359-336)	
Arses (338-336)	
Darius III (Codomannus) (336-331)	

THE HOLY PEOPLE OF GOD

None of the preceding things would be of vital concern to us, nor could they be properly understood, aside from God's selection of His Holy People, their conditional inheritance of the promised land, and their ultimate purpose in human redemption as the people of God. So it is without apology that we give considerable space, along with numerous Scriptural references, to survey this Holy Nation from its inception to its exile. And we highly recommend that the reader take the time to read every reference to these precious words of God. There is absolutely no better way to prepare oneself for this study.

God selected Abraham and promised him both a people and a land through whom all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-16). For 400 years this people was tested and prepared in the iron furnace of Egypt for the rigorous task of being the people of God (Genesis 15:13,14; Deuteronomy 4:20). He prepared Moses in Pharaoh's own household as a lawgiver and a guide to lead His people through the Red Sea, through the wilderness, and into the land promised (Exodus 2:1-10; 14:21,22,30; Joshua 3:7-17).

As God had promised Israel possessed the land of Canaan (Joshua 21:43-45), and it was divided by lot to the twelve tribes of Israel for an inheritance (Joshua 18,19). But we must bear in mind that their status in the land, and as the people of God, was a conditional one. God had entered into a covenant relationship with His people, and His law had to be obeyed: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Exodus 19:5,6). "For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and ye shall possess greater nations and mightier than yourselves. Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the

river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be. There shall no man be able to stand before you: for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:22-28). "But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee. . . The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. And thy carcass shall be meat unto all fowls of the air, and unto the beasts of the earth, and no man shall fray them away" (Deuteronomy 28:15,25,26).

But Israel did not obey: her covenant relationship with God was a yo-yo existence—in and out of His favor; and consequently in and out of control of the promised land. This continued through fifteen judges, more accurately viewed as deliverers rather than rulers, spanning a time period of more than three hundred years. But rather than seeing idolatry and sin as the problem, Israel blamed her political arrangement; so she demanded a king to be like the nations about her, and a king was given (1 Samuel 8:4-18). But within one hundred and twenty years the kingdom was ripped apart, ten tribes breaking off to establish the Kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam I, and the tribe of Judah, along with the Levites, forming the Kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12:12-24).

The divided kingdoms continued to drown in their own iniquity. Their righteousness was like the morning cloud and the early dew (Hosea 6:4,5). They went whoring after the abominable licentiousness of Baal (Hosea 4:12-14), and their private lives were characterized by swearing, lying, stealing, adultery, and murder (Hosea 4:1,2; Jeremiah 6:9,10). Priest and prophet alike were corrupt (Jeremiah 32:32-35), and their worship became a sham—a stench in God's nostrils (Amos 5:21-23). God renamed them Loruhamah and Loammī—there will be no more mercy for you are no longer my people (Hosea 1:6-9). "Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not

hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that were round about them, concerning whom the Lord had charged them, that they should not do like them. And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only. Also Judah kept not the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight" (2 Kings 17:13-20).

So after more than two hundred years, or in 721 B.C., Israel felt the final sting of the Assyrian sword (2 Kings 17:23). One hundred and fifty two years later, 588 B.C., the king of Babylon razed Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, plowed Zion like a field, and carried many of the people from the City of David to languish in Babylon for seventy years while they learned the necessity of obedience to the God Who had chosen them for His People (Jeremiah 52:1-30).

It was by these rivers of Babylon, with tears on their cheeks, and silent harps hanging on willow trees, unable to sing the Lord's song in a strange land (Psalm 137), that a penitent nation heard the decree of Cyrus the Great: "Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:3). A second chance; free again to be the covenant people of Jehovah God; harp strings must suddenly have vibrated throughout Babylon!

¹F.F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI)

²Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Baker, Grand Rapids, MI)

³John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Westminister Press, Philadelphia)

⁴Jack P. Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History* (Baker, Grand Rapids)

Outline Of The Book Of Ezra

I. INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

- A. Time period covered in Ezra: approximately eighty-two years, 538-456 B.C.
- B. Author: assigned by both Jewish and Christian tradition to Ezra the priest.
- C. Time of composition: probably around 450 B.C.
- D. Theme of the book: the return of the exiles under the decree of Cyrus, 538 B.C., to rebuild the temple, and reestablish the sacred worship of the Holy People.

II. UNDER THE DECREE OF CYRUS, THE EXILES RETURN TO JERUSALEM (1:5-2:70)

- A. The proclamation of Cyrus, releasing the Jews from their Babylonian captivity (1:1-4).
- B. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua, the exiles return to Jerusalem (1:5-2:70).
 - 1. Those remaining behind provide the material things necessary for the journey (1:5,6).
 - 2. The temple vessels taken by King Nebuchadnezzar when he razed the Jewish temple at Jerusalem restored to the captives (1:7-11).
 - 3. A list of the captives who returned (2:1-63).
- C. The number of those returning to Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus (2:64-67).

III. THE WORSHIP SYSTEM RESTORED (3:1-7)

- A. The altar of burnt offerings rebuilt (3:1-3).
- B. The feast of tabernacles observed, and both daily and special sacrificial services resumed (3:4-7).

IV. THE TEMPLE OF GOD REBUILT (3:8-6:22)

- A. The foundation of the temple laid in the second year after the return to Jerusalem, 437 B.C. (3:8-13).

- B. The Samaritans oppose the rebuilding of the temple (4:1-5).
 - 1. Their effort to join with the Jews on the project rebuffed by Zerubbabel (4:1-3).
 - 2. Counsellors hired to frustrate the Jewish mission (4:4-6).
- C. Legal steps taken to thwart the project (4:6-16).
 - 1. A letter sent to Cambyses to accuse the Jews (4:6).
 - 2. Another letter sent to Pseudo-Smerdis, accusing the Jews of rebellion against the king (4:7-16).
- D. Smerdis issues a decree to halt all work on the temple (4:17-22).
- E. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah stir up the people, and Zerubbabel resumes work on the Lord's house (5:1,2).
- F. Tatnai, the provincial governor, challenges Zerubbabel's authority to continue the work (5:3-5).
 - 1. He sends a letter of protest to Darius king of Persia, outlining his efforts to stop the temple project (5:6-16).
 - 2. He further requests that the king make a search for the alleged decree of Cyrus, permitting the construction of the temple (5:17).
- G. The decree of Darius, allowing a continuation of the work (6:1-12).
- H. The temple completed in 515 B.C. (6:13-15).
- I. The children of Israel dedicate the house of God (6:16-22).

V. EZRA THE PRIEST RETURNS TO JERUSALEM TO RESTORE ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP PRACTICES (7:1-10:44)

- A. The genealogical line of Ezra the priest (7:1-5).
- B. The time of Ezra's return to Jerusalem—the seventh year of Artaxerxes, 458 B.C. (7:6-10).
- C. Artaxerxes decree giving Ezra authority to restore the worship of God (7:11-26).
 - 1. All Israelites, including priests and Levites, who chose to of their own free will might accompany Ezra (7:11-13).
 - 2. Ezra is commissioned to gather and carry all the offerings, including those from the king and his counsellors, to the house of God at Jerusalem (7:14-20).
 - 3. He also is commissioned to collect for further needs from the treasurers beyond the river (7:21-23).
 - 4. Priest, Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, and ministers of the house of God to be exempt from taxation (7:24).
 - 5. Ezra given authority to enforce conformity to God's law (7:25,26).
- D. Ezra praises God for King Artaxerxes' support (7:27,28).

- E. Family heads who returned with Ezra (8:1-20).
- F. Prayer and preparation for a safe journey to Jerusalem (8:21-30).
 - 1. A fast at the river Ahava (8:21-23).
 - 2. Twelve priests appointed to take charge for the safe delivery of the offerings for the Lord's house (8:24-30).
- G. The company arrives at Jerusalem (8:31-36).

VI. EZRA'S REFORMS AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD (9:1-10:17)

- A. Ezra's anguish over the pollution of the holy seed through mixed marriages (9:1-4).
- B. In great heaviness of heart, he confesses the sins of the people (9:5-17).
- C. The people respond by repentance and a renewal of the covenant (10:1-17).
- D. A list of the priests who had married foreign women (10:18-44).

4

Introduction To The Book Of Ezra

TIME PERIOD

The book of Ezra picks up the strands of Israelite history where 2 Chronicles ends, that is with the decree of Cyrus II, in the first year of his reign from Babylon, which granted the captive Israelites, widely dispersed by the Assyrians and Babylonians, freedom to return to their native homeland (2 Chronicles 36:22,23). That gives the book a starting date of 538 B.C. Ezra himself came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, and his last recorded date is the first month of the following year, or 456 B.C. Thus the book covers a time period of approximately eighty two years.

CONTENT

Israel possessed the Promised Land by divine right. But having violated God's covenant, she was allowed to be carried captive first by the Assyrians, and then by the Babylonians as punishment for her disobedience. The length of the captivity in Babylon had been fixed by Jeremiah as seventy years. The seventy years had expired, and it was time for the captives to go home. This was permitted under the decree of Cyrus (1:2-4), and immediately a colony of the faithful set out to rebuild the house of God at Jerusalem (1:2-5). Despite heavy opposition, under the leadership of Jeshua the high priest, and Sheshbazzar and later Zerubbabel as governors (unless these are two names for the same person), their mission was accomplished, and the temple was ready for service by 515 B.C. (Ezra 1:7,8; 3:2; 5:2,14-17; Haggai 1:1,12-15; Ezra 6:15).

But the new temple was such a disappointment to some of the returning captives that the temple services were probably never fully restored, or if so, they had soon fallen into a serious state of lethargy and unconcern. At any rate, Ezra the priest, having been made aware of the need, came to Jerusalem with the necessary credentials from king Artaxerxes to institute the needed reforms (7:8-26). This he did by reinforcing the Book of the Covenant as the guiding force in the

lives of the people (Nehemiah 8:1-12), restoring the days for religious celebrations (Nehemiah 9:13-18), and by separating certain men from their foreign wives who would likely lead them again to the same sinful alliances of the past (9-11).

Following is a general chronology of Ezra that should prove helpful to the Bible student in keeping the overall perspective of the book in mind:

Cyrus issued the decree of return (1:2-4):	538 B.C.
Reconstruction of the temple began (3:8)	536 B.C.
Opposition to the temple project (4:6)	530 B.C.
Decree issued to stop the temple construction (4:7-23)	522 B.C.
Work on the temple resumed (4:24; 6:3-12)	519 B.C.
The temple completed (6:15)	515 B.C.
Ezra began his work in Jerusalem (7:8,9)	458 B.C.
Ezra's work completed (10:17)	457 B.C.

Since a number of months are also used in dating the events of Ezra and Nehemiah, it should be helpful to the reader to become familiar with the Jewish calendar. Their months did not exactly correspond with ours, but for our purpose the following should be adequate:

<i>Nisan</i>	April
<i>Iyar</i>	May
<i>Sivan</i>	June
<i>Tammuz</i>	July
<i>Ab</i>	August
<i>Elul</i>	September
<i>Tishri</i>	October
<i>Marchesvan</i>	November
<i>Kislev</i>	December
<i>Tebeth</i>	January
<i>Shebet</i>	February
<i>Adar</i>	March

AUTHORSHIP

The book bears the name of Ezra who is the principle character of the narrative; and since a portion of it is written in the first person (7:27-9:15), he is generally believed to be its author. Also tradition, both Jewish and Christian, assigns to him its authorship, as well as that of 1 and 2 Chronicles, along with a number of other books. We see no valid reason to believe otherwise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ezra was the son (or perhaps grandson) of Seraiah the high priest in Jerusalem who was captured, taken to Babylon, and killed when

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the Holy City (2 Kings 25:18-21; Ezra 7:1-5). Ezra was "A ready scribe in the law of Moses" who "had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:6,10). He was evidently a well-known and trusted character in Babylon, for the king granted his request to go to Jerusalem with considerable treasures. Furthermore, any additional needs of his were to be supplied by the king's treasurers on the western side of the Euphrates (7:11-21). He was even authorized to confiscate the property of, imprison, or put to death those who refused to submit to the law of God (7:25,26).

He arrived in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, 458 or 457 B.C., and immediately occupied himself with restoring the ancient order of things. After about one year he dropped from the scene, and we hear no more of him until the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, when he joins Nehemiah in once more working for a reformation among the people. Although traditions abound, nothing more is known for sure about him beyond this point.

Commentary On Ezra

CHAPTER 1

THE PROCLAMATION OF CYRUS

1:1-4

1:1-4. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, (v:2) Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. (v:3) Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. (v:4) And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

1:1 Cyrus king of Persia. This was Cyrus II, also known as Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.), who came to the throne of Persia in 559 B.C. He had joined together the Median and Persian kingdoms by 550 B.C., and wisely ruled the two as a dual monarchy, granting each one equal rights. By 539 B.C. he had built them into such a powerful force that they marched into Babylon, killed Belshazzar son of Nabonidus, who was serving as viceroy in his father's absence, and brought the Babylonian Empire to its end (Daniel 5). Cyrus then assumed the throne of Babylon for himself, and became sovereign over a vast empire that would spread itself from India to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1). It was in the first year of his reign from Babylon, or 538 B.C. that he issued the decree to the Jewish captives, allowing them to return to their homeland, and to rebuild their temple. **By the mouth of Jeremiah.** The writing prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah's prophecies

covered a period of at least thirty nine years, from the 13th year of Josiah until the 11th year of Zedekiah, 639-587 B.C. (Jeremiah 1:2,3). This was the period that marked the decline and fall of the Holy Nation. As a watchman on the wall Jeremiah tried desperately to save his people. His message may be divided generally into three sections. (1) A call to repentance to avert impending disaster. Judah had broken covenant with God (Jeremiah 11:1-11; 22:8,9): like a wild ass sniffing for a mate, she had turned to idols (2:23-25); religion had become an anesthetic for immorality of the grossest sort (7:4-10); and her streets could be searched in vain for a person of fair ethical judgment (5:1,2). The Holy People were no longer holy, and God could not allow their continued existence. A seething pot was boiling in the north, tilted toward Jerusalem (1:13-15); the alarm of war had sounded (4:19-21); four kinds of destruction had been decreed: the sword to slay, the dogs to tear, the fowls and beasts to devour, and exile for the survivors (15:2-4); and the attackers would show no mercy (6:22,23; 21:7-10). Only in repentance and renewal of the covenant was there any hope of survival for the nation (3:12-18; 4:1,2). But Judah would not listen. In fact, Jehoiakim showed such contempt for Jeremiah's warnings that he cut his scroll to pieces and burned it (36:20-24). The nation's doom was sealed. (2) Survival through submission. Judah, having rejected her only hope of salvation through repentance, was about to feel the edge of Nebuchadnezzar's sword. Her only hope now, clearly pointed out by Jeremiah, was in full surrender and submission to Babylonia, accepting the chastisements for her sins (27:8-14; 38:18). For his effort, Jeremiah was imprisoned as a traitor (32:1-4), but his words held true: Zion was plowed as a field (26:18; 52:1-19). (3) A promise of restoration. It was a horrible picture of misery and destruction that Jerusalem presented to the eye of the weeping prophet (Lamentations 4:4-10). But all was not lost: a letter was sent to the captives in Babylon promising a return after seventy years of captivity (Jeremiah 29:10); the voice of joy and gladness would again be heard in the land (33:11)—Jeremiah would put his money on that in the form of a real estate purchase (32:8-15). It was this promise that was now on the verge of fulfillment. **The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus.** How this was done we are not told. Two hundred years earlier the prophet Isaiah had predicted this decree of Cyrus, even calling him by name (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). Josephus says that Cyrus had read this prophecy, and thereby learned his role in divine history. This certainly is within the realm of possibility. Daniel the prophet was among the captives, but had obtained a position of great eminence and respect in Babylon by the time Cyrus came to the throne (Daniel 2:46-48). His abilities were recognized immediately by Darius, and some thought was given to setting him over the entire kingdom (Daniel 6:1-3). Others of the

Exile were also in favorable positions of access to the king (Daniel 2:49). Any of these familiar with Isaiah's prophecy, and of Jeremiah's predictions of a return to their homeland, would quickly see in Cyrus' accession a divine hand at work, and would no doubt at their first opportunity apprise the king of the same. At any rate, however he may have come by the information, he knew he had a command from the God of heaven to do this particular work (see v. 2). **He made a proclamation.** The word proclamation is from the Hebrew *abar*, meaning to pass over, pass through, or pass along. It is used of captors walking over the bodies of their prisoners (Isaiah 51:23), the flood waters covering the earth (Isaiah 54:9), or of something passing back and forth (Ezekiel 35:7; Zechariah 7:14). Thus the word of freedom for the people of God flowed back and forth through the land. But furthermore, it was put into writing, a fact that would later become very important when the legality of their work on the temple was challenged (see 5:17).

1:2-4. The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth. Cyrus had gained a good knowledge of the one true God; I see no other explanation for this phrase or the following verses. This gives credence to the idea set forth above, that Daniel and other captives had been active in spreading a knowledge of the true God among their captors. **Hath charged me.** Commanded, NKJV; appointed, NIV, NASV. Unlike the hardhearted Pharaoh (Genesis 5:1,2), or the haughty Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:19-27), Cyrus recognized that the God of heaven still ruled in the kingdoms of men; and that his appointment to the throne was a part of His divine scheme of the ages. **To build him an house at Jerusalem.** Originally God directed Moses to build the ark of the covenant, a small box-like object slightly less than 4x3x3 feet in dimension. Over it was placed the mercy seat, a cover of pure gold, and within was placed the tablets of the covenant. It was from above this mercy seat that God promised to meet and speak with His people (Exodus 25:10-22; Hebrews 9:1-5). The ark was housed in a portable structure called the tabernacle, an arrangement that served Israel well during her days of wilderness wanderings, and while she established herself in the promised land. But once king David had firmly established the kingdom, and had chosen Jerusalem for his capital, it concerned him that he lived in a cedar house, while the ark of God was still in a tent (2 Samuel 7:1-3). David therefore purposed to build a house for the ark of the covenant, and thus for God Himself, since the ark was the place where God met with His people. However we must bear in mind that the idea was not originally David's, but God's, since God long before had promised to choose a place for His name (Deuteronomy 12:11; 1 Kings 9:1,2). God, however, did not

allow David the privilege, since he was a man of war, but instead commissioned his son Solomon for the task (1 Chronicles 22:1-11). Once the temple was constructed and the ark of the covenant was moved into it, it quickly became the center of Jewish worship and nationalism. It was God's house or place of habitation (Psalms 132:13), a chosen place for His name (Psalms 132:13,14). There sacrifices could be offered for sin (Psalms 66:13-15), prayers presented in God's very presence (1 Kings 8:22-53; Isaiah 56:7; Acts 3:1), and voices lifted to God in joyful praise (Psalms 42:4). To dwell in the house for ever would be the ultimate blessing for any man (Psalms 27:4,5; 132:7). Most of all it represented in type the Lord's house, the church of Christ of the New Testament (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5-10), and looked forward to the time when men would need no temple, but could in reality dwell in the presence of God (Revelation 21:22). However because of Judah's wickedness, and because she believed that the very presence of the temple was an assurance of God's approval and protection (Jeremiah 7:4-16), the Babylonians were allowed to burn it to the ground (2 Kings 25:9), and to scatter the Holy People to the four winds (Ezekiel 5:1-10). Now the time had come for God to fulfill the promise of restoration for the dispersed captives; and an order of the first priority was the temple: in fact there could be no restoration of God's people without a restoration of God's house. Cyrus had been chosen as God's servant to issue that command. **Who is there among you?** The captive Israelites, scattered throughout the Persian Empire. **Now let him go up to Jerusalem.** After seventy years of alienation and anguish, and prayers and longing toward Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:46; Daniel 6:10), the decree gave the Jews of the Diaspora freedom to go home—freedom to rebuild their holy temple, their holy city, and to be once more the peculiar people of God. Shouts of prolonged praise must have been heard throughout the empire for this proclamation of emancipation. **Let the men of his place help him.** God did not allow the slaves of Egypt to leave empty handed (Exodus 11:2,3). This was in a sense a second Exodus (for this idea see Isaiah 51:9-11), and the people would not leave empty handed.

THE CAPTIVES PREPARE FOR THEIR JOURNEY

1:5,6

1:5-6. Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. (v:6) And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with

goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

1:5,6. Many of the Israelites had fared well in captivity, becoming successful in business and government in the countries to which they had been deported (Esther 2:18-23; Daniel 2:46-49; Nehemiah 2:1). While it was one thing for the home-loving Israelites to weep and long for Zion (Psalms 37), it was something else for them to actually give up a fairly lucrative lifestyle, uproot their families, and return to a country suffering the aftermath of war and overrun with foreigners (2 Kings 17:24; Nehemiah 1:3). Not all would be willing to go, and those who did would need strong leadership. **Then rose up the chief of the fathers.** Chief (Hebrew *rosh*). This word is used of mountain peaks (Genesis 5), tops of towers (Genesis 11:4), or the heights of stars (Job 22:12); it is also used of leaders such as the heads of families (Exodus 6:14), or the chief priests (2 Kings 25:18). No doubt here it simply suggests men of high standing and influence, the kind of men who had been deported to Babylon in the first place (1 Kings 24:14), who were willing to take the lead in the Exodus to the holy land, regardless of the sacrifices demanded. **Judah and Benjamin.** These were the two tribes left to form the Kingdom of Judah when the remaining ten tribes revolted under Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:21-24). **The priests and Levites.** God had selected the tribe of Levi in lieu of the firstborn from each Israelite household (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:12,13), and had set them apart for the priestly and sanctuary service (Numbers 8:13-23). They were absolutely indispensable for a restoration of the temple and worship service. **With all them whose spirit God had raised.** Jeremiah sent a letter to the captives, promising them deliverance at the end of seventy years (Jeremiah 29:1-10). The prophet Ezekiel regularly taught God's word to the people, and his messages were topics of conversation among the people (Ezekiel 14:1; 33:30). Visions of his, such as the valley of dry bones taking on flesh again, must have inspired many home-loving Israelites (Ezekiel 37:1-14). Daniel gained knowledge of the end of the seventy years captivity by reading books containing Jeremiah's prophecies (Daniel 9:1-19), and no doubt many others had available to them the same word of God. In these ways, and perhaps by other means, smoking embers of freedom were kept glowing in the Jewish breast; and when Cyrus issued his decree, the embers burst into flame: the people rose up to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem. **All they that were about them strengthened their hands.** The Jews who could not, or did not wish to return to their homeland, (and perhaps their well-wishers among the Babylonians as well), provided the necessities for the long journey home, in addition to the gifts for the house of God. In

this way God's cause has always been advanced: those who cannot go help send those who can.

CAPTURED TEMPLE VESSELS RESTORED BY CYRUS 1:7-11

1:7-11. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and put them in the house of his gods; (v:8) Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. (v:9) And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, (v:10) thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. (v:11) All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

1:7-11. The vessels of the house of the Lord. Holy vessels were an essential part of the original sanctuary service. An abundance of such furnishings had also been lavishly supplied for the temple by Solomon (2 Kings 25:8-17). Nebuchadnezzar stripped these from the temple, no doubt partially for their monetary and religious value, but also to show contempt for the Jewish God of the temple, as Belshazzar was doing the night that Babylon fell (Daniel 5:2-4). Cyrus commissioned Mithredath the treasurer to turn these into the hands of the prince of Judah that they might be restored to the house of God. **This is the number of them.** Here we run into one of the very frequent, and more perplexing problems of the Old Testament; that of apparent discrepancies in numbers. Ezra details the number of items turned over to Sheshbazzar, totalling 2,499, but then comes up with a total more than twice that amount, 5,400. Two possible explanations come to mind: (1) Ezra gives a detailed list of some of the major vessels, or 1,499, then adds to that list by saying, "And other vessels a thousand." But perhaps there were still others of even less significance that were not reckoned in either of these, bringing the total to 5,400. (2) We must remember that we are dealing with copies of the Scriptures, not the originals; therefore there is a strong possibility of copyists errors. This seems likely because the list in the Septuagint adds up to 2,489, while the same list in 1 Esdras 2:13,14 (followed by the RSV) adds up to 5,469. However in all such instances we must remember that whatever the solution may be, no contradiction exists, as sceptics would have us believe, as long as other valid explanations are possible; and that is certainly the case here.

CHAPTER 2

A LIST OF THE CAPTIVES WHO RETURNED

2:1-63

2:1-63. Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; (v:2) Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: (v:3) The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. (v:4) The children of Shephatiah three hundred seventy and two. (v:5) The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. (v:6) The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. (v:7) The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. (v:8) The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. (v:9) The children of Zaccai seven hundred and threescore. (v:10) The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. (v:11) The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. (v:12) The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. (v:13) The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. (v:14) The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. (v:15) The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. (v:16) The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. (v:17) The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. (v:18) The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. (v:19) The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. (v:20) The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.

(v:21) The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three. (v:22) The men of Netophah, fifty and six. (v:23) The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. (v:24) The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. (v:25) The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. (v:26)

The children of Ramah and Gabba, six hundred twenty and one. (v:27) The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. (v:28) The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. (v:29) The children of Nebo, fifty and two. (v:30) The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. (v:31) The children of other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. (v:32) The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. (v:33) The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. (v:34) The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. (v:35) The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

(v:36) The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. (v:37) The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. (v:38) The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. (v:39) The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

(v:40) The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four.

(v:41) The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight.

(v:42) The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all an hundred thirty and nine.

(v:43) The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth, (v:44) The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon, (v:45) The children of Lebanan, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, (v:46) The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmai, the children of Hanan, (v:47) The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, (v:48) The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, (v:49) The children of Uzza, the children of Passeh, the children of Besai, (v:50) The children of Asnah, the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim, (v:51) The children of Bakbuk, the children of Mehida, the children of Harhur, (v:52) The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, (v:53) The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah, (v:54) The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

(v:55) The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, (v:56) The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, (v:57) The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. (v:58) All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three

hundred ninety and two. (v:59) And these were they which went up from Telmelah, Telharsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel: (v:60) The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two.

(v:61) And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name: (v:62) These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood. (v:63) And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.

The long lists of names that appear in this chapter and elsewhere in the Bible make very tedious reading for the average Bible student, and on the whole seem quite useless. But this is far from the case in their original intent. We must ever bear in mind in studying the Bible that it is the development and consummation of God's scheme of redemption. The Old Testament portrays the selection of the lineage of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), the development of that seed into a Holy Nation to become a depository for God's revelation through people, prophets, and symbols (Deuteronomy 18:15-22; Romans 9:4,5; Hebrews 8:1-6), and a land especially promised and abundantly blessed for the habitation of these people (Genesis 13:14; Deuteronomy 12:6-15). But all this was with one grand climax in view: the coming of Christ as our Savior (Galatians 3:15-19; Ephesians 1:10; Acts 3:22-26). Thus for the Holy Nation the genealogical structures served at least the following purposes: (1) to establish the genealogical line of Abraham so that Christ could be seen as its legitimate consummation (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38; Galatians 3:26-29); (2) to sustain the tribe of Levi as special temple servants with the priesthood being limited to the descendents of Aaron (Numbers 3:9-12; Exodus 29:9); and (3) to form the basis for inheritance in the promised land (Joshua 13:8-21;42; Leviticus 25:23; 1 Kings 21:1-3). If the people were to return to the *holy land* to be *holy people* with a *holy purpose*, it was absolutely necessary that Ezra determine the pure Israelite strain, and purge out those who were not of the proper lineage, which of course he did (Ezra 2:62,63).

Another tremendously challenging thing about this chapter is the number of returning captives given by Ezra, which in many instances differs from the figures given by Nehemiah. For a discussion of this the reader is referred to the notes on 2:64,65.

2:1,2 The children of the province. That is, the people who had inhabited the area of Judaea, for it had been made into a Persian pro-

vince. **Every one to his own city.** As we have already shown the promised land was divided on the basis of tribal and family inheritance. Each returning family now seeks a restoration of his original inheritance. **Came with Zerubbabel.** In 1 Chronicles 3:17-19 Zerubbabel is listed as the grandson of King Jehoiachin (called also Coniah and Jeconiah) through his son Pedaiiah. Haggai and Matthew call him the son of Shealtiel, who was the brother of Pedaiiah (Haggai 1:1; Matthew 1:12). This would probably mean that he was only a legal son of Jehoiachin (cf. Exodus 2:10), or maybe a son through a levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). Sheshbazzar was the name of the prince of Judah to whom Cyrus delivered the temple treasures (1:10). This was either another name for Zerubbabel, or else he was soon replaced by Zerubbabel as governor of the province (Haggai 1:1,14). **Jeshua.** The high priest, also called Joshua by Haggai and Zechariah (Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 3:1). Some of the other leaders listed bear familiar names, such as Mordecai and Nehemiah, but probably are not identifiable with these better known Bible characters.

2:3-63. Having listed the leaders, Ezra proceeds to list the returning captives in seven categories: (1) *by family*, 3-19; (2) *by locality*, 20-35; (3) *the priests*, 36-39; (4) *the Levites*, 40-42; (5) *the Nethinim*, 43-54; (6) *sons of Solomon's servants*, 55-58; (7) *those unable to establish their genealogy*, 59-63. At the beginning of this chapter we have shown the importance of family and priestly genealogical records, and no further comment on these need be given. However, two of these categories require special consideration. **The Nethinim.** This is a transliterated Hebrew term meaning, "the ones given." Actually the Levites were all *Nethinim* in the general sense, because as a tribe they had been given to God as special servants of the temple (Numbers 8:19). But others also were occasionally given to this service (Numbers 31:40,41,47; Joshua 9:23); the Nethinim mentioned here had descended from those thus appointed by king David (Ezra 8:20). **The sons of Solomon's servants.** Solomon had pressed the conquered Canaanite population into forced labor (1 Kings 9:20,21), and it appears that these servants had remained a distinct group even in captivity. **Urim and Thummim.** The Hebrew means lights and perfections. These were objects placed on the breastplate of the high priestly garments (Exodus 28:30), and were used as a means of receiving revelation from God. How this was accomplished we are not told. But those unable to establish their genealogy were barred from the priesthood until such lineage could be restored by Urim and Thummim.

NUMBER OF THE CAPTIVES WHO RETURNED 2:64-70

2:64-70. The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, (v:65) Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women. (v:66) Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; (v:67) Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

(v:68) And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place: (v:69) They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priest' garments. (v:70) So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

2:64-67. The whole congregation together. The numbers that are here listed present some serious difficulties. To help the reader grasp the full import of the problem, we list four separate accounts of those who returned:

	EZRA	NEHEMIAH	1 ESDRAS	SEPTUAGINT
Total Enumerated	28,818	31,089	31,600	32,008
Servants	+ 7,337	+ 7,337	+ 7,337	+ 7,337
Singers	+ 200	+ 245	+ 245	+ 200
	<u>37,355</u>	<u>38,671</u>	<u>39,182</u>	<u>39,545</u>
Text Totals	42,360	42,360	42,360	42,360
Servants	+ 7,337	+ 7,337	+ 7,337	+ 7,337
Singers	+ 200	+ 245	+ 245	+ 200
	<u>49,897</u>	<u>49,942</u>	<u>49,942</u>	<u>49,897</u>
Differences	12,542	11,271	10,760	10,352

This helps one to see at a glance that not only do the four sources disagree in the enumeration of those who returned, but also when the totals are given, the discrepancy in each instance is more than 10,000. Various explanations of this have been given; we list here a few of the more prominent ones: (1) The differences represent numberings at two or more different times; Ezra counted those who joined the group at the beginning, while Nehemiah evidently used a record that had been produced later. Thus some of the original group had dropped out, and others had been added along the way. (2) The original documents had been damaged, making omissions necessary. (3) Copyists' errors. (4) Some method of accounting was used that, if fully understood,

would harmonize the accounts. Though all of these explanations have some merit, yet we realize that they can not either alone, or in combination with each other, totally solve the problem. Many, many times the Grand Old Book has been challenged, but when all the facts were in it, it came through with shining colors. We have every confidence that the matter here would be no exception.

2:68-70. They gave to the treasury. The size of the gifts as stated, according to a footnote in the NIV, was 1,100 pounds of gold, and about three tons of silver: a considerable contribution when translated into terms based on the value of these precious metals today. Again we see a considerable difference between the figures here and those given by Nehemiah. But the explanations given in the notes on 2:64-67 would also apply here. **One hundred priests' garments.** For a description of these see Exodus 28:1-43. **And all Israel in their cities.** The returning captives were not only Judean Jews, but people from the northern tribes as well. All had the opportunity to return to their former inheritance, and to be once more the people of God.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORSHIP SYSTEM RESTORED

3:1-7

3:1-7. And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. (v:2) Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. (v:3) And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord, even burnt offerings morning and evening. (v:4) They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; (v:5) And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the Lord that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the Lord. (v:6) From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord. But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid. (v:7) They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

3:1 And when the seventh month was come. It took Ezra and his company four months to make the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:9). It is unlikely that the first exodus under Zerubbabel made it any quicker. At any rate by the seventh month, the month Tishri, corresponding to our September-October, the people were fairly well settled in their cities, and it was time for the actual work of restoration to begin. Religiously speaking, the seventh month was the ideal time for this, for it was the most significant month of the entire Jewish year. It

began with the Feast of Trumpets, which was characterized by a memorial blowing of trumpets, afflicting the soul, and a burnt offering (Leviticus 23:23-25). And since this marked the beginning of the civil year, this was probably also a kind of New Year's celebration. In addition to this some also believe that it memorialized either the creation of the world, or the giving of the law from Sinai. A second celebration came on the tenth day of the seventh month—the day of atonement (23:26-32). Under the Old Testament system, sins were not forgiven in the absolute sense (it took the blood of Christ to do that, Hebrews 9:15). The blood of animals served only to roll sins forward for another year (Hebrews 10:1-4): the sacrifices of atonement day accomplished this purpose: "But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people" (Hebrews 8:7). From the fifteenth to the twenty-first of this month the feast of tabernacles was observed. When the harvest had been gathered, all Israelites moved into booths constructed of tree branches to remind them of their escape from Egypt, and the period of wilderness wanderings when they had no fixed dwelling (Exodus 23:33-44).

3:2-7. The altar of the God of Israel. The Holy People had just completed seventy years of captivity for disobedience to God, and perhaps no people ever felt more heavily the burden of sin than did they. It was imperative that the great altar be restored, and their sacrifices for sin be resumed; no other work of God could even be considered until this crucial matter was taken care of. The original altar measured $7\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and stood in the court in front of the sanctuary. The fire on it had been miraculously ignited, and was kept continuously burning (Exodus 27:1-8; Leviticus 6:12; 9:24). Solomon increased the altar's dimensions to $30 \times 30 \times 15$ feet when he constructed the temple (2 Chronicles 4:1). **As it is written in the law of Moses.** This phrase, or its equivalent, will often be encountered in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (Ezra 7:10; 10:3; 8:8,9; Nehemiah 10:34,36), and sets the tone for the restoration movement. Apostasy from God's divine law had resulted in captivity; restoration demanded a return to the original plan. King Josiah had followed this divine pattern in his efforts to reform and save the kingdom of Judah some years before (2 Kings 22:8-23:24), and any apostasy from God's Book today must be corrected in precisely the same way. Anything short of this would be that much short of a restoration: there is absolutely no substitute for *as it is written* (1 Corinthians 4:6). **They set the altar upon his bases.** That is, they determined the exact spot of the previous altar so it would be a true restoration of the original. **And they burnt offerings thereon unto the Lord.** For a description of these, and for a detailed list of the requirements for the seventh-

month feast days, we refer the reader to Numbers 29. **But the foundation of the temple of the Lord was not yet laid.** Carpenters and masons were already at work in preparing the materials, but the actual on-site construction of the temple had not yet begun.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

3:8-13

3:8-13. Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. (v:9) Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. (v:10) And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. (v:11) And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. (v:12) But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: (v:13) So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

3:8-13. Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God. It had now been nearly a year since the captives left Babylon. This time had been consumed in preparing their dwellings, and restoring the sacrificial system and religious feasts. **In the second month.** The month Iyar (Zif of the old Hebrew calendar), corresponding to our April-May. It should not escape our notice that the sacrifices of the people had been resumed on the first day of the most important religious month of the Jewish year. Now, the foundation of the temple is laid in the very month that Solomon started the original temple (1 Kings 6:1). This indicates serious and solemn planning by Jeshua and

the other leaders, rather than mere coincidence, and a consecrated determination in every way to return to the ancient order. **To set forward the work of the house of the Lord.** Set forward is from the Hebrew verb *natsach* and means an overseer or superintendent. Ezra lists the number of Levites who returned from captivity as seventy-four (2:40); these were now appointed as supervisors for the construction of the temple. **When the builders laid the foundation.** For almost a year—one no doubt filled with hardships, fears, and disappointments—this moment had been anticipated. Now it had actually arrived: The Lord's house was being built; Jehovah would once more dwell among His people (Ezekiel 44:1,2); trumpets were sounded, and shouts of praise and thanksgiving ascended to the throne of the Father. **Ancient men, that had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice.** Ezekiel had promised a glorious temple far surpassing the old structure of Solomon, and into which the glory of Jehovah Himself would enter by way of the eastern gate (Ezekiel 40-47). But the temple the old men now saw rising up before them seemed nothing by comparison: tears of disappointment rolled down their cheeks. What they did not realize was that this temple would be blessed with the most glorious *Presence* of all—God made flesh (John 1:1,2; Mark 11:1-11); and that it stood as a symbol of, and would extend to the establishment of, the most glorious institution that ever graced God's good earth—the church of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:21,22).

CHAPTER 4

OPPOSITION TO THE WORK ON GOD'S HOUSE

4:1-22

4:1-3. Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel; (v:2) Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. (v:3) But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.

4:1,2. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin. That is, the Samaritans. Assyria captured Samaria in 721 B.C. (see notes on Assyria in our introductory background material). "And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof" (2 Kings 17:24). According to Josephus this motley population was designated as Cutheans in the Hebrew tongue, but Samaritans in the Greek. Enmity that first surfaced at this point between them and the Jews was to become perennial. The above writer addresses this situation as follows: "And when they see the Jews in prosperity, they pretend that they are changed, and allied to them, and call them kinsmen, as though they were derived from Joseph, and had by that means an original alliance with them; but when they see them falling into a low condition, they say they are no way related to them, and that the Jews have no right to expect any kindness or marks of kindred from them, but they declare that they are sojourners, that come from other countries" **Then they came to Zerubbabel.** From the very outset of the division of the Holy

People of God, a centralized worship in the temple at Jerusalem was viewed as a unifying factor in a divided state; it was thus vociferously opposed, and idolatrous altars were set up at Dan and Bethel in the Northern Kingdom as alternatives (1 Kings 12:26-33). It posed no less a threat at this juncture in their history, and the Samaritans do not intend to stand idly by while it happens. Satan always has and always will oppose worship based on the concept of *as it is written*. **Let us build with you.** Compromise is one of Satan's most effective tools. Pharaoh could say to the slaves in Egypt, "Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land" (Exodus 8:25); "Go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away" (Exodus 8:28); "Go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord" (Exodus 10:11); "Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed" (Exodus 10:24). But Pharaoh found no compromise in Moses; neither would the Samaritans find any in Zerubbabel. **For we seek your God, as ye do.** Their petition was made to Zerubbabel, but their claim simply was not so. Even though an effort had been made to teach the imported Samaritans the nature of the true God (2 Kings 17:27), their worship was never more than a conglomeration: "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence. Unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord, neither do they after their statutes, or after their ordinances, or after the law and commandment which the Lord commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel" (2 Kings 17:33,34). This was nothing more than Satan's ancient strategy—infiltrate, adulterate, and destroy (cf. 2 Kings 17:7-18; Revelation 2:14,20). But Zerubbabel had made every effort to determine the pure Israelite strain (2:62), and the true pattern of God's service (3:2); and regardless of how badly additional hands were needed, to violate the covenant by such an unholy alliance would be the greatest folly. **Essarhadden king of Assur.** He reigned from 681-669 B.C. Shalmaneser and Sargon had to a great extent repopulated Samaria with strangers. But even down to the reign of Essarhadden the practice had continued, and no doubt added still further corruption to whatever vestige of the ancient Scriptural worship that still remained.

4.3. We ourselves together will build unto the Lord. Zerubbabel's response to the Samaritans was emphatic and decisive: "You have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel." Not one inch of ground would be ceded; not one principle would be compromised. The Lord's plan and the Lord's people were sufficient for the work; otherwise, there would be no need for it to be done. And what a lesson for the church of Christ today! There are presently those with a diluted

worship who constantly seek to change the Lord's body on the pretense that they want to build with us. To such, like Paul, we must not give "Place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you" (Galatians 2:5). The kisses of an enemy are deceitful when there is war in the heart (Proverbs 27:6).

4:4,5. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, (v:5) and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

4:4,5. The people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah. When the attempt at compromise failed, the adversaries bitterly resented their rejection, and resorted to less subtle tactics. Sneers and harassment replaced the pious effort at compromise—and with a greater degree of success. God's workmen lost heart in the onslaught, and perhaps in some cases quit altogether. Even an Elijah can become discouraged with enough opposition (1 Kings 19:4). **And hired counsellors against them.** At this point the Samaritans resort to a third and more professional level of opposition. Counsellors were hired whose sole function was to frustrate the work of God. No doubt discouragement and wrong counsel were their chief weapons, but they probably also implemented efforts to cut off their supplies at the source. **All the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.** Assuming 537 B.C. as the year in which the temple reconstruction was started (Ezra 3:8), this would mean that the delaying tactics of the Samaritans continued for up to sixteen years, or to 521 B.C., the date when Darius Hystaspis came to the throne of Persia.

LEGAL STEPS TAKEN TO STOP THE RESTORATION 4:6-16

4:6-16. And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. (v:7) And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue. (v:8) Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: (v:9) Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, and Apharsites, and Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, (v:10) And the rest of

the nations whom the great and noble Asnappar brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time. (v:11) This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time. (v:12) Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations. (v:13) Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again, then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings. (v:14) Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; (v:15) That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. (v:16) We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

4:6,7. In the reign of Ahasuerus. Who was this Ahasuerus? Some consider him the Ahasuerus of Esther 1:1 (Xerxes I, 486-465 B.C.), but this position ignores the context of the balance of the chapter (see esp. vv. 23,24). It is far more plausible to think of him as Cambyses (530-522 B.C.) The difference in name presents no real problem: ancient monarchs often wore more than one name or title. **They wrote an accusation.** They petitioned the king in writing to issue an injunction against the restoration project in Jerusalem. Just what the king's response was to this petition is uncertain, but it is evident that all the opposition had brought the temple work to a virtual standstill. The people of the land were concentrating more on nice homes and stable living conditions, than on the purpose for which they had returned to their homeland (Haggai 1:2-7). **In the days of Artaxerxes.** That is, Pseudo-Smerdis, 522-521 B.C., a usurper of the throne of Persia. Being such, his ascension to the throne created some unrest in the Persian Empire, and Zerubbabel probably saw it as an opportunity to safely resume the temple construction (4:12,13). The Samaritans, however, were equally quick to respond in drafting a letter to Artaxerxes requesting that he halt the work. The desired results were attained: by decree of the king, and by force of arms all work was made to cease (4:23,24). **In the Syrian tongue.** In the Aramaic language, for such is the force of the Hebrew *Aramith*.

4:8-10. Rehum the chancellor. Commander, NKJV; commanding officer, NIV; high commissioner, NEB; (*beel teem*, literally, lord of judgment). Probably a Persian governor of the Samaritan province. **Shimshai the scribe.** Secretary, NIV. Each Persian governor had such a scribe attached to him, not only as an assistant, but also with considerable authority of his own, granted by the king, that he might keep check on the activities and faithfulness of his master. **The great and noble Asnapper.** This is probably an Aramaean corruption of the name of Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian monarch who reigned from 669-630 B.C. This shows that the practice of deportation had been continued long after the sack of Samaria in 721 B.C., and furnishes us with further evidence why Zerubbabel refused to consolidate the pure Israelite strain with these predominantly foreign Samaritans. The lists of these officials make up the address of the letter sent to Artaxerxes, and mark the beginning of the Aramaic section of Ezra. The Aramaic continues through 6:18, and is a testimony to the carefulness of the inspired author in recording these important transactions.

4:11-16. The letter to Artaxerxes contained the following: (1) The Jews who came up from the captivity were rebuilding the rebellious city of Jerusalem, restoring the walls, and repairing the foundations. (2) Once the city was restored, the people would refuse to pay taxes, tribute, or duty; and the king's revenue would suffer. (3) Jerusalem's history marked it as a city of trouble and rebellion to both kings and provinces, making necessary its original destruction: a fact which archived records would substantiate. (4) A restoration of the city would effectually sever the territory west of the Euphrates from the king's domain.

4:17-22. Then sent the king an answer unto Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and unto the rest beyond the river, Peace, and at such a time. (v:18) The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. (v:19) And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. (v:20) There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them. (v:21) Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me. (v:22) Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?

4:17-22. The king's reply to Rehum and Shimshai was as follows: (1) Their letter had been received and plainly read before him. (2) The search requested had been made, and Jerusalem had indeed been found an ancient city of insurrection, rebellion, and sedition. (3) The king's tribute could well be put in jeopardy, for Jerusalem's kings in the past had ruled other countries, and had collected toll, tribute, and custom. (4) All work of reconstruction was to cease until such time when the king should see fit to issue another command to the contrary. (5) His decision was to be implemented immediately.

WORK ON GOD'S HOUSE HALTED

4:23,24

4:23,24. Now when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. (v:24) Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

4:23,24. They went up in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews. They lost no time in putting into effect the decree issued by Artaxerxes. **And made them cease by force and power.** Armed with the power given them by the king, and perhaps with a threat of military might, they brought to a temporary end the sixteen-year effort, wrought with trouble and perplexity, to rebuild the temple, and to restore the nation as the Holy People of God. **Unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.** Darius Hystaspis, 521-486 B.C.

CHAPTER 5

THROUGH PROPHET URGING THE WORK RESUMED

5:1,2

5:1,2. Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them. (v:2) Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

5:1,2. Haggai the prophet. Haggai prophesied in the second year of Darius, 519 B.C. (Haggai 1:1). His first message came in the month Elul, the sixth month of the Jewish year, and consisted of a strong rebuke to the people for their apathy toward the restoration of God's house. He scored them deeply for saying the time had not come for the Lord's house to be built, even though they experienced no problems in finding time and funds to surround themselves with ceiled or paneled houses (1:2-4). As a result of their apathy, the prophet pointed out, their ground was practically barren, and even what was produced did not satisfy: they were earning wages to put into a bag with holes (1:5-11). Within twenty-four days this message had stirred the people to action: the temple work was resumed (1:12-15). Haggai's second prophecy came on the twentieth day of the seventh month (Tishri), near the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, a message designed to encourage those who experienced such sadness over Zerubbabel's inferior temple, in contrast to how they remembered the great temple of Solomon (cf. Ezra 3:12,13; Haggai 2:1-9). On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (Kisley) his third message was delivered. A serious error of the Jews before their fall was their conception that the presence of the temple and its holy objects of service made *them* holy—a veritable guarantee that God was among them, and they were His people (Jeremiah 7:4-10). But the prophet points out that a beautiful temple does not replace the beauty of holiness, and that an unclean person is not made clean simply by touching a holy object

(Haggai 2:19). On the same day the final message of the prophet was given specifically to encourage Zerubbabel in his great work for the Lord's cause (2:20-22).

The prophet Zechariah. Zechariah's first prophecy came just two months after Haggai began to encourage the people to action on the temple—the eighth month of the second year of Darius (Zechariah 1:1)—in which he encouraged the righteousness of the Holy People by reminding them that disobedience had brought them into captivity in the first place (1:2-6). His second vision came in the same year, on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month (1:7). This prophecy was more extensive, consisting of God's promise to restore and bless Jerusalem, and to take vengeance on those who had scattered the captives (1:18-21); it served as an incentive for the dispersed people to flee Babylonia (2:1-12). Joshua the priest was then seen in the presence of God's angel with Satan standing by to accuse him. His filthy clothing (sin) was taken away, and replaced by new robes of righteousness (3:1-10). So despite the opposition of Satan, he stood as a golden lampstand before the people. He had laid the foundation of the temple, and would see the work through (4:1-14). A flying scroll was seen that represented the curse to be brought on anyone who violated God's pure covenant (reminiscent of the curses spoken from Mount Ebal, Deuteronomy 27:9-26). It would enter the house of the ungodly and destroy it down to its foundations (5:1-4). Israel's sins would be carried to Babylonia in a measuring basket, and Joshua would stand crowned, not only as the high priest of God, but also as a symbol of the great High Priest and King to come, Jesus Christ (5:5-11; 6:9-15). For nearly two years the prophet's voice was silent, but in the ninth month of the fourth year of Darius, 417 B.C. (7:1), he renewed his challenge. Again he called to mind the disobedient and rebellious spirit of their fathers—hearts hardened as flint against the prophetic message (7:4-13). But once more he promised prosperity and safety to the righteous inhabitants of Jerusalem (8:1-23). Above and beyond temporal blessings enjoyed in Jerusalem would be the arrival of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the real Branch. He would be pierced (12:10-14), and His flock scattered (13:7-9), but He would nonetheless open a foundation for sin in Jerusalem (13:1), and every bell and pot would be inscribed HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD (9:20,21). The prophet thus offered the greatest incentive of all to the little band of persecuted and discouraged Israelites: they would succeed in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple. But their real mission was of far greater import and significance: through them the Messiah would be given to bless the whole world (Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:15-29; Romans 9:1-5.)

5:2. Then rose up Zerubbabel. Seeing their real mission in restoration, Zerubbabel knew that legal restrictions had either to be overcome or ignored—"We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). **And began to build the house of God.** Without another moment's delay work on the temple was resumed. Consequences, of what ever sort they might be, would simply have to be dealt with when they came. Not only had Haggai and Zechariah preached that the temple should be finished, they themselves joined in the work with Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Preachers often do the telling and expect others to do the work (Matthew 23:2). Such is not the case with the real servants of God: they practice what they preach.

THE RENEWED EFFORTS CHALLENGED BY TATNAI 5:3-5

5:3-5. At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build the house, and to make up this wall? (v:4) Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? (v:5) But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.

5:3-5. Tatnai, governor on this side the river. The word for governor (*pechah*) is rather indefinite in its extent, being best understood by its context. For example, Ezra's commission was delivered "Unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river" (Ezra 8:36). Nehemiah also requested a letter for the same purpose (Nehemiah 2:7). Sheshbazzar (Ezra 5:14), Zerubbabel (Haggai 1:1), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 5:14) at different times governed Judah. So *Pechah* designated the lesser officials of a province, but also those who had much broader authority, as is evident in this matter with Tatnai. He seems to have been responsible for both the Syrian and Palestinian provinces. Thus it was a considerable legal authority that now confronted Zerubbabel and his companions. **Who hath commanded you to build this house?** Tatnai demands authority for what he sees as action subversive to the interest of the king of Persia and the Syrian province. **What are the names of the men that make this building?** Along with our text the RSV, NIV, and the NEB see this as a question from the Samaritan governor and his company. However the ASRV translates it, "Then we told them after this manner, what the names of the men were that were making this building." With this agree the NKJV and the NRSV. The latter translation is smoother, but perhaps does not reflect as well the total context of the passage. For it would

seem from verses ten and eleven that the only response given was that they were the servants of God; that is, they were acting under the authority of the God of heaven, and no earthly official had the right to contest that. **The eye of God was upon the elders of the Jews.** Since this project was by God's command, and was being carried out under His watchful eye, Tatnai was unable to stop it himself: his only recourse was to submit the matter to Darius.

THE LETTER TO DARIUS

5:6-17

5:6-17. The copy of the letter that Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai, and his companions the Apharsachites, which were on this side the river, sent unto Darius the king: (v:7) They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. (v:8) Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands. (v:9) Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? (v:10) We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. (v:11) And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up. (v:12) But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried the people away into Babylon. (v:13) But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God. (v:14) And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; (v:15) And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place. (v:16) Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished. (v:17) Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there in Babylon, whether it be so,

that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

5:6,7. Quite surprisingly the letter which Tatnai drafted to King Darius represents very accurately the state of the Jewish project, and the basis of their appeal. If God's watchful eye had not been over His people, one would have expected far otherwise.

5:8-10. We went into the province of Judea. Tatnai wanted the king to know that his investigation had been first hand. The matter whereof he spoke was from his own personal knowledge. **The house of the great God.** Cyrus had acknowledged Jehovah as the Lord God of heaven (1:2), and the God (1:3), and here Tatnai called Him the great God. Although both of these men worshipped other gods, they had gained a good knowledge of the one true God. The Jews of the dispersion had made terrific inroads into the world of polytheism. This knowledge, no doubt, is another thing that tempered Tatnai's action against the Jews, and why he so accurately portrayed the lot of the returning exiles. **This work goeth fast on.** Haggai and Zechariah had so inspired the people that their work took on an air of desperation—rebuilding the temple was not only a religious obligation, it was a matter of survival (Haggai 1:6-11). **Who commanded you to build this house?** The governor wanted Darius to know that he had diligently carried out his commission from the king, and his actions were in the interest of the king's authority. **We asked their names.** For an explanation of this see the notes on vv. 3-5.

5:11,12. They returned us answer. That answer was not just a list of names of the workmen involved in the temple construction (if it even contained any names at all); it was rather an affirmation of whose servants they really were, and why they were engaged in the present task. **Servants of the God of heaven and earth.** The pagan concept of gods was that of locality (1 Kings 20:23-28), objects of wood, stone, or precious metals (Isaiah 44:14-17; Acts 17:28-30), planets (2 Kings 22-23; Isaiah 47:12-14), or rulers (Isaiah 14:4-14; Acts 12:20-22). But Jehovah God created all things, both in heaven and on earth (Genesis 1:1-3; Hebrews 11:3; Job 38:4-7; Psalms 8:34; 33:6; Acts 4:24). Being the Creator, He claims divine sovereignty over all (Exodus 20:3; 1 Chronicles 29:11-13; Psalms 24:1; 90:1,2; Daniel 4:25; Revelation 4:11; 14:6,7). All worship and service must be directed toward Him as Creator, rather than toward His creation (Romans 1:25; Acts 17:22-29). He is not only the *great* God, He is the *only* God; and the Jews were building the temple in response to His directives. **Which a great king of Israel builded and set up.** Or Solomon, who, speaking from a physical standpoint, was perhaps the greatest and most powerful king of Israel, though his love for luxury, and his

alliances with foreign women, had brought the kingdom to the brink of destruction. **Our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath.** Before the captivity, God had been accused of being unequal, punishing innocent people for the sins of others (Ezekiel 18:25). But the seventy years in Babylon had been a humbling and educational experience. The captives had accepted the fact that it was their sins that had cost them their freedom and status as the peculiar people of God. **Who destroyed this house.** King Nebuchadnezzar had the temple burned, and Zion plowed as a field (2 Kings 25:1-10; Micah 3:12; Jeremiah 26:18). **And carried the people away into Babylon.** Some 10,000 were deported to Babylon during the sack of Jerusalem, leaving only the poorest of the people in the land (2 Kings 24:14).

5:13-16. In the first year of Cyrus. Concerning this decree and the vessels of the temple, see our notes on chapter one. **Then came the same Sheshbazzar.** Either Zerubbabel or the governor of Judah who preceded him. Since both are credited with having begun the temple work (3:8-4:3), it would appear to be the same person designated by two different names, a practice not at all uncommon at the time. **Even until now hath it been in building.** Although actual work on the house of God had ceased for a number of years, yet the idea of its completion had not been abandoned; thus it was viewed as a project still pressing toward completion.

5:17. Let there be search made in the king's treasure house. As the reader will recall the author of Ezra was careful to record the fact that not only had Cyrus issued his proclamation, he had also put it in writing (1:1). Thus there was no doubt that a careful search of the king's archives would reveal the document, and would establish the authority under which the temple was being reconstructed. Such would prove to be the case.

CHAPTER 6

THE DECREE OF DARIUS

6:1-12

6:1-12. Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. (v:2) And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: (v:3) In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; (v:4) with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: (v:5) And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto the temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of God. (v:6) Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Aspharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: (v:7) Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place. (v:8) Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered. (v:9) And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: (v:10) That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons. (v:11) Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and

being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this. (v:12) And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.

6:1-5. Then Darius the king made a decree. In compliance with the request of the Jews he issued an order for a search to be made for the decree given by Cyrus. **Where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.** Evidently both monetary items and valuable documents were stored together in the house of rolls at Babylon, and it was here that the search began. But if the document had originally been stored there (which would have been the logical place for it), then Pseudo-Smerdis had destroyed it when he reversed the decree. Fortunately a copy of the decree had been preserved and was found in the palace at Achmetha. Again we see the eye of God upon the Jews (5:5) in providentially preserving this decree, and in bringing a king to the throne who would leave no stone unturned in locating it. **In the first year of Cyrus.** For our comments on this see the notes on 1:1-3. **Let the house be builded.** Some details are here given that are not mentioned in the earlier reference. The foundation was to be strongly laid, indicating a quality and an enduring structure. The size was specified as sixty feet wide and sixty feet high (no length of the building is given). This is probably the maximum size allowed by Darius, and there is no indication that the new temple was that large. The original temple was ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high (1 Kings 6:2). Seeing the carefulness of Zerubbabel in other instances of restoration would lead one to believe that the new temple was of the same dimensions. However the limited resources of the returning captives could not compete with Solomon's wealth in the quality and embellishments of the structure (3:12,13). **Let the expenses be given out of the king's house.** Whatever was needed to rebuild the temple, and to prepare it as a place of sacrifice, was to be provided from the king's treasury.

6:6-10. Let the work of this house of God alone. Tatnai and those backing him in the challenge against the Jews were told in no uncertain terms to withdraw, and to allow the work to go forward on the house of God. It was not only an approved project of the governor of Judah, but also of the king of Persia as well. **I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews.** What a turn of events! Not only were Tatnai and his companions to distance themselves from the work as far as opposition was concerned, but were also to see that taxes collected on behalf of the king in the provinces of Syria be used to provide for the expenses of the builders. This must have been a galling deci-

sion for the Samaritans; but often those who oppose the work of God find themselves in similar situations (cf. Exodus 1:15,16; 2:5-10; Esther 3:5,6; 6:4-11). It is hard to fight against God (Acts 5:33-40). **And that which they have need of.** In addition to funds being supplied for the builders and the project itself, Darius specifically designated that whatever the priests needed for their sin offerings and worship—bulls, rams, lambs, wheat, salt, wine or oil—these were to be provided on a daily basis. **And pray for the life of the king.** Darius could not have been ignorant of either the history of his empire, or the influence of the Jews with God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been delivered from the fiery furnace, heated seven times hotter than normal, and without even the smell of smoke on their garments (Daniel 3:19-29). Daniel prayed daily toward Jerusalem, and God honored his faith by granting him safety in a den of hungry lions (Daniel 6:18-23). Ahasuerus' decree of death against the Jews had been turned into a great victory for the captives (Esther 4:15-17). It was certainly to the king's advantage to rebuild the Lord's house at Jerusalem, restore the worship of Jehovah, and have the captives pray on behalf of the life and prosperity of the king.

6:11,12. Also I have made a decree. Should any one choose to ignore or alter the decree of Darius, punishment would be swift and severe: timbers would be pulled from his house to build a gallows, he would be hanged on it, and his house site would be turned into a garbage dump. **And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there.** Again we see that Darius had done his homework in the Jewish religion. God had chosen Jerusalem and the temple as the place where He would establish His name (Deuteronomy 12:11; 1 Kings 9:1,2). **Destroy all kings and people.** Nebuchadnezzar was wet with the dews of heaven and ate grass like the oxen that he might learn "That the most high ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (Daniel 5:32). Darius, however, here recognizes Jehovah's sovereignty over both kings and people, and strongly invokes His wrath against any who would set his hand to alter or destroy the house of God at Jerusalem. **Let it be done with speed.** Should any choose to violate the decree of Darius, the execution of his penalty would be sure and swift. From the total context of this decree, considerable concern on the part of Darius is manifested: the building had been delayed for eighteen years, and longer neglect might well bring God's wrath on his own kingdom. The tone of the decree was one of urgency.

THE TEMPLE COMPLETED

6:13-15

6:13-15. Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily. (v:14) And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. (v:15) And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

6:13,14. So they did speedily. The action of the Samaritans was decisive: the king's document was delivered with haste to Zerubbabel in Jerusalem. **The elders of the Jews builded.** With all legal impediments now removed, provision made for tribute money from the Syrian provinces to be applied to the areas of need, and with workmen inspired by prophetic zeal, the work moved forward. **They prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah.** For a brief synopsis of these men and their prophetic messages see notes on 5:1. **According to the commandment of the God of Israel.** It was God's plan to bring the Jews again to their homeland after their seventy years of captivity (Jeremiah 24:6). To this end He issued the charge to Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, and to release the Exiles (Isaiah 44:28-45:1-13; Ezra 1:2). **The commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes.** The Artaxerxes mentioned here could not be the one mentioned in 4:7 (Pseudo-Smerdis), for he had strongly opposed the restoration project. Furthermore the order as listed would also indicate that he was a successor of Cyrus and Darius. This would no doubt, then, be Artaxerxes I, otherwise known as Longimanus (465-423), for he was certainly a friend and a benefactor of the Jews, as we shall see when we study the work of Nehemiah.

6:15. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king. Cyrus' decree of return had been issued in 538 B.C. (1:2-4). Actual work on the temple began in 536 (3:8); by 530 strong opposition was raised against the project (4:6); Pseudo-Smerdis stopped the work entirely in 522 (4:7-23); in 519 B.C. Darius permitted the work to resume (4:24; 6:3-12); and four years later, 515 B.C., the temple was completed. Its restoration had consumed a total of about twenty-one hard and trying years for the people of God, but the rewards would be immeasurable.

THE RESTORED TEMPLE DEDICATED

6:16-22

6:16-22. And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy, (v:17) and offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. (v:18) And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. (v:19) And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. (v:20) For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. (v:21) And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the Lord God of Israel, did eat, (v:22) And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

6:16. Kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. It had been a long, arduous task, but the victory was sweet. Once more the symbol of God's presence stood on mount Zion in Jerusalem, and it was appropriate that it be rededicated to God's service. The Hebrew *chanukkah* (dedication) is of considerable interest to us, especially as it relates to the temple. Solomon had dedicated the first temple with very elaborate ceremonies and sacrifices: "And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 8:63). In 169 B.C. Antiochus Euphianes desecrated the temple of God in the most profane way, stripping it of its precious treasures, and desecrating its altars (1 Maccabees 1:20-50). But Judas Maccabaeus led a rebellion against him, routed his armies, and set about the task of restoring the temple and its services. This they accomplished, and the refurbished temple and its altars were rededicated on the twenty fifth day of Kislev, the ninth month of the Jewish year (1 Maccabees 4:52-58). Judas decreed that this should be an annual feast (1 Maccabees 4:59), and it was this feast that furnished the occasion for Jesus to deliver His famous lesson on the good Shepherd of the sheep (John 10:22).

6:17. And offered at the dedication of this house of God. In contrast to Solomon's elaborate dedication of the first temple

Zerubbabel's was small by comparison—a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and twelve male goats—but the dedication was carried out with great joy. Through prophet urging they had learned not to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10). We should always be thankful to God that He accepts our gifts on the basis of what we have, and not what we lack, when they are willingly offered from a thankful heart (2 Corinthians 8:12).

6:18. Beginning with this section, the writer resumes the use of Hebrew in his text. **And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses.** The tribe of Levi had been selected, in lieu of the firstborn in each family, to do the service of the sanctuary. They received no inheritance, but were to be supported from the tithes of the land (Numbers 3:6-13; 8:14-22). From this tribe Aaron and his sons were chosen for the perpetual office of the priesthood (Exodus 28:1; 29:9), a fact dramatically confirmed by the rebellion of Korah, and the budding of Aaron's rod (Numbers 16:3,10,29-33; 17:1-8). King David had divided the priests into twenty-four courses, with the time of service being determined by casting lots (1 Chronicles 24; Luke 1:8), and the Levites were accordingly divided to assist them in their service (1 Chronicles 23:6,28). **For the service of God.** The sanctuary and its services were minutely detailed by God to Moses, who had been cautioned to make it all according to the pattern he received on mount Sinai (Exodus 24-30; Hebrews 8:5). This significant detail was made necessary because the ordinances prefigured God's scheme of redemption through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:1-8). The unblemished lamb represented the sinless Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18,19); the blood offered by the high priest in the most holy place signified Christ's blood offered before the throne of God in heaven as a propitiation for our sins (Hebrews 9:9-12,14); and the veil that hung between the two parts of the sanctuary symbolized the fact that the way into heaven was not made manifest while the first arrangement still stood (Hebrews 9:7,8; Matthew 27:50,51). Thus each detail became not just a temporary arrangement for Jewish benefit, but rather a picture of human redemption in Christ. It was in this way all divinely mapped by the great Architect of the ages: any deviation from the plan would have had eternal repercussions. **As it is written in the book of Moses.** Again we see the emphasis of the restoration movement: it was a return to the Book. God had spoken His will, and Zerubbabel and the returning exiles were determined to follow the pattern. Those who deny the viability of restoration today based on the pattern revealed in the New Testament need a serious education in the methods and authoritative sources of these returning captives.

6:19-22. And the children of the captivity kept the passover. The original passover was kept on the fourteenth day of the first month,

and was to be a perpetual Israelite observance throughout their generations (Exodus 12:6,14). The feast is now restored to the people in every essential aspect. **For the priests and the Levites were purified together.** Purify is from the Hebrew *taher* and means to be pure or clean. It is used of such things as the wind cleansing the sky of clouds (Job 37:21), the process of refining gold (Malachi 3:3), the spoils taken in war (Numbers 31:23), or the purification of people in preparation for worship (Leviticus 22:3-7). One might require purification because of leprosy (Leviticus 14), contact with a dead body (Leviticus 19:11-13), an issue of blood, or perhaps any running sore (Leviticus 15:2-25), after the birth of a child (Leviticus 12:4-8), or various other reasons. Each uncleanness had its own *taher* requirement, as may be seen from studying the contexts of the references cited above. Both priest and Levite had accomplished any necessary conditions of purity, and were prepared to "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (1 Chronicles 16:29). **And killed the passover.** The passover lamb was selected and penned on the tenth day of the first month, and then slaughtered and prepared on the evening of the fourteenth (Exodus 12:3-6). Neither should it pass without notice that it was at a passover feast that our precious passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7) bade farewell to His disciples, and a few hours later offered Himself without spot for the sins of the world (John 13-17; 1 Peter 1:18,19). **The children of the captivity.** These are called in v. 21 the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity. They not only had returned from the captivity, but had separated themselves from the foreigners of their own land, making every effort to be the distinct and peculiar people of God. These all joined in with the priests and Levites in the celebration of the passover feast. **And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days.** The passover proper was celebrated on the fourteenth day of the first month; the feast of unleavened bread began the following day, and lasted through the twenty-first. It began with a holy day in which all labor ceased, and ended the same way. During the feast no leaven was to be found in any Jewish household, and sacrifices were to be offered daily (Leviticus 23:4-8). In time the two feasts came to be considered as one. **With joy.** The captives were back home; the temple was restored; the sacrifices for sin had been resumed; the Holy City was rising from the dust and ashes: no wonder the passover was eaten with joy. **The king of Assyria.** Darius was no doubt here called the king of Assyria because it was that power that had initiated the captivity, and the king of Persia now dominated that territory. In their thanks to God for their freedom they forgot not the king whom God had used to strengthen their hands.

CHAPTER 7

EZRA THE PRIEST

7:1-10

7:1-10. Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, (v:2) The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, (v:3) The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, (v:4) The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, (v:5) The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest: (v:6) This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the lord God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him. (v:7) And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. (v:8) And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. (v:9) For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. (v:10) For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

7:1-5. In the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia. The temple was completed and dedicated in the sixth year of Darius, 515 B.C. (6:15). The inspired historian now passes over in silence some fifty seven years, and takes up the narrative of events in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, 458 B.C. (7:8). The events of Esther transpired during this period of silence (see notes on Esther 1:1), but give us insight only into a crisis of the Jews still dispersed throughout the Persian Empire. However, many scholars believe that it was in this period that the prophet Malachi entered the scene. If so, his prophecies give us firsthand information about the decaying religious and moral prac-

tices of the restoration project found by Ezra when he came to Jerusalem. It was certainly a shoddy state of affairs. Israel was questioning God's love for His people (Malachi 1:2), and His altar had been polluted with profane bread and sick animals (1:7-14). Rejected wives washed the altar of God with their tears while their husbands fulfilled their lusts with the daughters of strange gods (2:11-16). God was robbed of His tithes (3:8-10), and the people had concluded that it was vain to serve the Lord (3:13-18). Malachi's warning rang clear; unless a radical change of course was manifest, God would rub the dung of their butchered animals in their faces, and they would once more be led in shame from the land (2:1-3). It fell to the lot of Ezra to bring about that change. **Ezra.** It is here that we are first introduced to the author of this divine restoration history, and are allowed to view his priestly credentials as a descendent of Aaron through Eleazar (see our Introduction to Ezra for what may be certainly known about this man). **The son of Seraiah.** Seraiah was a chief priest in Jerusalem at the time it was razed by Nebuchadnezzar. He was taken as a captive to Riblah and there killed by the king of Babylon (2 Kings 25:18-21). More than 120 years had elapsed since Seraiah's death, so it is likely that Ezra was a grandson, or perhaps even further removed. The reader must bear in mind that genealogies were designed to establish lineages, not give exact relationships, a fact well substantiated in both Old and New Testaments.

7:6-10. This Ezra went up from Babylon. Even though captives in Babylon, the exiles seemed to have kept a constant vigil over the state of their beloved Jerusalem. Ezra being no exception. So when he learned that the religious devotion and the temple worship of the people had fallen into such disrepute, he determined to prepare himself, obtain permission from the king, and travel to the holy city to rectify the situation. **He was a ready scribe in the law of Moses.** *Sopher* (scribe) is from a Hebrew verb that means to count, recount, or relate something, such as (to count objects) (Ezra 1:8; Isaiah 22:10), (or people) (2 Samuel 24:10), or to tell or recount important events (1 Chronicles 16:24; Psalms 26:7; cf. also Psalms 78). The *sopher*, the scribe, was thus a secretary who recounted in writing the decrees of kings (Esther 3:12), the predictions of prophets (Jeremiah 36:4-8,26), or recorded the words of God (Jeremiah 8:8). And often his position seems to have carried considerable authority in government (1 Kings 4:1-3; 2 Kings 22:3,4). Beginning with Ezra the office of scribe took on tremendous religious and legal significance. To enforce right religious practices Ezra received from king Artaxerxes authority to confiscate material goods, imprison, banish, or even carry out the death penalty (Ezra 7:26). By Jesus' time the scribes had become virtually the only teachers and interpreters of the law of God, often considered as

higher authority than the Word itself (Matthew 23:2,3; 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13). They were designated as doctors, that is trained teachers of the law (Luke 5:17), and lawyers, legal experts or jurists (Matthew 22:35), and frequently served as members of the great Sanhedrin Court (Matthew 26:57; Acts 4:5,6). Ezra was a ready scribe: he recognized the importance of God's law in His divine scheme, learned it for himself, and prepared himself to teach it to others—a commendable feat that says much about this devout man. **The king granted him all his request.** Judging from the letter of Artaxerxes, Ezra's requests may have been considerable: permission for other captives to accompany him, monetary necessities for work and sacrifice, and legal authority to get the work back underway. Evidently the king responded without reservation because he was willing for God's hand to lead him in his decisions. **And there went up some of the children of Israel.** All who wished to volunteer were free to go (7:13); but as we shall learn later the Levites and Nethinims were reluctant to volunteer, and had to be virtually drafted by Ezra and their chief Iddo (8:15-20). **And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.** That would have been in 458 B.C. **For upon the first day of the month began he to go up from Babylon.** The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem took them four months, and that was again seen as a sign of God's good blessings upon them. **For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord.** Disciplined study and diligent preparation have ever been a requirement for those who would seek the favor of God, and lead others in the right paths of truth and godliness (Proverbs 23:12; John 5:39; 1 Timothy 4:13-16; 2 Timothy 2:15). Ezra had certainly not been remiss in this respect. **To teach in Israel statutes and judgments.** A statute is an established rule of law; judgment is a matter of deciding a case, or the due process or procedure of litigation. Israel's leaders would have to be taught both the principle and the application of the law.

THE DECREE OF ARTAXERXES

7:11-26

7:11-26. Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel. (v:12) Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. (v:13) I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. (v:14) Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven

counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; (v:15) And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, (v:16) And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willing for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: (v:17) That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. (v:18) And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. (v:19) The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. (v:20) And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house. (v:21) And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, (v:22) Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. (v:23) Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? (v:24) Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. (v:25) And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. (v:26) And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

7:11. Now this is a copy of the letter. The carefulness of the inspired scribe is again seen in his reproduction of this correspondence from king Artaxerxes, for he transcribed it in its original Aramaic. **Words of the commandments of the Lord.** One of the real gems gleaned from Ezra and Nehemiah is the importance they attach to the word or commandments of the Lord. They accepted God's law as their guide in all matters religious, and taught the people accordingly. It is

tragic that we have not applied that valuable lesson in our own time, for it is God's word that brings about the new birth (1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Peter 1:22,23), saves the soul (James 1:21), produces Christian growth (Acts 20:32), and serves as a mirror for the soul (James 1:25). Furthermore it is complete (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3), final (Galatians 1:6-10; Revelation 22:18,19), authoritative (John 10:35; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 14:37; 2 Thessalonians 2:14-3:14), and will be the standard of judgment in the final hour (John 12:48; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:12-15). But most of our present religions treat God's book as more or less a relic of an ignorant age, and hold its divine precepts in contempt. It will be to their own eternal destruction (John 12:48). Even among those of the restoration movement, rumblings of discontent are heard to the effect that actual restoration is not a viable principle. Such would have received little sympathy from these two great men of the Book.

7:12-26. Artaxerxes, king of kings. The great Medo-Persian Empire covered approximately 2,000,000 square miles, extending from east to west about 3,000 miles, and from north to south ranging up to 1,500 miles. Artaxerxes was not just being boastful when he prefaced his letter as king of kings. **Unto Ezra the priest.** There is little question that Ezra, like Daniel (Daniel 6:1-3), Mordecai (Esther 9:4), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1), had obtained an eminent position with the Persian authorities. So he was willingly entrusted with credentials that would give him almost unlimited authority in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas. **I make a decree.** This decree of Artaxerxes might be generally summed up as follows: (1) permission for Ezra and any other willing Jews of the Exile to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem; (2) authorization for Ezra to carry the silver and gold donations of the king and his counsellors; (3) permission to raise additional funds throughout the province of Babylon, including freewill offerings from his fellow-Jews; (4) authority to purchase needed animals for sacrifice, and to use the balance of these funds in the Lord's service in whatever way he deemed necessary; (5) permission to select from the king's treasure house whatever vessels might be needed in his priestly ministry at Jerusalem; (6) license to collect from the Persian provinces east of the Euphrates any additional revenues needed for the temple service; (7) exemption of temple servants from tax, tribute, or custom; (8) requirement for Ezra to select and appoint knowledgeable magistrates and judges over the eastern provinces to both judge the people, and to teach them the law of God; and (9) authority to banish, confiscate the property of, imprison, or even put to death any who would not submit to this decree of the king, or to the law of God. It would be difficult to see how Artaxerxes could have issued a stronger

proclamation for the advancement of the Lord's cause in Jerusalem. It is hardly any wonder that Ezra had such praise for the king.

EZRA'S PRAISE FOR ARTAXERXES' SUPPORT
7:27,28

7:27,28. Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem: (v:28) And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

7:27,28. Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers. This blessing embodies the epitome of the Jewish faith. God had selected Abraham and promised to make of him a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3). With a mighty hand He delivered that developing nation from the oppression of Pharaoh, and established it in a land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 3:8; 13:5). The seed of Abraham became His special and peculiar people, treasured above all the people of the earth (Exodus 19:5,6); and although Jehovah never allowed them to forget that He was Creator and Sovereign of the entire universe (Exodus 20:9-11; Nehemiah 9:6), yet in a special sense He was *their* God (Exodus 6:6,7) —the God of their fathers (Exodus 3:6), the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:16), the Lord God of the Hebrews (Exodus 3:18). It is in this very intimate and dramatic context that Ezra opens his mouth to praise God. **Which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart.** Ezra had attained a position of influence with the king of Persia, and it was he himself who had approached and convinced the king to allow and support his mission to Jerusalem (7:6). Yet, he claimed no glory for his actions; rather he extolled God for having conditioned the king's heart to be receptive to his appeal. What a contrast between the humble Ezra and the pompous Herod who died a miserable death because he gave not God the glory for his accomplishments (Acts 12:21-23). And what a lesson there is in this for us: "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:17). We are taught by the Master, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). **To beautify the house of the Lord.** A temple in good physical repair, and a worship carried out with vessels crafted from earth's most precious materials would certainly be a thing of beauty in the ravaged city of Jerusalem. But there is a far greater beauty implied in this verse than

the mere physical. Artaxerxes had beautified God's house by his published decree of approval to restore and adorn that house, by his magnanimous gifts, by his acknowledgment of the God of heaven, and especially by a heart tender enough to be touched by the Lord's hand. **And hath extended mercy unto me before the king.** Ezra may well have risked his life as he approached the king with his appeals (Esther 4:11), but the king had been merciful and granted every request. **And I was strengthened.** Ezra had a challenging task before him; but seeing the hand of God at work with Artaxerxes and his counsellors, he was strengthened for the task: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

CHAPTER 8

FAMILY HEADS WHO RETURNED WITH EZRA 8:1-20

8:1-20. These are the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. (v:2) Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush. (v:3) Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty. (v:4) Of the sons of Pahathmoab; Elihoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males. (v:5) Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. (v:6) Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. (v:7) And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. (v:8) and of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males. (v:9) Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. (v:10) And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males. (v:11) And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. (v:12) And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Kakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males. (v:13) And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah. (v:14) Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

(v:15) And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. (v:16) Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathin, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. (v:17) And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told

them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God. (v:18) And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; (v:19) And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; (v:20) Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes has appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.

8:1-14. These are now the chief of their fathers. Ezra lists more than 1,700 males who gathered for the return with him. Taking into account the families of these men, this would raise the number of those returning under Artaxerxes to a probable 10,000—a tremendous responsibility for Ezra, and a good reason for his concern for their safety as indicated later in the narrative.

8:15-20. And I gathered them together. Before the long journey began, Ezra needed to know if he had all needed personnel for his mission; so he paused by the river that flows to Ahava to take stock. Having done so, he found no Levites for his temple servants, without whom a restoration of the worship system would have been impossible. It is quite surprising that the Levites, who had always been so forward in their response to the Lord's cause (Exodus 32:25-29; Numbers 25:6-13), now showed such little interest. Only seventy four went up with Zerubbabel (2:40), and not one assembled for the journey with Ezra. But after all it was their religious leaders who had first departed from God's law, leaving His sheep with no shepherds, and making the captivity mandatory (Jeremiah 50:6; Ezekiel 34:1-6). **Men of understanding.** That is, men who understood the Levitical system, and who were no doubt familiar with the genealogical records so necessary to establish the proper lineage (cf. 1:61,62). **And I sent them with commandment to Iddo.** Seemingly Ezra here first uses the authority granted him by Artaxerxes (7:23); for the men selected to provide Levites for the ministry of the house of God were sent to Iddo with commandment, and with precise words for the chief of the Nethinims. **By the good hand of our God.** Whether by strong urging or the threat of force, the recruiting efforts were successful. God so blessed Eliezer and his companions that more than 250 Levites and Nethinims mustered for the challenge. How much more glorious their service would have been though had they responded first without the force of command, or without the fear of the king's wrath. And how much more beautiful is the service of a child of God when it is a response of love, rather than a begrudged service out of demand (see 2 Corinthians 8:1-12; Philemon 8,9).

PRAYER AND PREPARATION FOR A SAFE JOURNEY
8:21-30

8:21-30. *Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. (v:22) For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him. (v:23) So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.*

(v:24) Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and then of their brethren with them, (v:25) And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: (v:26) I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; (v:27) Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. (v:28) And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the Lord; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the Lord God of your fathers. (v:29) Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the Lord. (v:30) So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

8:21-23. **Then I proclaimed a fast there.** Two expressions here need to be considered: fasting, and afflicting the soul. *tsum* (fast) means to abstain from food, either totally or in part. The day of atonement marked a national fast for the Jewish people (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27; Jeremiah 36:6). During the captivity, three other fast days were proclaimed for the fourth, fifth, and tenth months (Zechariah 7:1-7; 8:19). In addition to these, fasting was observed in the face of national calamity (1 Samuel 7:6; Jeremiah 38:8,9; Jonah 3:5; Daniel 10:2,3), personal tragedies (2 Samuel 12:16-22), and as an act of individual devotion (Luke 18:12). *Anah* (afflict) means to be bowed down, humbled, or afflicted. The children of Israel were afflicted by the bondage of Egypt (Genesis 15:13; Exodus 1:11); the Philistines wanted to bind and afflict Samson (Judges 16:5,19-21); and Job considered his miseries as an affliction from God (Job 30:9-11). As in this passage under consideration it is used elsewhere in connection with fasting, or

even as a synonym for fasting (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27), the idea being that one afflicted his body by depriving it of food, even as his soul was afflicted by his heavy burdens and sins, and for which he humbly implored God for relief. Fasting however, with its associated affliction, became an end within itself in the minds of the Israelites, as did most of their other religious acts (Isaiah 58:3-7). But here with all earnestness Ezra and his company implored God to look upon their afflicted souls, consider the straits of the perilous journey before them, and to give them safe passage back to the promised land. Thus it was in the fullest intent and import of the fast that Ezra and his companions engaged in here—souls in desperation reaching out to God for divine aid. **For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers.** When Ezra approached Artaxerxes for permission to return to Jerusalem, he had elicited from him his every request (7:6). But in order to do so he had evidently convinced the king that God was behind the project, and would see it through (at least he was persuaded that God's wrath would fall upon his kingdom if he did not comply). With such a dramatic faith in God's oversight of the work portrayed before the king, how could Ezra turn to him and his soldiers for protection? **So we fasted and besought our God for this.** There comes a time when faith must be put to the test; this was that time for Ezra, and he was determined that his would not fail it.

8:24-30. Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests. The chief priests were apparently men of priestly descent who were leaders in their respective communities, and who in later times held responsible positions in the sacrificial system and financial affairs of the religious community. By New Testament times they occupied seats in the prestigious Sanhedrin Court, and were a leading force among the Jewish people (Matthew 26:3,14; Mark 15:1-3). At any rate these men selected by Ezra had won positions of respect, trust, and leadership among their people; and their unquestioned integrity made them choice candidates for the task about to be appointed them. **Sherebiah, Hashabiah.** At first notice these two men seem to have been priests, but from vv. 18,19 we learn they were from the servant class of Levites. The Septuagint probably has preserved the true sense of the Hebrew: "And I separated twelve from the chief priests to Sherebiah, and Hashabiah, and ten with them from their brothers" (for the same idea see also the NIV). **And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold.** According to a footnote in the NIV there were about 25 tons of silver, 3¾ tons each of gold and silver vessels, and golden basins weighing about 19 pounds. There were also two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. It was a valuable cargo that Ezra committed to the care of the priests. It is little wonder that he carefully chose men of integrity and responsibility to assume this trust. Also we can now better see why the long prospective journey to Jerusalem

elicited devout prayers and fastings—men have brutalized and killed for far less. **Ye are holy unto the Lord.** For our comments on holiness and purification see notes on 6:19-22. **Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priest and the Levites.** No detail was overlooked by Ezra in making provision for the accounting of funds committed to his trust; no less would be expected of those commissioned to carry the valuables. They received it by weight; they would carefully account for it in the same manner. No less should be required of those responsible for the Lord's treasury today. Too much temptation has been put into the paths of some; too many churches have been relieved of needed funds; congregations have been ripped apart—and all because someone was appointed to a position of public trust who had neither the qualifications nor the integrity for the task.

ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM

8:31-36

8:31-36. Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. (v:32) And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days. (v:33) Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binui, Levites; (v:34) By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. (v:35) Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the Lord.

(v:36) And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

8:31,32. On the twelfth day of the first month. Twelve days had passed since the exodus to Jerusalem had begun (7:9). It had been a busy time: thousands of people had left the vicinity of Babylon, and had regrouped eight days later at the river flowing to Ahava (8:15). There a genealogical check revealed no Levites, and this situation was quickly remedied (8:15-20); a time of prayer and fasting was proclaimed (8:21); and the treasures for the Lord's house were disbursed to the priests and the Levites who would be held accountable for their

safe keeping and delivery to the chief priests and Levites in the temple at Jerusalem (8:24-29). **And the hand of God was upon us.** This is a phrase often repeated by the author. In the face of very real and imminent danger Ezra's faith had been severely tested (8:22); but faith tested became faith rewarded—God made their enemies as chaff driven from the wheat by the wind. **And he delivered us from the hand of the enemy.** Who these were we are not told, but they were probably bands of Samaritans who were in rebellion against the Persian Empire, and had no respect for the king's decree. Nor are we told how God delivered them. But their deliverance was in such a signal way as to leave no room for question: God's hand was their means of safe passage through enemy territory. **And of such as lay in wait by the way.** People who waited in ambush. No street of any patrolled city is totally safe from those whose only aspiration of life is to live off the prosperity of others. How much less then the long stretches of unguarded roads and passes between Babylon and Jerusalem. But "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12). No hand could possibly prevail over that little caravan of God's pilgrims. **And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.** A thousand mile journey, and three days rest! Not much time to recuperate from such a long, tiresome trip; but, then, Ezra had not come to Jerusalem for a vacation. He had a mission, and a burning zeal to accomplish it.

8:33-35. Now on the fourth day. Not only did Ezra feel an urgency to teach and enforce the law of God in Jerusalem, but he was under commandment from the king to act speedily, especially with reference to the gifts they had carried from Babylon (7:17). **By number and by weight.** The silver, the gold and all the precious vessels had been carefully weighed and counted at the beginning of the journey (8:25-27). Now the action was repeated, taking every precaution to assure that each item contributed was accounted for. Such was necessary should the integrity of those responsible for the safe delivery of the valuables every be questioned. These passing remarks give considerable insight into the heart of Ezra the priest, and show us why king Artaxerxes felt perfectly safe in assigning him such blanket authority. He not only was faithful in his commitment to the word of God, but in all material matters as well. Truly, "He had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (7:10). **Offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel.** The influx of up to 10,000 immigrants into Jerusalem and its vicinity must have presented innumerable problems related to their settlement. But pressing as they were, these could wait: the first order of business was to offer a sacrifice to God. At least at this point in time the returning captives had their priorities in order.

8:36. And they delivered the king's commissions. The Samaritan threat had hung heavily over the restoration project from its very beginning, and any renewed activity around Jerusalem or the temple usually brought immediate action on their part. It was eminently necessary then that they know quickly, not only that Ezra's planned actions had the approval of Artaxerxes, but that they also would have to bear their fare share of the financial burden. But their reaction was favorable, and their response immediate, however galling the experience might have been for them.

CHAPTER 9

THE HOLY SEED POLLUTED THROUGH PAGAN MARRIAGES

9:1-4

9:1-4. Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. (v:2) For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass. (v:3) And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. (v:4) Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgressions of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.

9:1,2. The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands. The smoke of their sacrifice had hardly cleared until Ezra was hit square in the face with one of Israel's perennial problems: unholy marriage alliances with the corrupt idolators of the land. God had ordained that Israel as His peculiar people should remain separated from all the rest of the people of the earth (Exodus 33:16). By positive command marriages were not to be contracted with the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, people who had been driven from the land because of their gross immorality (Deuteronomy 7:1-4; 9:4-6). But regardless of God's danger warnings, the lust for new flesh and power led men, even of the stature and wisdom of Solomon and Ahab (1 Kings 11:1-8; 16:30-33) to acquire strange wives, and to set the course of the nation toward destruction. Ezra knew both the Book of God, and the history of the sins of his peo-

ple; and he was literally appalled at what he saw, not only among the common folks, but among the priests and temple servants as well.

The casual reader hardly feels the force of this problem, thinking only perhaps in terms of marriage outside one's ethnic, racial, or social level; but such is a far cry from reality. The pagan nations were so steeped in abominable and lascivious practices as to be almost inconceivable to the modern mind. Sons and daughters were burned in sacrifice to their gods (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 19:5); cult prostitutes of both sexes demoralized the people (Deuteronomy 23:17,18; 1 Kings 14:23,24; 2 Kings 23:7,8; Hosea 4:12-14); blood gushed from their veins as idol worshippers tried to gain the attention of their gods (1 Kings 18:28); and men in their blindness bowed in desperation to sticks and stones (Isaiah 44:14-17).

So the threat posed by intermarriages with pagans was twofold: (1) a pure lineage of Abraham, necessary to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1-3; Romans 9:4,5) could be extinguished as had happened with the northern tribes (Exodus 33:16; Nehemiah 13:23; John 4:20-22; Ezra 9:2); and (2) the purity in morals and worship demanded by the true God would be contaminated with the abominations of idolatrous practices, making the Holy People everything but holy (2 Kings 23). Is it any wonder that Ezra almost went into a state of shock when the message of this practice came to his ears?

And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle. Tearing one's garments was a way of showing deep anguish or extreme anger (Genesis 37:29,34; Judea 11:35; 2 Kings 11:14; Matthew 26:65). No doubt there was an element of both that sparked Ezra's reaction. **And plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard.** Disappointment with his people, deep hurt in his own heart, and fear of God's renewed wrath against the Holy Seed brought this rather violent reaction by Ezra against his own body. It is unprecedented in Scripture. Nehemiah, however, felt the same deep emotions over mixed marriages, but expressed them by cursing and pulling out the hair of others (Nehemiah 13:25). **And sat down astonished.** The Hebrew *shamem* (astonied) means desolate, as people left alone (Lamentations 1:16), or land ravaged by war (Ezekiel 33:28; 35:12). It also means to be appalled, devastated, or horror-stricken (1 Samuel 5:6; Job 16:7; Ezekiel 20:26, NIV). The news that all levels of Jewish society—people, Levite, and priest—had totally ignored God's injunctions on marriage literally devastated and horrified Ezra. He felt, as did Elijah (1 Kings 19:3,10), so desolate, so alone. No one any longer seemed to care for the law he had loved so long, and prepared so diligently to teach.

9:4. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the word of the God of Israel. At the sight of Ezra's distress, manifested by this plucked hair and torn garments, the people who still feared God and respected His law began to rally around the scribe. Again, as in the case of Elijah, some precious souls had not bowed the knee to Baal (Romans 11:3,4). **Until the evening sacrifice.** God required that the Jewish day both begin and end with the offering of an unblemished lamb (Exodus 29:38,39; Numbers 28:3,4). Nor should it pass without our notice that at the very time the evening sacrifice was being prepared and offered, our precious Lamb of God was offered on the cross for the sins of the world (Matthew 9:46,50; Luke 9:54-56).

EZRA' CONFESSION AND PRAYER

9:5-15

9:5-15. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, (v:6) And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. (v:7) Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day. (v:8) And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. (v:9) For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. (v:10) And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments, (v:11) Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. (v:12) Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever. (v:13) And after all that is come upon us

for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this; (v:14) Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping? (v:15) O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous: for we remain yet escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before thee in our trespass: for we cannot stand before thee because of this.

9:5-7. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness. From deep in the Babylonian captivity Daniel chose the hour of the evening sacrifice to unburden his soul to God, and to confess the sins that had brought divorce from the loving and gracious Jehovah (Daniel 9:3-5). It may well have been this precedent that caused Ezra to sit astonished until that same hour. Also it is quite evident that others of the faithful would be joining him at that particular hour. **I fell upon my knees.** His posture was one of deep humility: knees bent, head bowed, and hands spread in a gesture indicating an appeal for mercy. **I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee.** From the time she had marched away from the Red Sea, until God delivered her into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, Israel had proven to be an unfaithful wife: longing for the flesh pots of Egypt (Exodus 16:3), committing whoredoms with the daughters of Moab (Numbers 25:1,2; 1 Corinthians 10:8), clamouring to be like the nations about them (1 Samuel 8:19,20), worshipping the queen of heaven (Jeremiah 44:17-25), and attaching sodomites to the house of God (2 Kings 23:7). Now only barely having severed her umbilical cord from Babylon, she is up to her old sinful ways again. No wonder it brought a blush to Ezra's face to once again approach God for mercy! **For our iniquities are increased over our heads.** David visualized sin as a horrible pit of miry clay (Psalms 40:2). Ezra expressed the same idea here, except their transgressions were more like quicksand—the people were in over their heads. Like some terrible overgrowth, their transgressions were rapidly growing toward the heavens. **Since the days of our fathers.** Isaiah had said before of God's people, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Romans 10:21; Isaiah 65:2). Hosea added to that, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea 6:4). No one ever felt the truth of these prophetic utterances more heavily than did Ezra at this point. **And for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands.** Early in her history God had laid before Israel a very clear prin-

Ezra 1:6

cipe: "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). Daniel saw the Babylonian captivity as God's application of this principle (Daniel 9:3-13), and so did Ezra. There was clear reason for hair pulling and beard plucking, for sackcloth and ashes (Daniel 9:3): for once more God's curse was hanging heavily over the Holy People (9:10,11).

9:8,9. And now for a little space grace hath been shewed. A people so fickle could not have been released from captivity on their own merit; it had to be by the amazing grace or unmerited favor of God. **To leave us a remnant to escape.** First they had escaped the total destruction from the hands of their enemies, which they well deserved; and then God had delivered them from the Babylonian captivity before they had paid their just dues. True, even with God's mercy so manifest, only a small remnant has chosen to return; but that remnant was sufficient to keep faith and hope alive, and for that Ezra was thankful. **A nail in his holy place.** A place in his holy city to put down roots, to have as a permanent residence. **And give us a little reviving.** Captivity had been devastating for the spirit of the faithful: tears flooded their eyes as they remembered Zion (Psalms 137:1-4). But God had not forgotten them: in a grand revival He allowed them to march back to Jerusalem, rebuild the temple, restore the Holy city, and renew their commitments. **To give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.** This probably referred to the wall of protection afforded them by the decrees of the Persian kings, rather than the physical walls used to protect ancient cities. Jerusalem's walls were no doubt in a poor state of repair at this time, and gave little protection from the enemies without.

9:10-12. And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? After all God's beneficence, what could be said? His people were inexcusable, showing no loyalty at all, but turning immediately to the very things He had forbidden. **The filthiness of the people of the lands.** Some of the detailed abominable practices of the Canaanite people were incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, human sacrifice, and other vile and obscene acts associated with the fertility rites of the Baal cults (Leviticus 18:1-24). **Filled it from one end to another.** These were not isolated acts of immorality among the Canaanites, but were rather common and accepted practices of the people. Much like Sodom, it would have been difficult to have found ten righteous men (Genesis 18:24-32). **Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons.** For the details of this commandment see Deuteronomy

7:1-4. **That ye may be strong.** These commandments were not arbitrary, but practical. Nothing weakens the morals and religious conviction of even a strong person more quickly than a wicked mate. Both Solomon and Ahab are classical examples of this (1 Kings 11:4-7; 16:29-33). Paul said, "Be not deceived: evil communications [bad company, RSV] corrupts good manners" (1 Corinthians 15:33). **And eat the good of the land.** When Israel entered the promised land, stones were to be set up on mount Ebal, plastered over, and the law written on them. Then curses and blessings were to be pronounced respectively from mount Ebal and mount Gerizim against those who broke that law (Deuteronomy 27,28). Cursed would be both their gathering baskets and their storehouses (Deuteronomy 28:17,18,37-39); pestilence would cleave to them, and famine would stalk the land (Deuteronomy 28:21,22); their only food would be the fruit of their bodies (Deuteronomy 28:53). The returning exiles had already experienced pockets with holes (Malachi 1:6); would they go the rest of the way? To eat the good of the land meant to be obedient to the God of the land: there was no other way. **And leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.** It was a simple formula that God had given His children: obey God and inherit the land; disobey Him and be thrown out. Ezra knew it was a choice that had to be made—and soon!

9:13-14. **And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds.** The loss of prosperity, family, respect of peers, freedom, homeland; but most of all the loss of a covenant relationship with God. **And has given us such deliverance as this.** Even though the punishment was less than they deserved, God had reversed it, and through Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes had once more restored them to their homeland. **Should we again break thy commandments?** In the shadow of both the wrath and love of God, was there any rationale, in open rebellion to the plain law of God, to contract heathen marriages that would lead again to every conceivable abomination? **Would thou not be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us?** Only a remnant of a great nation remained, and that through the mercy of their God. If His wrath were again brought to bear against them, they would be hopelessly destroyed forever.

9:15. **O Lord God of Israel.** A desperate appeal, designed not only to acknowledge God as supreme Ruler, but also to tie Him with a people He had chosen to be His own. **Thou art righteous.** No excuse was tendered by Ezra; no apology for sin; no shifting of responsibility. God had been wholly righteous in His dealing with Israel, even longsuffering; Israel had been totally wrong. **For we remain yet escaped.** Probably the idea expressed here is that only a small remnant remained who had thus far escaped destruction or absorption into paganism. **We are before thee in trespasses.** But now even they stand before

Him, “Naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12). It is a sad Ezra who stands and pleads for the life of sinful Israel.

CHAPTER 10

THE PEOPLE RESPOND BY REPENTANCE

10:1-17

10:1-17. Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore. (v:2) And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. (v:3) Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. (v:4) Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. (v:5) Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

(v:6) Then Ezra rose up from the house of God, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. (v:7) And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; (v:8) And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

(v:9) Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter,

and for the great rain. (v:10) And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. (v:11) Now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. (v:12) Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do. (v:13) But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. (v:14) Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.

(v:15) Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. (v:16) And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. (v:17) And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.

10:1-4. Now when Ezra had prayed. A prayer that consisted of a confession of the sins of his people, and an appeal for God's mercy that the returned exiles might be spared despite still another departure from God's covenant in their marriage relationships (9:6-10). **There assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation.** The sight of Ezra the priest in such anguish—prostrate before the house of God, weeping and tearing his garments—caught the immediate attention of the people, and a large crowd gathered around him. They no doubt heard Ezra's confession of their sins, for the people also were weeping bitterly. **We have trespassed against our God.** Shechaniah, acting as a spokesman for the people, joined Ezra in his lament for the nation's sins, giving the distressed priest support he badly needed. **Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.** At the dedication of the original temple Solomon prayed for God to make it His dwelling place, and to hear petitions of forgiveness directed toward His house (1 Kings 8:26-30,38,39); and God granted his requests (1 Kings 9:1-3). From the captivity of Babylon Daniel prayed toward Jerusalem, thus toward the Lord's house, and was delivered from the den of lions (Daniel 6:10,18-23). Shechaniah knew God still lived in His holy temple; and that prayers directed toward Him in that place would not go

unanswered, providing of course the terms of pardon were met. **Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God.** *Berith* (covenant) means literally, to cut a covenant, since making a covenant seems originally to have involved cutting apart the body of an animal, and the covenanting parties passing between its severed parts (Genesis 15:17,18; Jeremiah 34:18,19). It was as if to say, if we break this covenant, may our bodies be severed and our blood be shed, as was that of this animal. It was a most solemn agreement. **To put away all the wives.** A heart-rending decision; but sin requires radical surgery, not a bandaid (Jeremiah 8:11). John the Baptist repeatedly emphasized to Herod concerning his brother Philip's wife, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Matthew 14:4). The man at Corinth had to be delivered to Satan until his adulterous alliance was rectified (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). It is thus evident that repentance of past sins does not right an unscriptural marriage relationship; the cause of the sin must be eliminated (cf. Matthew 19:3-9). **And such as are born of them.** Again the decision is radical, but necessary. No doubt many of the children resulting from these marriages were already grown, or at least of such age as to have been thoroughly grounded in abominable idolatrous practices. To preserve the holy lineage the purge had to be complete. **Let it be done according to the law.** Human emotions, family ties, or hardships, do not determine God's will (Nehemiah 8:9; Luke 14:26; John 6:60). Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Then as now there is but one standard of restitution—the law of God. It is God against whom we have sinned; it is God alone who has the right to set the terms of pardon. **Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee.** Shechaniah reminded Ezra that he had authority both from God and the king to correct this sinful situation, and with that authority came also the responsibility. **We also will be with thee.** As a leader of the people he spoke not only for himself, but for the congregation that had gathered around Ezra; they would support him in whatever decisions he made to restore their covenant relationship with Jehovah.

10:5-8. Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God. There had been a time for prayer, confession, tearing clothing, and weeping; but it was a time now for decisive action. The people had made a commitment to back Ezra in his action; but human nature is fickle. To assure their fidelity, he puts all under oath—chief priest, Levite, and the man on the street. **And went into the chamber of Johanan.** Chambers were attached to the Lord's house for storage space, as well as for use by the priests (1 Kings 6:5-10; Nehemiah 13:4,5). One of these occupied by Johanan was selected by Ezra, perhaps for a period of private meditation, as well as to formulate his plan of action. **He did**

eat no bread, nor drink water. For the significance of this continued fast see the notes on 8:21. **And they made proclamation.** They sent a message throughout Jerusalem and Judah urging all the returned captives to assemble themselves together in Jerusalem. **And that whosoever would not come within three days.** Artaxerxes had given Ezra almost unlimited power to teach and enforce the law of God (7:6). And he here finds it necessary to invoke that authority, threatening to confiscate the property of any who refused to respond by the set date. **And himself separated from the congregation.** Cut off from priest, temple, and sacrifice; and consequently cut off from God. During the captivity, or soon thereafter, the synagogue of the Jews had its origin. In controlling its participants, three degrees of punishment developed: (1) a person might be suspended from the synagogue for thirty days; (2) he might receive an unlimited suspension, and all contact with him was to be avoided. This ban, however, could be lifted; (3) the third degree banned him forever. Faithful Jews were forbidden to do business with him, teach his children a trade, or help him in time of danger. He was barred from all saving benefits in Israel, and condemned to eternal perdition. By Jesus' day, synagogue expulsion had become a very powerful deterrent to subversive belief or action among the Jews (John 9:9-22; 12:42,43). Even at this early date, Ezra's threat would have involved some, or maybe all of these constrictions, and thus would have carried great force.

10:9-12. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin, These are the two tribes, along with that of Levi, that made up the Kingdom of Judah. **Gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem.** Ezra had issued an edict for this assembly (v. 7), and by the third day the people had responded. **All the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.** It was with troubled and fearful hearts that this multitude stood trembling, not only in the presence of Ezra and their leaders, but also in the veritable presence of God. For they had just received some very disturbing news: (1) they were living in rebellion to God's laws, and were in danger of His wrath, even to the point of a second exile; (2) their marriages were illegitimate, and would have to be dissolved; (3) they would have to give up children conceived as a result of these marriages; and (4) any one refusing to comply would be subject to the severest penalties. But they also trembled for another reason—the heavy rain. This was the ninth month, corresponding to our December, the cold season, and the first of the three month's period during which 72% of Israel's rain fell. So these people were standing exposed in a cold, heavy rain. But there seems to be more implied: probably they thought of the extraordinarily heavy rain as an indication of God's wrath being poured on them because of their transgres-

sions. **And Ezra the priest stood up.** With so large a crowd and the noise of the heavy rain, addressing the people would have been extremely difficult, so Ezra stood to enable him to project his voice more distinctly, and perhaps to do so from a more commanding position. **Ye have transgressed.** God set Ezekiel as a watchman on the wall to warn His people of their wicked ways (Ezekiel 3:18-19). Isaiah was told, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 58:1). This is precisely what Ezra did at this point, and that without hesitation or compromise. **And have taken strange wives.** His appeal was concise and specific. This is a characteristic of all Bible preaching. Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7); Elijah told Ahab that it was he and his father's house who had troubled Israel by forsaking the commandments of God (1 Kings 18:18); Peter said to Ananias, "Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts 5:4); and to Simon the sorcerer, "Thy money perish with thee" (Acts 8:20). God's preachers today need to be just as specific to clear their hands of blood, and to save souls (Acts 20:26,27). **Now therefore make confession.** Ezra in his prayer had confessed the sins of the people as a nation; but a personal recognition and confession of sin must be a cardinal part of any effort to return to God's favor. **And separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.** It was not enough for them to recognize and confess the sin they had committed in taking strange wives; they had to follow up their confession with separation (for reasons why this was necessary see our notes on 9:1,2). **As thou hast said, so must we do.** These people wanted to be God's chosen ones; they wanted to worship Him in the beauty of holiness. But like all of us, the things they wanted to do, they did not always do (Romans 7:14-21). But despite their human weaknesses, may it here be said to their credit that probably few people of our own society would meet such heart-rending demands to become a child of God. They, however, with a faith reminiscent of their father Abraham, said in substance: "It is God's will; we must do it."

10:13,14. But the people are many. Many marriages had been contracted with foreign women. It would take considerable time to determine these by an examination of the genealogical records, and it would take even more time to make fair and humane provisions for them and their children once the separation had been accomplished. Besides, the bad weather would hamper any kind of action necessary to be taken. **Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand.** The plan suggested was that their rulers should be positioned in convenient stations; then by appointment the people would come and proper disposition of the matters would be made. While the separations were

no doubt distasteful to many, yet every precaution was taken to assure a fair, just, legal, and expeditious handling of the matters. Even local elders from the various cities were to be present to witness the procedures. Had this not been the case, some men no doubt would have cast aside their wives and families, as they would a worn out garment, with no consideration for their feelings and welfare. After all, they had disposed of their Jewish wives in favor of foreign women with just such thoughtlessness (Malachi 2:10-16). **Until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.** God's wrath hung heavily over the nation, and it would not be alleviated until the strange women and their abominable idolatrous practices were eradicated from the land.

10:15-17. Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter. It would appear that these two men opposed either the separation from foreign wives, or the plan established to facilitate the transactions. But they gained practically no support from the masses. **And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.** It took three months to complete the separations. This indicates how widespread the problem was, and why the people had urged Ezra for a period of grace to resolve the matter.

PRIESTS WHO HAD MARRIED FOREIGN WIVES

10:18-44

10:18-44. And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. (v:19) And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass. (v:20) And the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. (v:21) And the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah. (v:22) And the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasah. (v:23) Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. (v:24) Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. (v:25) Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. (v:26) And the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. (v:27) And the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. (v:28) Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai. (v:29) And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and

Ramoth. (v:30) And of the sons of Pahathmoab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. (v:31) And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, (v:32) Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. (v:33) Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. (v:34) Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel, (v:35) Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh, (v:36) Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, (v:37) Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau, (v:38) and Bani, and Binnui, Shimei, (v:39) And Shelemaiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah, (v:40) Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, (v:41) Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah, (v:42) Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. (v:43) Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah. (v:44) All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

10:18-44. The Bible is not a product of man, but of God. One of the evidences of this is the fact that it glosses over no defect of man, be he prophet, priest, or king. Such impartiality is demonstrated here in not only pointing out the sins of the priests in their marriage alliances, but also listing by name those thus involved.

The laws governing a priest were very stringent, especially as they related to marriage relationships. He was forbidden to marry a prostitute, divorced woman, widow, or non-virgin (Leviticus 21:7,13-15); and for him to take a foreign wife, who for the most part was the epitome of all these things, often even by the demands of her religion, shows how far he had removed himself from his holy calling. Thank God for a priest such as Ezra who "Prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (7:10).

SUMMARY

After about seventy years of captivity in Babylon because of a violated covenant with Jehovah God, under a decree of Cyrus issued in 538 B.C., Jews of the Diaspora were allowed to return to their homeland, rebuild their temple, and resume the worship of the God of their fathers.

Zerubbabel led the first expedition of captives back to Jerusalem shortly after Cyrus' decree was issued. Opposition from the Samaritans, and sometimes orders from the Persian kings themselves, delayed the temple project; but the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged the people to action, and by 515 B.C. the temple had been rebuilt and the worship system restored.

In 458 B.C. Ezra the priest led another colony of captives back to Jerusalem, armed with orders from king Artaxerxes to do whatever was necessary to further the worship of Jehovah. Much to his dismay on his arrival at Jerusalem he found that the intervening years had witnessed dangerous departures from God's holy covenant. Priest, Levite, and people alike had contracted forbidden marriages with foreign women, endangering the very existence of the Holy Nation. Ezra made provision for correcting these violations, and the people responded favorably.

Ezra may have simply faded into the background at this point; or he may have completed his work and returned to his position in Babylon. In any case he is not heard from again until about twelve years later when he is found again in Jerusalem working with Nehemiah, and teaching once more the law of God to the people (Nehemiah 8:1).

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

I. INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

- A. Time period covered in Nehemiah: probably about seventeen years, 445-428 B.C.
- B. Author: Nehemiah
- C. Time of composition: probably around 425 B.C.
- D. Theme of the book: The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, and the various reforms instituted among the people by Governor Nehemiah.

II. NEHEMIAH'S PREPARATION TO REBUILD THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM (1:1-2:20)

- A. The disturbing report given to Nehemiah about the condition of his homeland (1:1-3).
- B. Nehemiah's prayer for his people (1:4-11).
- C. He obtains permission from King Artaxerxes to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and fortify its defenses (2:1-8).
- D. Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem (2:9-11).
- E. The condition of the gates and walls appraised (2:12-16).
- F. A report of Nehemiah's plans to rebuild the walls sparks opposition from Sanballat, Tobbiah, and Geshem (2:17-20).

III. THE WALLS AND GATES OF THE CITY REPAIRED DESPITE INTENSE OPPOSITION (3:1-6:19)

- A. God's honor roll of those who repaired the wall (3:1-22).
- B. Opposition to the work increases (4:1-12).
 - 1. Sanballat and Tobiah mock and ridicule the workmen (4:1-3).
 - 2. Nehemiah prays that their reproach might be turned on their own heads (4:4-6).
 - 3. Their ridicule having failed, the enemies plan to use physical force to stop the work (4:7-12).

- C. Nehemiah arms his workmen for defense, but does not allow this to stop repairs on the wall (4:13-23).
- D. A problem of oppression against the poor comes to the attention of Governor Nehemiah (5:1-19).
 - 1. The people appeal to the governor for relief (5:1-5).
 - 2. Nehemiah responds with a rebuke to the nobles and rulers, demanding that they not only cease their oppressive practices, but restore to the poor what they had already taken (5:6-13).
 - 3. The governor's unselfish service to his people given as an example for other leaders to emulate (5:14-19).
- E. A plan is formulated by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem to kill Nehemiah, but the governor detects the plan and thwarts the assassination plot (6:1-14).
- F. Repairs on the wall completed in fifty-two days (6:15-19).
- G. Hanani and Hananiah given charge over the newly fortified Jerusalem (7:1-3).
- H. A plan is drafted to further populate and strengthen Jerusalem by moving one-tenth of the Judean population into the city, based on a genealogical register of those who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (7:4-73).

IV. EZRA THE PRIEST INSTITUTES REFORMS AMONG THE PEOPLE 8:1-10:39

- A. The people request that Ezra read the law of God to them (8:1-8).
- B. Upon hearing the law, they weep; but Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Levites proclaim it a day for celebration instead of sadness (8:9-12).
- C. Observation of the Feast of Booths restored (8:13-18).
- D. National repentance is called for as the Levites recall God's merciful dealings with His people (9:1-32).
 - 1. The people assemble to worship and confess their sins (9:1-3).
 - 2. Their deliverance from Egyptian bondage recalled (9:4-12).
 - 3. The giving of the law from Sinai recalled (9:13-15).
 - 4. Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, but He was still merciful toward them (9:16-22).
 - 5. Possession of the promised land recalled (9:23-25).
 - 6. Even in the promised land, they still continued to disobey God (9:26-31).
 - 7. The Levites appeal for God's mercy, and rededicate themselves to the covenant (9:32-38).

- E. A list of those who sealed the covenant (10:1-27).
- F. The people confirm the covenant (10:28,29).
- G. The renewal of the covenant leads to a restoration of divine ordinances of service (10:30-39).

V. JERUSALEM REPOPULATED AND FURTHER REFORMS UNDERTAKEN 11:1-13:31).

- A. A list of those who willingly moved to Jerusalem to fortify and strengthen it (11:1-19).
- B. A list of leaders who returned with Zerubbabel from the Babylonian captivity, and their genealogical lines (12:1-26).
- C. The walls of Jerusalem are dedicated (12:27-43).
- D. Provision is made for the support of the priests and Levites (12:44-47).
- E. Further violations of the covenant are corrected (13:1-31).
 - 1. The people are commanded to separate themselves from the Ammonites and Moabites (13:1-3).
 - 2. Tobiah is driven from the temple area (13:4-9).
 - 3. Corrections are made in the support of the Levites (13:10-14).
 - 4. Some Sabbath violations are corrected (13:15-22).
 - 5. Nehemiah deals with the problem of mixed marriages (13:23-31).

The Times Of Nehemiah

A judge may sentence a man to five years in prison for a crime committed; he may give a second man a much stiffer sentence for exactly the same crime. We understand the action of the judge only if we know that one man was a first-time offender, the other a habitual criminal. Just so it would be extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to understand the hearts, actions, and reactions of Ezra and Nehemiah without knowing something of the hearts and actions of the people with whom they had been chosen to deal. For example, why did Ezra almost go into a state of shock when he learned of foreign marriages among the people? (Ezra 9:3-5); or why would Nehemiah react so violently, throwing furniture into the streets, cursing, clubbing, and pulling hair, when he learned of similar violations? (Nehemiah 13:8). The answer lies in the heart of Israel.

A REBELLIOUS HOUSE

The historical books of the Old Testament give us somewhat of a running commentary on the fickle nature of the People of God; but it remained for the prophets to expose their hearts, and lay them bare for all to see. Near the end of their nationalism, Ezeikel labeled them as impudent and stiffhearted children—a rebellious house (Ezekiel 3:3-8). It is easy to see why.

As early as 755 B.C. Amos saw them as a people who would sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes; so selfish in fact that they would run until their tongues lolled out to scrape the dust from a poor man's neck just so they could add it back to their land (Amos 2:6,7). They stored violence and robbery in their palaces (3:10), perverted justice for bribes (5:12), and multiplied their idolatrous transgressions at Bethel and Gilgal (4:4). Moral standards had eroded to the point that a man and his son would both go in to the same maid (2:7); and worship was such a sham that God would not even smell in their solemn assemblies (5:21-26).

A short time later, 750-725 B.C., Hosea took up the gauntlet. He scored them as traitors to their Creator (Hosea 6:7), defiling the land

with swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and sexual immorality (4:2). They, he exclaimed, were a half baked cake—a mixed breed whose strength had been sapped by alien contamination (7:8,9). In a statement very definitive of their basic nature that prophet declared, “My people are bent to backsliding from me” (11:7).

But no one administered more scathing rebukes to Abraham’s seed, nor outlined more specifically their sinful nature, than did the royal prophet Isaiah, 740-700 B.C. He castigated them as the epitome of evil and unfaithfulness: “Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isaiah 1:4). There was no soundness in them from head to foot: just wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores—untreated, and unbandaged (1:6). They would grind the faces of the poor in the dust (3:15), rob the fatherless (10:2), and mislabel their evil as good (5:20). The law? they turned their ears from hearing it, even attempting to gag the prophets who would declare it to them (30:8,9).

The same heart analysis was continued by all the pre-exile prophets, especially Jeremiah, 626-586 B.C., and Ezekiel, 593-570 B.C.; and always with a predictable diagnosis: their hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Plain preaching had little effect on their unfaithfulness. In fact God Himself had forewarned Ezekiel, “For thou art not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel; Not to many people of a strange speech and of an hard language, whose words thou canst not understand. Surely, had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted” (Ezekiel 3:5-7).

A SHORT-LIVED REFORMATION

Seventy years in the captivity of Babylon caused the covenant people to do some real soul searching. Their sins had reached to heaven and brought them into bondage (Ezra 9:6,7). Confusion and shame covered their faces, and the curse of the law hung heavily over them (Daniel 9:8,11). Bitter tears of repentance flowed down their cheeks, and longing eyes turned toward Jerusalem—the City of God (Psalms 137:1; Daniel 9:15-19).

In 538 B.C. King Cyrus issued his decree of freedom; and despite dangers and hardships, Zerubbabel and Joshua led a faithful remnant back to the hill of Zion. Quickly the altar of burnt offerings was rebuilt, and the foundations of the Lord’s house were laid (Ezra 3:2,10). Almost as quickly opposition, and then lethargy, revealed serious undergrowth of an old problem—hearts bent to backsliding.

Haggai addressed the situation with usual prophetic zeal: "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built. Then came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes" (Haggai 1:2-6). The people rallied behind Zerubbabel, Joshua, and Haggai, the temple was completed, and much of the ancient way of worship was restored (Ezra 6:14-22).

By the time Ezra arrived at Jerusalem in 465 B.C., he found a shocking state of affairs. In almost total disregard to the law of God both people and priests had taken foreign wives, and were doing according to their abominations (Ezra 9:1,2). Ezra was numbed: "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished" (9:3). Ezra corrected the situation, even making the people take an oath that such abominable practices would cease in the land (10:5). But when Nehemiah assumed the governorship of the land thirteen years later, he also found cause for rage—Israel's backslidings had not been healed (Nehemiah 13:23-25; cf. also Jeremiah 3:22). Her old patterns of disobedience were being repeated.

However, let us not lose our perspective as we see the heart of Israel exposed. There was always a remnant in that nation who would not bow to Baal—the Elijahs, the Josiahs, the Jeremiahs, the Ezras, and the Nehemiahs. These laid their lives on the line to keep faith active and hope alive (Romans 11:1-5). The world was not worthy of them (Hebrews 11:38). Neither let us look at these exiles with pious hypocrisy: we also need frequent, even daily reformation and restoration (Romans 7:14-24); above all we need the continual flow of Jesus' blood to cover our sins (1 John 1:7-10; 2:1,2).

JERUSALEM DURING THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH

As we have already seen, the restoration, so often anticipated, and which set sail with such high hopes, soon floundered in lethargy and heathen abominations. Even further than this, that precious remnant of the faithful was in desperate straits. The Samaritans apparently had gained both a political and a physical advantage over Jerusalem. Evidence also indicates that they had brought to a standstill any attempts to rebuild and fortify the walls of the city. Commercialization had replaced religious dedication (13:15,16), and the holy lineage had been so polluted that it was in danger of becoming extinct (13:23,14).

Even their own wealthy brethren oppressed the returning exiles, taking mortgages on grain needed for livelihood, and collecting such absorbent interest that the poor were having to sell their children into bondage just to survive (5:1-5). The situation was aptly described to Nehemiah by some of his brethren; recently returned from Judah: "And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire" (Nehemiah 1:3). Nehemiah could not help but weep as he was apprised of the condition of his people and the Holy City (1:4).

Introduction To The Book Of Nehemiah

TIME PERIOD

The dates given in the book itself make it certain that Nehemiah covers a period of more than twelve years. Nehemiah received the report of Jerusalem's destitution in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, or 445 B.C. (1:1). He served as governor of Judah for twelve years (5:14), then returned to Persia (13:6). How long this interim in Persia was cannot be established definitely (it has been variously estimated for one to five years), but it was certainly long enough for some rather drastic changes for the worse to take place in Jerusalem, and especially in connection with the temple. For Tobiah had entered into an alliance with Eliashib the priest, and had even moved into one of the storage rooms of the temple (13:4,5). This would bring us to a probable date of 428 B.C. Thus we conclude that the book of Nehemiah spans a period of about seventeen years. This would make the total restoration period from Zerubabel to Nehemiah about one hundred and ten years in length, 538-428 B.C.

CONTENT

The book of Nehemiah is simply an extension of the history of the book of Ezra. In fact, in the Hebrew Bible they appear as one book. As the book of Ezra ended, Ezra had accomplished his reforms, and probably returned, as would Nehemiah, to his former position in Babylon (Some think he remained in Jerusalem as governor, but this seems highly unlikely. Otherwise his reforms, instigated through his strong and dedicated leadership, would not have been so completely reversed in so short a span of time). But in any case a period of about twelve years had intervened, 457-445 B.C., and an enthusiastic and determined group of exiles had deteriorated into an abused and poverty-stricken people—a reproach to the name of Jehovah God, and to the cause for which they had been selected.

Nehemiah was apprised of this pitiful situation by his brother Hanani who had recently returned from Judah, and the news of it brought him to bitter tears and depression. Nehemiah determined to

do something about it. After about three or four months of confession, fasting, and prayer, he approached King Artaxerxes and obtained permission to go to his people, rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, set up its gates, and strengthen and encourage the city of his fathers' graves (2:1-8).

It was not to be an easy nor an unchallenged task. Sanballat, in all probability the governor of Samaria, did not like the idea of the ancient enemy of his country being restored, and set about to stop the work either by compromise, intimidation, or force. But he had not counted on the indomitable spirit of Nehemiah as he rallied the children of the captivity. With a sword in one hand and a towel in the other, the wall was repaired and the gates set up within fifty two days (6:15). Nehemiah continued as governor of the land for twelve years, serving at his own expense (5:14), and instituting reforms with far-reaching ramifications. He relieved those oppressed by abject poverty (5:1-11), educated the people in the law of God (8:1-9), and corrected the foreign marriage problem that had again developed among the Holy People (13:23-25).

AUTHORSHIP

The book begins with, "The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah" (1:1). The narrative is written in the first person through 7:5. At that point the author inserts a copy of a written genealogical record of those who came up from captivity with Zerubbabel (7:6-73). Beginning with chapter eight, Nehemiah, when mentioned, is spoken of in the third person. This had led some to believe that this section was written by a different person, perhaps Ezra. However, it probably means no more than that Ezra was the predominant character in this division, and thus the author used the third person more from the point of view of an observer than as the author. Thus we hesitate not at all to consider the book as *the words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Most of what may be certainly known of Nehemiah must be gleaned from the book bearing his name. He was, of course, one of the Jewish captives in Babylon. However, he had obtained a high position in the Persian government, serving as cupbearer to king Artaxerxes (2:1). This position no doubt had allowed him to amass considerable wealth, thus enabling him to serve as the governor of Judah for twelve years without compensation. In addition to this a hundred and fifty nobles of the land ate daily at his table, and considerable entertainment and sustenance was extended to foreign dignitaries (5:14-17).

Nehemiah was a man of exemplary compassion and religious dedication. He was distraught because the poor were being oppressed in flagrant disregard for the law of God, and ordered that restitution be made of all that had been unduly exacted from them (5:1-7). Along with Ezra he made provision for the people to hear the law for themselves, and even bound them by oath to obey it (8:2,3,8; 10:29). Many religious reforms were made under his administration (8:13-18; 9:1,2; 10:28-39); and those who refused to submit voluntarily to the law were coerced into submission by force (13:15-21).

But being a compassionate and religious man did not deter him from his duties as governor; he could also be a man of steel. Neither mockery, threats, nor violence could turn him from his mission. If he had to carry a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other, he had set his heart to restore the wall of Jerusalem to afford his people a degree of safety and independence, and rebuild that wall he would (4:13-18). When he found Tobiah the Ammonite living in one of the storage chambers of the temple, he literally threw his household goods out of the room (13:6-9). Certain others who had married foreign women were cursed and beaten, and lost a good deal of their hair and beard in the encounter (13:23-25). In all Nehemiah's activities there seems to have been one overriding goal in his life. He chose to close his historical narrative with an expression of it: "Remember me, O my God, for good" (13:31).

Commentary On Nehemiah

CHAPTER 1

HANANI'S REPORT TO JEREMIAH

1:1-3

1:1-3. The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, (v:2) That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. (v:3) And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

1:1. The words of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was one of the Jewish exiles who had made a name for himself among the Persians. He became cupbearer to king Artaxerxes (2:1), and had amassed a considerable fortune, as may be inferred from the fact that he was able to serve as governor of Judah for twelve years without any material compensation. Not only this, but a hundred and fifty nobles of the land ate daily at his table, in addition to the entertainment and sustenance he provided for foreign visitors (5:14-17). Nehemiah was a man who showed great compassion for the exiles who returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Thus when he learned of their depressed state, he willingly gave up his lucrative position and power in the palace at Shushan for the demanding task of removing the reproach from his brethren, and from Jerusalem, the city of his fathers—a challenge that was to consume more than twelve years of his life (5:14). The statement, “The words of Nehemiah,” indicates that Nehemiah was the author of the work before us. They are words which form a narrative of his work as governor of Judah, but especially his restoration of the walls of Jerusalem, and the holy law of God as a final and authoritative directive in the hearts and lives of the people. His history of this work may

be basically outlined as follows. (1) He repaired the walls and gates of Jerusalem, giving the city a degree of independence and security not enjoyed for some time (3-6). (2) Taking note of the city's sparse population, he took a genealogical census of Judah, and moved every tenth family to Jerusalem to strengthen its defences (7; 11:1,2). (3) Poverty had forced the general populace to take mortgages on their property to buy food; but ever increasing taxes and interest made it impossible for them to redeem their notes. Some were even reduced to slavery. Nehemiah took immediate and decisive action to cancel all debts and restore all land to its rightful owners (5:1-13). (4) He educated the people in the law of God, and restored it as a directive for their lives and religion (8-10). (5) He cleansed the temple of all foreign influence, and separated the Moabites and Ammonites from among the pure strain of Israel (13:1-9). (6) He instituted a temple tax and restored the practice of tithing as a means of supporting the temple and its workers (13:10-13). (7) He compelled a dissolution of all foreign marriage alliances (12:23-31).

9:1
In the month Chisleu. The ninth month of the Jewish calendar (Zechariah 6:1), corresponding to our December. **In the twentieth year.** That is, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, or 445 B.C. **Shushan the palace.** Shushan, called by the Greeks Susa, was one of the capitals of the Persian Empire. Located on the banks of the Choaspes River, it was of a mild climate, and the kings of Persia often stayed there during the winter months. It contained a quite heavy concentration of the dispersed Jews, some of whom, along with Nehemiah, had become very successful in the affairs of government (Esther 1:2; 2,16; Daniel 8:2).

1:2,3. That Hanani, one of my brethren. That is, the brother of Nehemiah who had made a visit to Judah, and returned with a first-hand report of the sad plight of the returned captives. He was a man of above average integrity and religious zeal who would later accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem and serve under him as one of the rulers of the city (7:1-3). **I asked him concerning the Jews that had escaped.** Despite his success, Nehemiah still had an abiding interest in those zealous patriots who had given up everything in order to return to restore their homeland under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Thus he was anxious to gain an eyewitness account of their welfare. **The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach.** It was a sad report that Hannai had for his brother. The city of Jerusalem was very sparsely populated (7:4). Those remaining there were victims of abject poverty and subjected to greedy landlords and avaricious politicians (5:1-13). The people were woefully ignorant of the law of God (8:6-8), and the holy seed was polluted by strangers (13:23-26). Scorn and ridicule were heaped on by

the nations about them, and the Holy People were utterly shorn of their glorious origin and illustrious history. **The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.** Whatever progress Zerubbabel and Ezra had made in restoring the city of God had been reversed in the intervening years. Its streets were practically deserted and its walls and gates lay in shambles, and afforded no protection for its inhabitants. It was a very disturbing message that Hanani had brought to Nehemiah. It would drive him to depression, despair, and finally to a determination to sacrifice all if necessary to rebuild the Holy City.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER FOR HIS PEOPLE

1:4-11

1:4-11. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, (v:5) And said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments: (v:6) Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. (v:7) We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. (v:8) Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: (v:9) But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. (v:10) Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. (v:11) O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

1:4. When I heard these words. That is, the words spoken by Hanani depicting the destitution of the returned exiles, and the wasted state of the Holy City. **That I sat down and wept.** Literally a flood of tears or loud weeping. The description given him of the plight

of both his people and his homeland was such a shock to Nehemiah that he gave in to emotional despair. **And mourned certain days.** Nor was this just a superficial emotional wound: four months later king Artaxerxes would be able to discern from physical appearance and disposition a distinct state of depression in his servant. **And fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.** In addition to certain times set aside for national fasts among the Jews (Leviticus 16:29-31), fasting was joined with fervent prayer on occasions of imminent national calamity (Jeremiah 38:8,9; Jonah 3:5), personal tragedies (2 Samuel 12:16-22), and as an act of individual devotion (Luke 18:12). Perhaps elements of all three of these were present in Nehemiah's fast: (1) The unprotected and sparsely populated Jerusalem was wide open to attack from neighboring nations. (2) Nehemiah himself had suffered a personal calamity as Hanani's report shattered all his hopes and dreams of his escaped brethren having successfully rebuilt and fortified the Holy City. (3) No doubt fasting was a regular part of this godly man's religious devotions. In any case, he was here reaching out to God in anguish and desperation.

1:5. And I said. The similarity between the prayer of Nehemiah and that of Daniel, Daniel 9:3-19, is striking. It no doubt indicates that the writings of Daniel were extant at the time, and that Nehemiah had access to them. **I beseech thee.** A strong entreaty, indicating the writer's deep need for Jehovah's intervention. **O Lord God of heaven.** The address used by Nehemiah is that of *Jehovah Elohiym*. *Jehovah* is the personal name of God, and appears 6,823 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. It probably designates God as the self-existent one, having neither beginning nor end (Exodus 3:14). The prophet saw Him as the One who inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15). *Elohiym* is used 2,570 times. It is a plural term, and should be considered as designating not only the majesty of the Godhead, but its plurality as well (Genesis 1:2,26). The Scriptures portray *Elohiym* as Creator (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 45:18), Sovereign (Deuteronomy 10:17; 1 Kings 20:28; Isaiah 37:16; 54:5; Jeremiah 32:27), Judge (Psalms 50:6; 75:7), Savior (1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalms 18:46-48), and One who sustains an intimate relationship with His people (Psalms 59:17; Jeremiah 23:23). Furthermore, in contrast to self-proclaimed local deities, He is the holy God whose glory covers the earth. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:1-3). **The great and terrible God.** Terrible is a translation of *yare*. The leading connotation of the word is that of

fear, but may also denote reverence or awe (Leviticus 26:2; Psalms 89:7; 111:9). While God is love (1 John 4:8), showing mercy to the thousands who love Him and keep His commandments (Exodus 20:6); yet He must also be approached with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28). His wrath can be terrible toward those who rebel against Him (Joel 2:11). **That keepeth covenant.** When a covenant is broken, it is not God who does it—He remains faithful toward those who love Him and keep His commandments. True, the covenant between God and Israel had been broken. But it was their disobedience, not Jehovah's unfaithfulness, that caused the breach (Exodus 24:3-8; Deuteronomy 11:26-28; 28:1-6,15-19). This fact will, of course, be apparent throughout Nehemiah's prayer.

1:6-7. Let thine ear now be attentive. Nehemiah appealed to God to have responsive ears to hear his confession of sins, both his own and that of his people, and to have His eyes opened to their desperate need. **Both I and my father's house have sinned.** It was under considerable pressure that Saul made such an outright confession (1 Samuel 15:10-24); the same was true of David (2 Samuel 12:1-13). But Nehemiah willingly and forthrightly laid bare his own soul, and that of his people. After all it was a broken covenant that had brought about their desolation in the first place, so he laid the responsibility squarely on their own shoulders—no excuses, no defense. When the high priest went into the holy place, he offered first for himself, then for the sins of the people (Hebrews 9:7). The struggling cupbearer used the same order of priority in his prayer. **We have dealt very corruptly against thee.** *Chabal* (corruptly) means to destroy or ruin, as to destroy the poor with lies (Isaiah 32:7), as Babylon destroyed Jerusalem (Isaiah 13:5), or as the little foxes ruined the grape vineyards (Song of Solomon 2:15). So the Holy People had acted toward God in such manner as to ruin or destroy their covenant relationship with Him. **And have not kept the commandments.** No doubt this has primary reference to the ten commandments, the constitution of God's covenant, but for all practical purposes would extend to any requirement spoken by God. Every precept of the Decalogue had been repeatedly disregarded by the nation without a blush. The nation's moral standards had become as an open, running sore (Jeremiah 8:10-12; Isaiah 1:5,6). **Nor the statutes.** The established rule of law. **Nor the judgments.** Passing judgments in matters of law; due process or procedure of litigation. **Which thou commandest thy servant Moses.** Moses was the mediator of the Old Testament system (John 1:17; Galatians 3:19).

1:8-11. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses. The commandment referred to here is

this: "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. And the Lord shall scatter you among the nations, and ye shall be left few in number among the heathen, whither the Lord shall lead you" (Deuteronomy 4:25-27). It is amazing to see how literally this prophecy had been fulfilled. But one need not be surprised; God was its author (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). Even Jesus Himself affirmed, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Nehemiah asked God to remember that threat (now a historical reality); but it was with a view toward a second promise that the writer wanted this memory recalled. **But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments.** God had promised that upon repentance and confession of sins He would remember His covenant made with the patriarchs, and would bless and prosper the people and the land. "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land" (Leviticus 26:40-42). With this in view, Nehemiah intensely confessed the sins of himself and his people, and invoked God for the fulfillment of His promise of a renewed covenant. **Now these are thy servants and thy people.** The seed of Abraham had been selected as God's holy people, made a recipient of His great love, and esteemed special above all other people on the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6-9). It was not an honorary position, but rather one of demanding service. They were vehicles for receiving and spreading knowledge of the one true God (Genesis 17:1; Exodus 3:14,15; Isaiah 43:8-12), recipients of divine revelation (Deuteronomy 18:15-22), a depository for the covenants, the law, the service of God, and the promises (Romans 9:4), and responsible for keeping righteousness alive in the earth (Galatians 3:19). But all this was given with one grand climax in view: presenting the Messianic Seed to the world as a propitiation for the sins of all humanity (Genesis 12:1-3; Acts 3:22-26; Romans 9:5; Galatians 3:18-24). It was a service that would separate families (Genesis 12:1-3), lead to the sacrificial altar on Moriah (Genesis 22:2), the bondage of Egypt (Genesis 15:13;

Deuteronomy 4:20), the miry dungeon of Zedekiah (Jeremiah 38:6), and the fiery furnace of Babylon (Daniel 3:19-25). "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Hebrews 11:36-38). **Whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power.** To the powerful and vindictive Pharaoh, the I AM said, "Let my people go" (Exodus 5:1); and the people threw off their chains of oppression, and walked on dry ground through the sea (Exodus 14:22; Psalms 106:9,10). Often throughout the Scriptures this mighty act is looked on as Israel's redemption (Psalm 107:2; Isaiah 43:1-3). Thus they were His people, His servants, His redeemed. On this basis Nehemiah implored Jehovah to once more look upon their miserable estate and bless them with deliverance. **Who desire to fear thy name.** As a whole the heart of the nation was deceitful, and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). But there was always that faithful remnant, the seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal (Romans 11:4); and it was on behalf of these that Nehemiah made his petition for mercy. **And prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.** At this point he redirects his requests from the people at large to himself. It would appear that he had already made his decision to approach Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild the wall, and now petitioned God for a favorable response from the king.

CHAPTER 2

NEHEMIAH'S PETITION TO ARTAXERXES

2:1-8

2:1-8. And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. (v:2) Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, (v:3) And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? (v:4) Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. (v:5) And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchres, that I may build it. (v:5) And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. (v:7) Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; (v:8) And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

2:1-3. In the month Nisan. This was the first month of the Jewish calendar, corresponding to our April. This would begin the dry season in Palestine, and is probably the reason that Nehemiah chose to wait three or four months after having been apprised of the distress of Jerusalem before petitioning the king. The dry weather would be much more conducive to the work he hoped to accomplish. **In the**

twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king. Although another year had been started on the Jewish calendar, it was still the twentieth year of the king's reign, or 445 B.C. **And I took up the wine.** When wine was brought to the king, the cupbearer normally was required to taste it first so the king might be assured that it had not been poisoned by an enemy. **Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.** Nearly four months of anxiety, prayer, and fasting had taken its toll on Nehemiah. Although he was expected to do so while in the king's presence, he could no longer conceal his disturbed state of mind. His personality change was noted by the king, leading him to inquire more specifically about the problem. **This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.** Artaxerxes had concluded from observation that the change in his cupbearer was a matter of depression, not a physical malady. **Then I was very sore afraid.** It would appear from 1:11 that Nehemiah had prepared himself to face the king with his request. But standing now in his presence, and challenged by the king for an extraordinarily poor countenance, his courage apparently failed him momentarily. He could at that very moment stand in danger of a very stiff penalty, or even death (Esther 4:11). **Then I said to the king.** But this was no time for weakness or hesitation. If he was to help his people, it had to be now or never; so with all the reverence he could muster, he immediately addressed the Persian monarch. **Let the king live forever.** This was a common approach to royalty (1 Kings 1:31; Daniel 2:4; 3:9), showing both subjection to the king, and a wish for his continued well-being and prosperity. **The city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?** Jerusalem was the place where Nehemiah's fathers were buried, but he may have intentionally failed to mention its name to the king at first. Once he had established his own personal reasons for wanting to restore the city, there would be less likelihood of the king's considering his motives as politically motivated or dangerous to the empire. Nehemiah had planned his approach well.

2:4-6. For what dost thou make request? By this time the king recognized that Nehemiah had some petition to put before him concerning the city of his ancestry, so he urged him to proceed with it. **So I prayed to the God of heaven.** No doubt this was a prayer uttered only from the heart, but the matter before him was too important to pursue without first asking God to intervene on his behalf. The destiny of Israel was hanging in the balance. **If it please the king.** The author here premises a favorable reply on the merits of his proposition and his person. First, he wants the king to rest assured that nothing in his request would be detrimental to the interest of the kingdom, or give him cause for disapproval. Then he asked his consideration of the kind of person it was who was making the request. Everything indicates

that Nehemiah was a man of sterling quality; and he had no doubt always worked for the king's interest with the same zeal and dedicated service he would later manifest as governor of his own people. If the king would graciously consider these factors, then he surely would grant the favors about to be requested at his hand. **That thou wouldst send me to Judah.** Although not stated in the text, there is hardly room for doubt that this request was for the appointment to the governorship of Judah; for that is what Nehemiah received in response to it. That being true, it is easy to see why he exercised such caution and concern. He not only was asking the king to furlough a trusted cupbearer, but also to grant him the position of governor over a distant and rebellious province. **That I may build it.** Efforts to restore the city and its walls had been stopped by the decree of Pseudo-Smerdis in 522 B.C. (Ezra 4:12,21). Darius allowed work on the temple to resume two years later, but there is no indication that such permission included any resumption of the efforts to rebuild or fortify the city (Ezra 6:3-12). So what Nehemiah had requested would, if granted, violate a royal Persian decree. However, in the good providence of God that decree had not been made absolute. It contained the stipulation, "Until another commandment shall be given from me" (Ezra 5:21); so Artaxerxes would have complete freedom in reversing the order. This is precisely what Nehemiah hoped he would do. **The queen was sitting by him.** Mention of the queen's presence probably indicates that Nehemiah had judiciously chosen a relatively private occasion to present his appeal. With the pressures of his official responsibilities momentarily put aside, and with the pleasure of his queen's company, he would be more favorably disposed to entertain his servant's desires. **For how long shall thy journey be?** No set length of time for a leave was specified in the text. Nehemiah spent twelve years as governor of Judah (5:14), but it would seem unlikely that such a long furlough was granted by the king. I would think it more in keeping with the king's desire for his return that a shorter period of time was agreed upon, and that extensions of the leave were granted as the need dictated. **So it pleased the king to send me.** Nehemiah's fervent prayers were answered; the king would solidly back the restoration project. But there remained another serious hurdle to overcome.

2:7,8. Let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river. Traveling the route between Babylon and Palestine could be very hazardous, as may be easily ascertained from Ezra 8:21-23,31. Nehemiah therefore needed some guarantee of safe passage through the Persian provinces beyond the Euphrates. For this purpose he requested an official document certifying him as an emissary of the king, and instructing the governors of these provinces to assist him on

his journey. **And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest.** To repair the gates of the Jerusalem wall, the fortresses protecting the temple, and a home for the governor, heavy timbers would be needed; and such would not be readily available to Nehemiah. Thus he needed a requisition for timber from the king's forest preserve under the charge of Asaph. Through Hiram king of Tyre Solomon obtained cedars from Lebanon for the original temple (1 Kings 5:1-6). However, the word here translated forest is rare in the Old Testament (see Ecclesiastes 2:5; Song of Solomon 4:13). It is *pardes*, corresponding to the Greek *paradeisos* (our paradise), and means a preserve, park, or enclosed garden. So probably instead of Nehemiah asking for timber from the forests of Lebanon, he was requesting permission to use some from one of the king's parks much closer to Jerusalem. Much to his satisfaction, Nehemiah was granted all his requests; and in this he saw the good hand of God guiding the decisions of the king.

NEHEMIAH'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

2:9-11

2:9-11. Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me. (v:10) When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. (v:11) So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

2:9-11. Then I came to the governors beyond the river. Nehemiah went directly to the authorities of the area to make known his mission, and to show the official documents from the king granting him the authority to execute it. **Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.** This further indicates the good standing Nehemiah had with Artaxerxes. He had granted him an armed guard to assure his safe passage through the Syrian provinces. **Then Sanballat the Horonite.** We are here first introduced to this arch enemy of Nehemiah's restoration movement. There is some evidence that Sanballat was the governor of Samaria. This being true, his disturbed state of mind, along with that of his servant Tobiah, over the new governor and his intentions, need not come as a surprise to us. Even from the very inception of the divided kingdom in Jeroboam's day, the breach between Samaria and Judah created wounds that never healed; and when Assyria finally captured Samaria and repopulated it extensively with foreigners, the rift widened (2 Kings

17:24). The bitter rivalry was fanned to flames during Zerubbabel's restoration of the temple, and in all the balance of Bible history that flame ever increased in intensity until finally extinguished by our Lord who came to make all men one (Acts 8:4-25; Galatians 3:27-29). Sanballat could thus normally be expected to use every means at his disposal—lies, mockery, deceit, cruelty, armed force—to stop the work of God in Jerusalem. **To seek the welfare of the children of Israel.** It is doubtful that anything could have made Sanballat happier than to see Jerusalem lying in rubble; and the reproach being heaped upon its inhabitants probably had his full approbation and support. Thus to seek the welfare of the people of God was to seek the wrath of this apostate Samaritan. **So I came to Jerusalem.** Despite the indications of an impending storm, Nehemiah made his journey; and, like Ezra before him (Ezra 8:32), rested only three days from his long journey before he began to initiate action.

THE GOVERNOR APPRAISES THE CHALLENGE BEFORE HIM

2:12-16

2:12-16. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. (v:13) And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. (v:14) Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. (v:15) Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. 16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.

2:12-15. And I arose in the night. With the dark cloud of opposition hanging heavily over him, Nehemiah chose to appraise the damaged gates and wall in relative secrecy, selecting only a few trusted men as aids, and using only the animal on which he himself rode. This secret mission was probably not only just to see and appraise the damage, but also to prepare a list of materials and workmanship needed for the task. The wise builder planned his work well. **The gate of the valley.** No doubt this was the exit from the City of David that led down into the Valley of Hinnom: a valley that skirted

the city to the south, then turned eastward to join the Kidron Valley. Of this valley Jeremiah wrote, "And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart" (Jeremiah 7:31). Because of such practices Josiah defiled it, and it became the garbage dump for the city, receiving even the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. The Greek form of the word (*geenna*) was used by Jesus to designate the fiery region of the damned in eternity (Matthew 10:28; 23:33; Mark 9:43-47). **Before the dragon well.** A pool located in the Hinnom Valley. **And to the dung port.** Located near the end of the southwest portion, this was the place where the refuse was carried from the city into the Valley of Hinnom. **The gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool.** Having examined the western side of the wall to its extreme southern end, the governor then turned north to have a look at the eastern side. Located on the eastern slope of the hill designated as the City of David was the Gihon Spring. It supplied from 7,000-40,000 cubit feet of water daily during periods of thirty to forty minutes, with interruptions of from four to ten hours, depending on the season. King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 32:30,31) had tapped this valuable resource by carving a 1,765 foot tunnel under the hill of the city, and diverted it to the western side to form the Pool of Siloam—the pool here evidently designated as the King's pool (3:15). **But there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.** He encountered so much rubble at this point that the animal he was riding could go no further. But Nehemiah did not allow darkness or dangerous obstacles to stop him; he continued by foot to explore the rest of the wall as far north as Kidron, the valley separating Jerusalem from the mount of Olives (John 18:1). **And turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.** He retraced his steps, and by means of the valley gate returned once more to the city.

2:16. And the rulers knew not whither I went. Nehemiah was very secretive about his mission—apprising neither the civil nor the religious rulers of his investigation and intentions. He knew when the word was spread about his commission to rebuild the wall, opposition would mount; so he used this interim of silence to survey the need and devise his plan for action.

NEHEMIAH'S REPORT TO THE JEWISH NOBLES

2:17-20

2:17-20. Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with

fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. (v:18) Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work. (v:19) But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king? (v:20) Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

2:17,18. **Ye see the distress that we are in.** The report of Hannai had been validated by an eye witness confirmation; it was now passed on to the Jewish nobles in essentially the same words. Nehemiah's plan is forthrightly laid on the table. **Come let us build up the wall of Jerusalem.** He may be the governor, but such a great task, by so few people, in the face of bitter opposition, would require the whole-hearted cooperation of the returned exiles. It was to this end that God's noble servant now set his hand. **Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me.** When Moses was told to go lead the children of Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, he feared they would question his authority for such action. He was told, "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you" (Exodus 3:15). In essence Nehemiah used the same approach with the nobles: God's hand was upon him, having prepared him, and led him to the task at hand. **As also the king's words that he had spoken unto me.** At this point he probably spread before them his credentials from Artaxerxes. With God's blessings, and legal authority from the king, the nobles were more than ready to join in the good work of rebuilding the walls and securing the city. Their hearts were quickly filled with hope and courage, and just as quickly were their hands filled with the tools for the job.

2:19. **But when Sanballat the Horonite.** Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem have been widely considered as governors of territories on the various sides of Jerusalem. But it seems more likely, since they were often linked so solidly together in their opposition to Nehemiah, that Sanballat was governor of Samaria, while Tobiah was a well-favored servant of his, and Geshem one of his captains over the Arab troops stationed near Jerusalem. Whatever the case, they certainly now join firm hands against the restoration movement. Their initial reaction took on three aspects. (1) They laughed him to scorn. That is,

Nehemiah, and any who might choose to cast their lots with him, were made the objects of their mockery, anger, and extreme contempt. (2) They despised them. Despise is from the Hebrew *buz*, and expresses a contempt that proceeds from pride and wickedness. Instead of the respect due a man of such dignitary status, they haughtily ground his face in the dust. (3) They charged him with rebellion against the king of Persia. Evidently they believed, or more likely wanted Nehemiah to think they believed, that his credentials were fake.

2:20. Then answered I them. Nehemiah had been attacked from three different aspects: he responded accordingly. (1) He firmly reminded his critics that this mission was in obedience to the God of heaven—let the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things, He would prosper it. (2) The people would arise and build. Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and whoever else might oppose the work were here served notice: mockery, intimidation, threats, and misrepresentation would not deter them from their appointed mission. (3) These rabblers had no business interfering with this work of God. Samaria had long ago given up any pretense to being the people of God, except as it might afford them some profit or advantage. They had neither portion, right, nor memorial in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah firmly informed them that they had best be on their way.

CHAPTER 3

GOD'S HONOR ROLL OF HIS WORKMEN

3:1-32

3:1-32. Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel. (v:2) And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri. (v:3) But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. (v:4) And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Merechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. (v:5) And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord. (v:6) Moreover the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Pasea, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. (v:7) And next unto them repaired Melatia the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and the Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river. (v:8) Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall. (v:9) And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. (v:10) And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah. (v:11) Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahathmoab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces. (v:12) And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters. (v:13) The valley gate repaired

Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung gate. (v:14) But the dung gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Bethhacerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof. (v:15) But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David. (v:16) After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Bethzur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty. (v:17) After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part. (v:18) After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah. (v:19) And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury at the turning of the wall. (v:20) After him Baruch the son of Babai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. (v:21) After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah the son of Koz another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. (v:22) And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain. (v:23) After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah by his house. (v:24) And after him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner. (v:25) Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning of the wall, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh. (v:26) Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out. (v:27) After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel. (v:28) From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house. (v:29) After them repaired the priests, every one over against his house. After him repaired also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate. (v:30) After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshulam the son of Berachiah over against his chamber. (v:31) After him

repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner. (v:32) And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

God has ever honored those who are willing to go against all odds, or render an extraordinary service. The name of Moses is a household word for millions still today, but the name of the Pharaoh who opposed him is a matter of much speculation, even among scholars (Exodus 5:1,2). We know intimately Elijah who stood against the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, but we know not a single name from among that band of false prophets (1 Kings 18:20-40). A woman broke an expensive alabaster box of ointment to anoint Jesus' head: wherever the gospel is preached, her story is still told (Mark 14:3-9). Hebrews chapter eleven has been called God's Hall of Fame; it pays distinct tribute to those of whom the world was not worthy. Nehemiah chapter three may seem dull or monotonous reading for us, but we must remember, it is a tribute to those sincere souls who braved hardships and the sword to restore and fortify the City of God.

3:1-32. Few comments on this chapter are needed, but perhaps a brief summary of why they were able to accomplish so much in so short a time, and why these people have been enrolled in God's Hall of Fame, might prove profitable. (1) They followed a well-devised plan. Each group had its assigned section of labor, and each individual labored in the craft best suited to his ability (2:12-20). (2) They worked as a determined body. Neither mockery, intimidation, nor violence could force them to turn from their appointed task (4:2-6,14). (3) They worked as a unified body—the men working with their hands, the guards who placed their lives between them and the enemy, the rulers backing the work in every way—to achieve a common goal (4:15-21). (4) They looked on the work—not as a menial task, not as a project of the governor—but as a service to God (2:12; 3:1).

But sadly in every church, community, or project, there are the shirkers who tarnish the scroll of the faithful. They say, and do not (Matthew 23:1-4); they will not enter the kingdom themselves, and try to hinder those who would (Matthew 23:13); they preach liberty while they themselves are the servants of corruption (2 Peter 2:19). The nobles of the Tekoites were just such people (3:5). They would gladly enjoy the protection of the refurbished wall, but they would not lift a finger to get the job done. Their record mars the continuity of this honor roll, but inspiration will not ignore their neglect. They have gone down in infamy as men who would not dirty their hands on one of the truly great triumphs of divine history.

CHAPTER 4

OPPOSITION TO THE WORK INCREASES

4:1-12

4:1-12. But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews. (v:2) And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stone out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned? (v:3) Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. (v:4) Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: (v:5) And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders. (v:6) So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

(v:7) But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, (v:8) And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. (v:9) Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. (v:10) And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. (v:11) And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. (v:12) And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.

4:1,2. When Sanballat heard that we builded the wall. Sanballat had scorned Nehemiah's project to rebuild the wall as a pipe dream, worthy only of the silliest mockery and contempt (2:19). He probably rested in the assurance that his egotistical outburst had put an end to the aspirations of the cupbearer-turned-governor; but he had vastly underestimated his opponent. **He was wroth.** *Charah* (wroth) is related to an Aramaic root meaning to start a fire, or to burn. Thus the news that restoration on the Jerusalem walls was making progress fired a burning rage in the evil heart of Sanballat. **And took great indignation.** Indignation is a translation of *kaas*. Like *charah*, it depicts a heart aflame with anger; but even more, it is a burning condition that leads to an overt action—anger exploding into destructive force. **And he mocked the Jews.** His anger and contempt found release: with blasphemy and slander Sanballat lashed out against the faithful on the walls of the Holy City. **And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria.** This speech appears singular in purpose: to fan the flames of prejudice against God's chosen by demeaning in every possible way those working on the wall. By thus priming the vile passions of men, especially those of the military, they would be ready to move instantly and violently against the Jews if force became necessary. **What do these feeble Jews?** Contempt continued to pour from Sanballat's lips. Were these feeble creatures so vain as to think they could accomplish any worthwhile task? **Will they fortify themselves?** Could such a puny element actually fortify and defend a city? Ridiculous! Or at least that is what Sanballat hoped to lead his people to believe. **Will they sacrifice?** In desperation, King Saul offered a sacrifice to God before he engaged the Philistines in battle (1 Samuel 13:8-12), thus invoking God's aid in gaining the victory. Sanballat blasphemously questioned whether the feeble Jews might try in the same manner to call God to their side. **Will they make an end in a day?** Are they so strongly motivated and divinely aided as to bring the destruction of many years to an end in one day? **Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?** The destruction was so complete, and the rubbish so deep, that Nehemiah had to survey a considerable portion of the walled area on foot (2:14,15). Could such rubble be turned into walls and fortresses by a mere handful of men?

4:3. Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him. Tobiah, who seems to have been little more than Sanballat's puppet to echo his sentiments, now adds his bit of sarcasm. Such a shoddy wall as might be constructed by the Jews would be broken down by a fox running over it.

4:4-6. Hear, O our God. Sennacherib king of Assyria blasphemed the God of heaven in a letter sent to Hezekiah king of Judah. When Hezekiah went into the Lord's house and prayed with the letter

opened before God, God took note of that blasphemy and the prayer of His servant. The next morning 165,000 Assyrians lay dead in their camp. A short time later the blasphemer's life was taken by his own sons (2 Kings 19:14-37). With such a precedent before him, Nehemiah opened his heart to God in prayer, requesting that the reproach heaped on God's people be turned on the Samaritans who initiated it. **For they have provoked thee to anger.** Jesus said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these by brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40). Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church of God and wasted it (Galatians 1:13); but our Lord responded, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:5). The blasphemy of the Samaritans was against God and His cause, not simply just a reproach against His people; and Nehemiah was perfectly willing for the Lord to handle it. In the meantime the wall continued to rise from the rubble.

4:7-9. Breaches began to be stopped. The people had a mind to work, and ridicule and opposition only seemed to inspire them to greater determination. The broken wall began coming together. **And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.** The silly caricature of those *feeble* Jews by Sanballat and his compatriots had served no useful purpose - God indeed had turned the reproach on their own heads. So turning from ridicule Sanballat entered into alliance with the adjoining nations to stop the fortification of the wall by force. **Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God.** The man of the hour was a man of frequent and fervent prayer (1:4; 2:4; 4:4,9; 6:9,14), and the usual petition now found its way to the throne of grace in the wake of this new crisis. **And set a watch against them day and night.** Nehemiah had an established formula: follow fervent prayer with decisive action. Guards were stationed at the partially finished wall around the clock.

4:10-12. And Judah said. At this point three distinct problems developed from within—perhaps the greatest threat to date to Nehemiah's work. (1) The labor was of such demanding nature that the workers were near exhaustion. Would they be physically able to continue at such a driving pace? (2) The walls were far from completion. Massive piles of rubbish lay in the paths of the builders; and bruised hands, sore muscles, and aching backs just did not seem up to the challenge. (3) The ridicule, the hard work, and the threat of war had taken its toll. Ten times the Jews from outside the city had reported to Nehemiah the imminent threat of war. Evidently they thought tired workers would make poor soldiers, and that their wisest course of action would be either compromise or surrender. The restoration project had reached the apex of crisis.

TROWELS OF LABOR AND WEAPONS OF WAR

4:13-23

4:13-23. Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. (v:14) And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. (v:15) And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. (v:16) And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. (v:17) They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. (v:18) For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

(v:19) And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, the work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall one far from another. (v:20) In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us. (v:21) So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. (v:22) Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. (v:23) So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

4:13-15. Therefore I set in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places. As indicated by italics the conjunction *and* is not in the Hebrew text. So the meaning of this rather difficult passage probably is that Nehemiah set the armed guards at the lower parts of the wall, the sections most likely to be attacked, but in elevated positions so their presence could serve as a warning to the approaching enemy. **I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.** He also assigned family groups certain positions of defense. This gave the weary workers a double incentive to defend the cause. They were indeed fighting for their great and

awesome God, but also in defense of their wives, sons, daughters, and homes—everything that was of real value to them. **When our enemies heard that it was known unto us.** From this context we would glean the idea that Sanballat and his henchmen planned a surprise attack on the city. But by some means, probably from the Jews outside the wall who tried to discourage him, Nehemiah became privy to their plans. Hastily he armed his workers, placing them in conspicuous places. When the Samaritans saw his fortified positions, they evidently withdrew their forces to revamp their battle strategy. **God had brought their counsel to nought.** Whatever the means employed to thwart the enemy, the loyal governor recognized in it God's hand working on behalf of His people. **We returned all of us to the wall.** With the threat of war in temporary abeyance, the people immediately resumed their positions of labor.

Example of Faith & Works

4:16-18. And it came to pass from that time forth. Even though the plan of attack had been temporarily frustrated, the danger to the city was still very real; it was no time for them to let down their guard. Half of Nehemiah's servants (perhaps his bodyguards) labored in the construction, while the other half stood armed and ready for his personal defense, and that of his staff. Furthermore, every workman on the wall was armed: "Every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon." This added considerably to their burden, but it was the only recourse open to them. As Christians, we can learn a valuable lesson from this example. On the one hand, we must constantly be engaged in building the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 9:16-22); on the other our deadly engagement with the rulers of the darkness of this world demands that we constantly wear the armor of God and always have the sword of the Spirit at the ready (Ephesians 6:11-18).

4:19-23. The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. Jerusalem for its size was very sparsely populated (7:4), so the available workers had to be widely distributed along the length of the wall. This seriously weakened their defenses. To overcome this, a plan for unified action was devised. The sound of a trumpet would quickly rally all to the point of attack, greatly increasing their strength to repel any enemy invasion. **Our God shall fight for us.** This was constantly kept before the people. They were doing the Lord's work; He would fight for them. There was no way they could lose if they faithfully continued in His service. **From the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.** The working day for the captives was fourteen hours or more. Considering the type labor—moving massive piles of rubble, mixing and carrying mortar, maneuvering heavy stones into place—one wonders at their tenacity. Often we are prone to dwell on the weakness and often repeated

apostasy of the Holy People, and tend to forget their trials and toughness, their pit-bull dedication in the face of overwhelming odds, their service to all humanity as the Chosen People of God. **Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem.** It was an around-the-clock vigil. Daylight hours were spent in labor, then at night all remained in the city to serve as guards. There were no comforts of home or bed for their weary bodies. In fact not even their clothing was removed except for details of cleanliness.

CHAPTER 5

OPPRESSION OF THE CAPTIVES

5:1-5

5:1-5. And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews. (v:2) For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live. (v:3) Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth. (v:4) There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards. (v:5) Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.

The exiles had escaped one kind of captivity only to be overwhelmed by another. Most of them who had chosen to return to Jerusalem no doubt had done so on the proverbial shoestring. Nor had they fared well in the intervening years. Drought stalked the land, and their money bags had holes in them (Haggai 1:6-11). Expected blessings had been turned into curses (Malachi 2:3), and withheld tithes closed the windows of heavenly prosperity (Malachi 3:8-11). Beyond that, a bad situation was made worse by heartless rulers who enriched themselves at the expense of the poor. Walls were a poor defense when there was nothing to defend; and that was the situation that was presently called to the attention of Governor Nehemiah.

5:1-5. And there was a great cry of the people. This was a cry of desperation from the lips of those choked by poverty and oppression—a condition capitalized on by their own wealthy but uncaring brethren! **We, our sons, and our daughters, are many.** Their families had increased in size, but food production had not increased accordingly.

More and more they had to look elsewhere for seed grain and sustenance. **We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn.** With all financial resources exhausted, there was but one recourse open to them if they were to continue to eat—mortgaged homes and farms. **We have borrowed money for the king's tribute.** Despite the abject poverty of the common people, taxes levied by the Persian king had to be paid. With no money to meet these obligations, more and more mortgages were issued on property; and family inheritances were being lost by default with ever increasing speed. **Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren.** The loss of a child causes as much grief to the poor as it does to the rich. Yet, poverty was robbing them of their own flesh and blood. Already some of their daughters had been made slaves due to unpaid obligations. **Neither is it in our power to redeem them.** Expenses exceeded income; land had been lost through foreclosures. There was no way to redeem those already taken as slaves, nor to prevent others from being enslaved. It was a heart-rending cry that came to the ears of a sympathetic governor.

NEHEMIAH'S RESPONSE TO THE POOR EXILES 5:6-13

5:6-13. And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. (v:7) Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them Ye exact usury, every one of his brothers. And I set a great assembly against them. (v:8) And I said unto them We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer. (v:9) Also I said, it is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies? (v:10) I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury. (v:11) Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredeth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them. (v:12) Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise. (v:13) Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and

emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise.

5:6-11. **“And I was very angry.”** Nehemiah had given freely of himself and his resources for the security and well-being of God’s heritage. It wounded him deeply to learn that some of his own brethren had used their positions of authority and wealth to impoverish the common people. But more than hurt, he was angry—angry enough to invoke the curse of God upon them if they did not immediately rectify the situation (v. 13). **Then I consulted with myself.** Though quick to anger, Nehemiah did not act presumptuously. He rather gave the matter intense thought, and acted on logical conclusions. **I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers.** Having composed himself and collected his thoughts, he bared his soul to the hardened and selfish culprits. **Ye exact usury, every one of his brother.** The law of Moses was very emphatic in its prohibition of this practice: “Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it” (Deuteronomy 23:19,20). **And I set a great assembly against them.** As a wise representative of his people Nehemiah had done his homework. He had somehow reached the masses with his intentions, marshaled their support, and gathered them as a solid phalanx behind him. No doubt he had also lobbied a number of his officials to the same effect. So it was a unified body that now stood demanding immediate relief for the poor. **We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews.** Nehemiah would make some costly demands of his officials and the nobles of the land, but none that he himself had not already exemplified. As governor he received no wages, and the demands of state were a constant drain on his resources (5:14-18). But this had not hindered his efforts to redeem from heathen slavery as many of his brethren as possible. **And will ye even sell your brethren?** In violation of the law of God they had collected interest and taken mortgages in pledge (Exodus 22:24,25). Would their own greed for filthy lucre, in such glaring contrast to Nehemiah’s loving concern for his people, now drive them to sell their own flesh and blood to foreigners? **Or shall they be sold unto us?** Would the souls of men become a common commodity on the streets of the Holy City—sold to the highest bidder? **Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.** Nehemiah had held a mirror to the souls of these men—they were shocked at what they saw, and any defense for their actions escaped them. **Ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the**

reproach of the heathen our enemies? These nobles, as leaders, ought of all people to exemplify obedience to the word and will of God, and especially in view of the present reproach being heaped on Jerusalem and its inhabitants by the heathen. Instead, they had contributed to the problem. **I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn.** The principle of collecting just and appropriate wages for one's service is valid and right (1 Corinthians 9:1-14; James 5:1-4); and as governor Nehemiah certainly had that right. Furthermore, his position of authority would enable him to extract usury from the poor, even to the point of exploitation. But like Moses (Hebrews 11:25), he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to take advantage of a lucrative opportunity for self-enrichment. So the governor not only castigated the rulers for unscriptural usury, but paved the way for challenging them to sacrifice for the suffering servants of God. **Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day.** All real property was to be returned to its rightful owners, effectively cancelling all debts; and all unlawful gains made through usury were to be refunded.

5:12,13. We will restore them, and will require nothing of them. The response of the wealthy landlords was certainly all that Nehemiah could have hoped for. They graciously consented to his demands, granted the full restoration of all material goods, and vowed a complete reformation of their former practices. **Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them.** Lest any should conveniently forget his commitment and renege on his promises, a deposition of intent was required of these men; and the priests were called as witnesses to their oaths. **Also I shook my lap.** In view of the nobles' firm and unqualified assent to Nehemiah's terms, these actions and threats of Nehemiah might seem crude or uncalled for. But the governor knew all too well the fickleness of human nature; and he determined that the oaths would be undergirded by the force of law, if such became necessary.

NEHEMIAH'S UNSELFISH SERVICE TO JERUSALEM 5:14-19

5:14-19. Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor. (v:15) But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God. (v:16)

Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work. (v:17) Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. (v:18) Now that which was prepared for my daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. (v:19) Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

5:14-16. Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah. For twelve years, 445-443, Nehemiah served as governor of Judah. During that time he took nothing for either his own services or that of his staff. His position in Babylon must have been most lucrative for him to have borne his own expenses for so long a period of time. This certainly affords a striking testimony of the unselfish nature and true dedication of this good man. **But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people.** Nehemiah's actions were evidently without precedent among his predecessors. They had taken whatever may have been due them, and at times even to the point of oppressing the very poor. Not only this, but their slaves had been permitted to take advantage of every lucrative opportunity. In the light of such practices Nehemiah's generosity stood out in stark contrast. **Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall.** In addition to his governmental administrative responsibilities Nehemiah labored on the wall, certainly in the capacity of a personal overseer, and probably often with his own hands. His slaves also were engaged in the work. **Neither bought we any land.** With Jerusalem in such a depressed state, available land no doubt was plentiful and cheap. But neither Nehemiah nor his servants made any purchases. He did not want to take advantage of a poor farmer just because circumstances forced him to practically give away his land. Besides this, his avowed purpose was to help them retain their inheritance whenever possible (5:11).

5:17-19. Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers. Nehemiah had not only taken all his own household expenses upon himself, but had extended table privileges to rulers of lesser rank and means. They certainly would have depended on the support of the people had it not been for the governor's generosity. Beyond that, foreign dignitaries were not entertained by state funds, but rather at the personal expenses of the governor. **Think upon me, my God, for good.** Although Nehemiah loved Jerusalem and his fellow countrymen dearly, he had an even higher

motivating power for his labor and sacrifice—he wanted above all for his good works to be memorialized before God. There is no greater or more noble service than this.

CHAPTER 6

NEHEMIAH'S ENEMIES FORMULATE PLANS TO KILL HIM

6:1-14

6:1-14. Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem, the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) (v:2) That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. (v:3) And I sent messengers unto them saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? (v:4) Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner. (v:5) Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; (v:6) Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. (v:7) And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. (v:8) Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. (v:9) For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands. (v:10) Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. (v:11) And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. (v:12) And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but

that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. (v:13) Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. (v:14) My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

Under the leadership of Sanballat, efforts had been made to stop construction on the wall and the restoration of Jerusalem. Having duly recorded these matters, the author side-stepped for a brief interval to discuss the internal problems of poverty and oppression within the city itself. At this point, however, he returned to his original thesis to chronicle further efforts to impede his work as the final breaches in the walls were closed.

6:1-4. When Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall. Much to their chagrin, the Samaritans and their allies had learned that the last gaps in the wall had been closed. All that remained to be done to complete the fortification of the city was to hang the gates. In desperation they decided on a last-ditch effort—Nehemiah would have to be killed. To accomplish this, however, it would be necessary to get him away from his armed defenders at Jerusalem; so a plan to this effect was initiated. **Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono.** The plain of Ono is situated in the coastal area of Joppa, and would have been about an equal distance from both Samaria and Jerusalem—an ideal place to carry out their evil intent. **But they thought to do me mischief.** The enemy, as they had done before, again vastly underestimated the brilliant Nehemiah. Their pretense to a peace negotiation was so transparent that he immediately saw it for what it was: an effort to destroy him. **I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.** It would appear that Nehemiah was biding his time. He did not immediately reveal his knowledge of their plan, evidenced from their persistence in pursuing it. Rather, he needed time to hang the city gates; and to unnecessarily agitate the enemy in the meantime would be foolishness. So his reply consisted merely of a statement to the effect that his work was too important to leave for the time being. Four times they pressured him to change his mind, but each time his answer remained the same.

6:5-9. Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand. Efforts to lead Nehemiah to the slaughter at Ono ended in frustration. However, refusing to be outdone, Sanballat went public with a campaign of slander and intimidation. Normally, correspondence to an official of state would have been sealed, but this letter was open and intended for more than

the eyes and ears of the addressee. In fact, it may have been delivered in much the same manner as the letter sent by Sennacherib to Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17-19:14; 2 Chronicles 32:9-20). **It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it.** The letter set forth allegations of a rumor spreading among the nations around Judah, and confirmed by no less a figure than Gashmu (probably another form of the name Geshem). The rumor was twofold. (1) The walls of Jerusalem were being rebuilt and fortified because the Jews planned a rebellion against Artaxerxes. (2) Nehemiah had appointed prophets to proclaim him as king of Judah. Both were extremely dangerous charges, and Sanballat made it known that he intended to carry them word for word to the very throne of Persia. **There are no such things done as thou sayest.** Nehemiah categorically denied the charges; they were only inventions of the evil heart of Sanballat. **For they all made us afraid.** That is, the whole effort of Sanballat and his henchmen was simply a scare tactic, designed to weaken the determination of Nehemiah and his followers to complete their task. But the ruse did not work. It is very evident that as the wall grew stronger, so did the faith and confidence of Nehemiah and his followers. **O God, strengthen my hands.** Jesus informed the distressed father who begged Him to heal his son, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." With tears filling his eyes the man exclaimed, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:23,24). Nehemiah was much like this man. He always expressed strong conviction and determination; but just as often he humbly implored God for strength. With him it was a matter of knowing his source of strength and victory.

6:10-13. Let us meet together in the house of God. A priest named Shemaiah was among those who sealed the sure covenant of faithfulness (10:8), and also joined other priests in worship at the dedication of the wall (12:42). The one mentioned here is probably the same priest. He was shut up or confined to his house at the time, evidently because of some physical or ceremonial uncleanness (Leviticus 21:16-23; 22:2-9). Nevertheless, he wanted to take Nehemiah into the temple on the pretense of protecting his life. But Nehemiah quickly responded that such a man as he could not enter God's holy sanctuary; the law of the Lord reserved that privilege only for the priests. "Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office of every thing of the altar, and within the vail; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death" (Numbers 18:7; cf. also 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). **Should such a man as I flee?** Nehemiah served as both leader and example to the people. Could he expect them to lay their lives on the line for the Lord while

he sheltered his own in the safety of God's house? **And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him.** Nehemiah was a shrewd ruler. By careful analysis of the situation he concluded that Shemaiah's prophecy was another concoction of Tobiah and Sanballat, put into the priest's mouth by a bribe from the same; and it was all with the grand design that they might portray him before the people as a coward. O, the devious devices of Satan's ambassadors!

6:14. My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works. At least four times in the course of his narrative Nehemiah lifted an appeal to the throne of grace to be remembered for his good services and reforms among God's people (5:9; 13:14,22,31). Here this basic prayer takes on a different aspect. He asked God to remember those cruel and vindictive men for their evil in opposing the work of God.

THE WALL COMPLETED

6:15-19. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. (v:16) And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

(v:17) Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. (v:18) For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. (v:19) Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

6:15,16. So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifty day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. Elul was the sixth month of the Jewish calendar, and corresponds roughly to our September. Comparatively speaking, the labor force on the wall was small; but what they lacked in numbers, they made up in zeal and determination. So in a short span of less than two months the Jewish exiles had completed the arduous task, much to the consternation of their enemies surrounding them. **They were much cast down in their own eyes.** Contempt had poured from the hearts and lips of the pompous Sanballat and Tobiah, but it was now turned on their own heads. God is not mocked (Galatians 6:7,8). Dogs licked Ahab's blood in the vineyard he had stolen (1 Kings 21:19; 22:37,38); Haman was hanged on his own gallows (Esther 7:10); worms ate the flesh of the blasphemous Herod (Acts 12:20-23); sin found out the vile hearts of

Sanballat and Tobiah (Numbers 32:23), and they fell into their own pit (Proverbs 28:10). **For they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.** Habakkuk said, “The Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Habakkuk 2:20). The enemies of the restoration movement finally had to acknowledge this truth, at least mentally if not otherwise.

6:17-19. Moreover in those days. This beyond doubt referred to the whole period of restoration under Nehemiah, and probably included an even longer span of time. **The nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.** A constant stream of information flowed between the Jewish nobles and Tobiah, with the pretended good deeds of that deviate being flaunted even before Nehemiah himself. This was certainly true during the reconstruction of the wall, but continued long thereafter, as is evidenced from the fact that shortly after Nehemiah’s return to Babylon, Tobiah was able to worm his way into the temple (13:4-9).

CHAPTER 7

HANANI AND HANANIAH GIVEN CHARGE OVER JERUSALEM

7:1-5

7:1-5. And come to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed, (v:2) That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many. (v:3) And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house. (v:4) Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.

(v:5) And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein.

7:1-3. With some of the Jewish nobles still courting the friendship and favors of Tobiah, Nehemiah saw a need to stabilize the government of Jerusalem with some trusted leaders. This he did by placing his brother Hanani, along with the palace ruler Hananiah, in charge of the city. **For he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.** Like his brother, Hanani excelled in his dedication to God, a characteristic sorely needed in Jerusalem at the time. **Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot.** Gates of eastern towns were usually opened at sunrise, but Jerusalem's gates were not to be opened until the sun was well above the horizon. This was an extra precaution taken to make sure all the people were up and about so the penetration of their security would be less likely. **And appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.** It appears here that some responsibility for guard duty was assigned to all the male inhabitants, but especially those whose houses were situated near the wall.

7:4,5. Now the city was large and great, but the people were few therein. Walls were repaired, gates hung, and watches positioned; yet the real key to defense was the people. But due to the sparse population of the city, Nehemiah discerned this as its weakest link. A register of those returning from Babylon with Zerubbabel was found, and from these families one in ten was chosen by lot to live in Jerusalem (11:1).

THE REGISTER OF THOSE WHO
RETURNED WITH ZERUBBABEL

7:6-73

7:6-73. These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city; (v:7) Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bignai, Nehum, Baanah, The number, I say, of the men of the people of Israel was this; (v:8) The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. (v:9) The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. (v:10) The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two. (v:11) The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred and eighteen. (v:12) The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. (v:13) The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five. (v:14) The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. (v:15) The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight. (v:16) The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight. (v:17) The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two. (v:18) The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven. (v:19) The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven. (v:20) The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five. (v:21) The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. (v:22) The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight. (v:23) The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four. (v:24) The children of Hariph, an hundred and twelve. (v:25) The children of Gibeon, ninety and five. (v:26) The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, an hundred fourscore and eight. (v:27) The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. (v:28) The men of Bethazmaveth, forty and two. (v:29) The men of Kirjathjearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three. (v:30) The men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred twenty and one. (v:31) The men of Michmas, an hundred and twenty and two. (v:32) The men

of Bethel and Ai, an hundred twenty and three. (v:33) The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two. (v:34) The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. (v:35) The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. (v:36) The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. (v:37) The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and one. (v:38) The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.

(v:39) The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. (v:40) The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. (v:41) The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. (v:42) The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

(v:43) The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, and of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four.

(v:44) The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred forty and eight.

(v:45) The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, an hundred thirty and eight.

(v:46) The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth, (v:47) The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon, (v:48) The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmi, (v:49) The children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, (v:50) The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, (v:51) The children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phaseah, (v:52) The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephishesim, (v:53) The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, (v:54) The children of Bazilith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, (v:55) The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Tamah, (v:56) The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

(v:57) The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida. (v:58) The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel. (v:59) The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebiam, the children of Amon. (v:60) All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two. (v:61) And these were they which went up also from Telmelah, Telharesha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel. (v:62) The children of Delaiah, the children of

Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two.

(v:63) And the priests: the children of Habaiiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called after their name.

(v:64) These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from their priesthood. (v:65) And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

(v:66) The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, (v:67) Beside their manservants and their maidservants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five sining men and singing women. (v:68) Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five: (v:69) their camels, four hundred thirty and five: six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses.

(v:70) And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work. The Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basons, five hundred and thirty priests' garments. (v:71) And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pound of silver. (v:72) And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pound of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments. (v:73) So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

7:6-73. For a discussion of this register, and the apparent discrepancies between it and Ezra's list, see our comments on Ezra 2:64-67.

CHAPTER 8

EZRA SHARES GOD'S WORD WITH THE PEOPLE

8:1-8

8:1-8. And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. (v:2) And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. (v:3) And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. (v:4) And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. (v:5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when they opened it, all the people stood up: (v:6) And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. (v:7) Also Jeshuad, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. (v:8) So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

8:1-3. And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street. With the walls repaired, and watches placed in strategic places around the city, Jerusalem enjoyed a greater degree

of security and independence than it had known for many years. It set the stage for a religious revival hardly without precedent among the People of God. Years before God had warned through Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children" (Hosea 4:6). Lest history should repeat itself, the people assemble with unanimous voice to call for a reading and exposition of the law of God. **And they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses.** The law of God given through Moses from Mount Sinai was the guiding beacon of the Jewish people (Proverbs 6:23). By a blood covenant they had bound themselves to it (Exodus 24:3-8; Jeremiah 34:18,19); and God required that the commandment be kept ever before them—treasured in their hearts, spoken of while walking or sitting, worn as signs on their hands and as frontlets between their eyes (Deuteronomy 4-9). His commandment was perfect (Psalm 19:7), more to be desired than honey and the honeycomb (Psalm 19:10), better than gold, even fine gold (Psalm 119:127), and a thing of delight (Psalm 119:77). Unlike our present society, they did not have this precious Word at their fingertips; but God honored them with the presence of Ezra the priest, a man of rare dedication and abilities (see notes on Ezra 7:6-10). **And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation.** That is, he brought the *book* containing the law before the people. The basic constitution of God's law, the ten commandments, was written with the finger of God on two tables of stone (Exodus 31:18). These and many other divine precepts Moses preserved in writing in some ancient type of book (Deuteronomy 28:58-61; Mark 10:4,5; Luke 20:28; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Chronicles 35:12; Luke 24:44-46). Each king was commanded to make for himself a written copy of this law, and to regularly read from it all the days of his life (Deuteronomy 17:18,19). When the people departed from God, the book of the law was the guideline for reformation of life, and a restoration of the primitive practices of the nation (2 Kings 22:8-23:25). The captives who returned with Zerubbabel had access to this law book (Ezra 6:17,18); and Ezra, even while in the captivity of Babylon, had become a ready scribe in that law, preparing himself to teach it (Ezra 7:6-10). Some critics have tried to deny any systematic or codified preservation of God's law before the time of Ezra, but the foregoing proves such not to be the case. However it comes as no surprise to the Bible believer to find Ezra bringing this book before the people to be read, reinforcing it as the only authoritative guide for the reformation of their lives and religion. **And all those that could hear with understanding.** Ezra's audience not only contained adults of both sexes, but also younger people who had reached a sufficient stage

of maturity to be involved in religious matters. It is a travesty to speak of the Bible as a book not subject to human comprehension—a revelation that reveals nothing! Jesus Himself said, “Let him that readeth understand” (Mark 13:14), and quoting from the prophet Isaiah He nailed down the exact reason why many did not: “For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15). Paul wrote, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Ephesians 3:4). **And he read therein.** From the first morning light to the middle of the day, the skilled Ezra opened the stream of inspiration to the thirsty souls about him. **And the ears of all the people were attentive to the law.** There is a similar incident in the restoration of Josiah. At that time, when the book of the covenant was read, “All the people stood to the covenant.” That is, the people pledged themselves to obey the terms of the covenant. The same is true of this body assembled before Ezra.

8:4-8. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood. Having described in a general way Ezra’s reading of the law and the people’s response, the author returns for some additional details of this momentous event. An elevated platform had been prepared from which he could better address the large crowd. He was flanked by men of honor, and had been assigned assistants, probably translators, who helped the people to understand the law being read. **And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people.** Ezra’s elevated position made it possible for the people to see the book of the law being opened. This evoked an immediate response from the crowd: they stood in reverence at the sight of that precious book, and in anticipation of the message about to be read from it. We who have allowed the Bible to become common place in our lives because we have been so marvellously blessed with copies of it in abundance, and with the ability to read it for ourselves, could learn a valuable lesson from this ancient people. Whatever other faults they may have had, they had not lost their reverence and respect for the holy word of God. **And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.** The people’s response brought praise to Jehovah from the lips of Ezra. The people assented with the hearty and emphatic amen, amen, then humbly bowed their faces to the dust and joined Ezra in his worship of the Lord. **And the Levites caused the people to understand the law.** Once the actual reading started, several men, along with the Levites, were no doubt dispersed among the crowd to help communicate the word of God to the people. This probably was done in two ways: (1) As Ezra read, they translated the word into the various languages of the people. This was necessary

because many of the Jews did not understand their native Hebrew (13:23,24). (2) Explanations and applications were added as needed to be sure that all clearly understood their own personal responsibilities to the word they were hearing. All this becomes very evident from v. 8: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

A HOLY DAY PROCLAIMED

8:9-12

8:9-12. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. (v.10) Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength. (v.11) So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. (v.12) And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

8:9-12. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha. Tirshatha is a term denoting fear or reverence. It was quite naturally applied to Nehemiah as governor as it had been to his predecessors (Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65,70). **This day is holy unto the Lord your God.** When Josiah heard God's message from the book of the law, he tore his clothing and wept before the Lord. The reason was apparent: "For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us" (2 Kings 22:11-13,19). The same curse hung heavily over the Exiles (1:6-11), and God's word produced in them a similar reaction. But this was not the proper occasion for sadness and weeping; rather they had manifold reasons for joyful praise: (1) They had been released from the Babylonian captivity and restored to their homeland. (2) They had a greater degree of security within the walled city than they had known for many years. (3) All debts had been cancelled, and all property returned to its rightful owners, ending some of the extreme hardships of the past. (4) The word of God was available to all of understanding, guiding them in the grace and favor of the Lord. (5) They had leaders, civil and religious, who loved God and had the deepest concern for His people. (6) Most of all, they could

rest in the assurance that God was their strength—an ever present help in time of trouble. Thus a day for rejoicing and festivity was proclaimed. **And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions.** Once the Levites had convinced the people, they readily caught the joyful spirit and enthusiasm of the occasion. They celebrated it with feasting, and shared gladly and liberally with those less fortunate than themselves. **Because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.** They not only understood the words, but also the import of God's law—a message designed to bring the ultimate joy and gladness to the lives of men, not to burden them with worthless statutes of bondage.

THE FEAST OF BOOTHS OBSERVED

8:13-18

8:13-18. And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. (v:14) And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: (v:15) And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

(v:16) So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. (v:17) And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. (v:18) Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

8:13-15. And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people. The readings of the first day were for all the people old enough to understand the Scriptures and their implications. But at this meeting only the heads of the various

families or clans, along with the priests and Levites, met with Ezra for a more detailed study of the law and its application to their present needs. **And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses.** Human tradition, feelings, conscience, family religion, and the wisdom of men have often been resorted to as adequate religious guides; but these can never be (Matthew 15:3-9; 1 Corinthians 2:9; Acts 23:1; Philippians 4:3-8; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21). Jeremiah the prophet said it well: "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Paul warned us not to think in men above that which is written (1 Corinthians 4:6), and Jesus Himself said the written word could not be broken (John 10:28). Scripture was given for purposes of doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16,17); and it is with this recognition of its holy content that the book of the law is now spread before these leaders. **That the children of Israel should dwell in booths.** This celebration was also called the feast of tabernacles, and was observed from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of Tishri. When the harvest had been gathered, all Israelites moved into booths constructed of tree branches to remind them of their escape from Egypt, and of their period of wilderness wanderings when they had no fixed dwellings (Exodus 23:33-34; Leviticus 23:34-43; Deuteronomy 6:13-16). This feast had been restored by Ezra about thirteen years earlier (Ezra 3:4), but its practice had again fallen into disuse.

8:16-18. So the people went forth. There is but one way a real restoration can be accomplished. When people find their religion out of harmony with the pattern given in God's word, they must change and conform themselves to the divine rule. Years of living in apostasy neither sanctify human tradition nor nullify God's original plan. Having determined God's will from a study of His word, the people immediately erected their booths and moved in. **For since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so.** Certainly the feast of booths had been observed thirteen years earlier under the reform of Ezra, so it could not be the author's intent here to assert otherwise. It is rather a depiction of how it was done. At no time since Jeshua (Joshua) had the people entered into their booths with such an overflow of emotions as they recalled their recent captivity, their burned temple, their broken walls, their greedy rulers, and their nearly destitute state. Such remembrances caused their hearts to swell with gladness as these were compared with their present state of affairs. **Also day by day, from the first day unto the last, he read in the book of the law of God.** With the authority of the

book of God's law restored to its rightful place in the hearts of the people, it was read (probably by Ezra) each day during the feast of booths. God expected no less of the exiles: "Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 31:12). **And on the eighth day was a solemn assembly.** The first day of the feast was marked by a cessation of labor and a sacred assembly; the eighth day repeated the requirements of the first (Leviticus 23:33-36; Numbers 29:12-35). The people were careful to observe the feast in the manner prescribed.

CHAPTER 9

A TIME OF NATIONAL PENITENCE AND CONFESSION

9:1-3

9:1-3. Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. (v:2) And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. (v:3) And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the Lord their God.

9:1-3. Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month. The feast of booths had begun on the fifteenth of Tishri, and was followed by a sabbath celebration on the twenty third (Leviticus 23:39). The day following, the people proclaimed a fast, dressed in sackcloth, and threw dust on their heads as symbols of distress and penitence (see Ezra 8:21-23). They then assembled to hear more readings from the book of law and confessions of sins. Basically it was a reiteration of God's covenant law, and a renewal thereof in the tradition of their ancestors (Joshua 24:1-25; Ezra 9,10). **And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers.** God's covenant was with the seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 17:15-21). It was therefore appropriate for only Abraham's lineage to stand before Him in this covenant renewal. **And read in the book of the law of the Lord their God.** If they were to be the people of God, they had to be the people of God's Book. That was true of the Israelites; it is equally true of us today (Revelation 1:3; 22:14,18,19).

ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT RECALLED

9:4-12

9:4-12. Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Serebiah, Bani, and Chenani,

and cried with a loud voice unto the Lord their God. (v:5) The Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. (v:6) Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshipped thee. (v:7) Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; (v:8) And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous: (v:9) And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; (v:10) And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. (v:11) And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. (v:12) Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.

9:4,5. Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites. The Levites, as it was their responsibility so to do, led the people in their praise to God and the confession of their sins. **Stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever.** Why should the Israelites praise God? What special relationship did He sustain with them? What were His rights of Lordship in demanding their allegiance? The Levites answered these queries so thoroughly in their confession that we here digress briefly to summarize their appeal. (1) He is the Creator of heaven and earth, and all things contained therein (v. 6). (2) All the hosts of heaven worship Him (v.6). (3) He entered a covenant with Abraham to give the land of Canaan to him and his seed, and kept His promises down to the most minute detail (vv. 7,8). (4) He led His people from the bondage of the powerful Pharaoh, parting the waters of the Red Sea for their escape (vv. 9-10). (5) He gave them miraculous guidance through forty years of wilderness wanderings (v. 12). (6) He gave them His holy law from Sinai (vv. 13,14). (7) Provisions from heaven were given to sustain them during their long stay in the

wilderness (v. 15). (8) In spite of their constant rebellions, God's mercy remained with them during forty years of wilderness wanderings (vv. 16-21). (9) God gave kings and kingdoms into their hands, dividing by lot their possessions to His people. He also multiplied their seed as the stars of heaven (vv. 22-25). (10) Despite their love for sin that often led them into the hands of their enemies, His lovingkindness remained steadfast; and He saved them when they lifted their penitent cries before His throne (vv. 26-31). (11) They could rest assured that God would honor His covenant with them if they renewed their commitment to Him (vv. 31-38). Surely there was ample cause for the Holy People to stand up and bless their God for ever and ever!

9:6-8. Thou, even thou, art Lord alone. God revealed Himself to Moses as the I AM, the eternal existent One (Exodus 3:14). He alone was God (Exodus 20:1,2; 6:4), and all material things were the work of His creative finger (Psalms 8:3). **Thou art the Lord the God, who didst choose Abram.** This Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, in a decisive historical act, had chosen Abraham and his seed to make of them a peculiar treasure above all the people of the earth (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; Psalms 135:4). To accomplish His purpose through His servant nation, God covenanted with them to give them Canaan, a land polluted by the abominable and filthy practices of its occupants (Genesis 15:16; Deuteronomy 9:4). But until their iniquity was full, He tempered this special people in the iron furnace of Egypt for four hundred years (Genesis 15:13; Deuteronomy 4:20).

9:9-12. And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt. When the four hundred years had expired, God honored His promise, and sent Moses to deliver His chosen from the oppressive hand of Pharaoh (Exodus 3:7-10). **And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh.** Ten destructive plagues were brought on Pharaoh and the Egyptians before he agreed to let the children of Israel go (Exodus 7:19-12:30). Even then he pursued the Israelite slaves, and intended to reclaim them by the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:5-8). **And thou didst divide the sea before them.** "And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (Exodus 14:21,22). **And their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps.** When Pharaoh's army entered the sea in pursuit of the Israelites, the walls of water closed in on them. The next morning their dead bodies littered the shore (Exodus 14:23-30). **Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire.** The Israelites were not left to wander in the wilderness without divine guidance: "And the Lord went before

them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night" (Exodus 13:21). When necessary, this pillar also became a dividing wall of protection between the Chosen People and those wishing to destroy the work of God (Exodus 14:19,20).

GIVING OF THE LAW FROM SINAI RECALLED 9:13-15

9:13-15. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: (v:14) And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant. (v:15) And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them.

9:13-15. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven. Never before in the annals of sacred history had the eyes of sinful men witnessed such an awesome event. Moses thus described it: "And Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. And the Lord came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the Lord called Moses up to the top of the mount; and Moses went up" (Exodus 19:18-20). **And gavest them right judgments.** The nature of God's judgments, statutes, laws, and commandments given to Israel were described as being right, true, and good. The apostle Paul echoed this same truth when he found himself entangled in sin: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. . . For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7:12,14). All of God's laws were lovingly designed for the well-being of His creatures, not as a burden to be borne in shame, self-pity, or deprivation. It is sin and Satan that warp our character to make us think of them in any other way. **And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath.** By inspiration the Bible divides itself into three dispensations of time: The Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian Ages. The word patriarch is from a combination of the Greek words *pater* and *arche* meaning father-rule. It was a period of some twenty-five hundred years during which God had no written or

codified system of law, but rather revealed Himself through the patriarchs—heads of households or clans (John 7:22). It began with Adam and ended at Sinai with the revelation of the law of Moses (Romans 5:12-14). The Mosaic Age began at Sinai and lasted for fifteen hundred years, or until the death of Christ on the cross (Deuteronomy 5:1-3; John 1:17; 7:19; Colossians 2:14-17). The Christian Age began on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ and will end only with the consummation of all things (Romans 7:1-4; Hebrews 9:16,17; Acts 2:14-40; 11:15; Matthew 28:18-20). During the Patriarchy, God's sabbath, as well as the other commandments now committed to the tables of stone, had not been revealed to the human race. But at this point in history they became an independent nation under God, receiving a special divine law to guide them in accomplishing their mission in Christ (Galatians 3:19). **And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger.** A vast multitude left Egypt—six hundred thousand men, not counting their children (Exodus 12:37)—and journeyed into a barren wilderness. To provide for so many required nothing short of a miracle. And such God performed by supplying manna, a thin, frost-like substance, for their daily nutrition (Exodus 16:13-18). Water to quench their thirst was also released by miracle from a rock in Rephidim (Exodus 17:5,6).

ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS REBELLIONS CONFESSED 9:16-18

9:16-18. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, (v:17) And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage; but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. (v:18) Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations.

9:16-18. But they and our fathers dealt proudly. Israel tempted God over their food and water supply (Exodus 16:1-3; 17:1,2). Then they complained about the kind of food provided (Numbers 11:4-6). Even while Moses was on Sinai receiving the law, they formed a golden calf to lead them back to the leeks and cucumbers of Egypt (Exodus 32:1-4). For forty years their rebellious hearts would continue to tempt God (Hebrews 3:15-19). God's altar was violated with strange fire (Leviticus 10:1-3); fearful hearts refused to enter the promised land (Numbers 14:1-3); the priesthood of Aaron was rejected

(Numbers 16:3,4); and idolatry and immorality became a common practice (Numbers 25:1-3; 1 Corinthians 10:8). It was enough to tempt God to disinherit them and start over with a new seed (Numbers 14:11,12).

**DESPITE REBELLIOUS SPIRITS,
GOD'S MERCIES ABOUNDED
9:19-22**

9:19-22. Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. (v:20) Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst. (v:21) Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. (v:22) Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.

9:19-22. Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness. The Lord hailed Moses with the salutation, "The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping Mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:5,6). This mercy and forgiveness He manifested to Israel in four distinct ways. (1) He guided and shielded them with the pillar of cloud and fire. (2) He gave them His good Spirit to instruct them, referring no doubt to the revelation of the Spirit given through Moses, and the system of prophecy which was made such a unique feature of the Holy people (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). (3) Their physical needs were totally supplied during their forty years of wilderness wanderings. (4) He gave them the kingdoms of the wicked heathen for their own possession.

**POSSESSION OF THE PROMISED LAND RECALLED
9:23-25**

9:23-25. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it. (v:24) So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people

of the land, that they might do with them as they would. (v:25) And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.

9:23-25. Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven. God had promised an aged Abraham and a barren Sarah a numerous posterity—as the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16), the stars of the heavens (Genesis 15:5), and as the sand of the sea shore (Genesis 22:17). The fulfillment of that promise was now a matter of history. **And broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers.** God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees to go into a distant and strange land and dwell among a people not his own (Acts 7:2-4; Genesis 12:1-3). When the feet of that faithful patriarch touched the plain of Moreh, Jehovah God made the famous land promise of the Old Testament (Genesis 12:6,7; 13:14-17), and later fixed its boundary lines at the river of Egypt and the Euphrates (Genesis 15:16-18). **So the children went in and possessed the land.** Under the faithful leadership of Joshua, Abraham's seed marched through the Jordan, routed kings and subdued kingdoms, and claimed the inheritance. "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. . . There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:43,45). In the land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus 8:8) they enjoyed blessings undreamed of at the fleshpots in Egypt—well-built houses, plenty of water, fruits in abundance, freedom from oppression—and they delighted in the goodness of the Lord.

CONFESSIONS OF CONTINUED REBELLION 9:26-31

9:26-31. Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. (v:27) Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies. (v:28) But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and

cried unto thee thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst deliver them according to thy mercies; (v:29) And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear. (v:30) Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands. Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

9:26-28. Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against thee. Despite the fact that God had set His love on these people, delivered them with a mighty hand from Egyptian oppression, miraculously sustained them in the wilderness, and gave them the land of milk and honey, they rebelled against Him and cast His law behind their backs. They even killed the prophets He had sent them for divine guidance. **Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies.** Israel's allegiance to the holy covenant, once they were settled in the promised land, was at best a sporadic thing. A brief summation might be given as follows: (1) Baal worship—Mesopotamian subjection for eight years—repentance—deliverance by Othniel (Judges 3:8). (2) Evil practices—eighteen years' subjection to Moab—repentance—deliverance by Ehud (Judges 3:12-15). (3) Evil practices—twenty years oppression by Canaan—repentance—deliverance by Deborah (Judges 4:2). (4) Evil practices—seven years subjection to Midian—repentance—deliverance by Gideon (Judges 6:1-6; 7:22). Like a scratched record repeating itself, such a yo-yo relationship with God was to continue through fifteen judges and forty-three kings—a thousand years of halting between two opinions (1 Kings 18:21). Such vacillation caused Hosea to view Israel's righteousness as a morning cloud and the early dew (Hosea 6:4); and Jeremiah castigated them for being perpetual backsliders (Jeremiah 8:5). Surely mercy had been strained, and their designation as the People of God unmerited; but through it all God's love and faithfulness had remained steadfast.

9:29-31. And testified against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law. Israel was a nation under covenant to God, a relationship she never seemed to take too seriously as manifested from her long history of apostasy. God often delivered her into the hands of aliens; but it was with one grand design in mind: to awaken her to her covenant responsibilities. But the discipline had little effect;

and had it not been for the grace and mercy of God, she would have long ago been utterly consumed.

THE LEVITES APPEAL FOR MERCY
AND RENEW THE COVENANT
9:32-38

9:32-38. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. (v:33) Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly: (v:34) Neither have our kings, our princes, or priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them. (v:35) For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works. (v:36) Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it: (v:37) And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. (v:38) And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

9:32,33. Now therefore, our God. For notes on this form of address see 1:5. **Who keepest covenant and mercy.** At one time Israel accused God of dealing unfairly with them (Ezekiel 18:25), but now they acknowledged that responsibility for the broken covenant rested squarely on their shoulders. **Let not all the trouble seem little before thee.** From the time of Assyrian oppression until this renewal of the covenant over two hundred and seventy-six trouble-filled years had elapsed (721-445 B.C.), engulfing the people from every walk of life. Jehovah was asked not to consider lightly those long years of suffering as He heard their confession and viewed their penitence. **Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us.** This confession and appeal was in no way to be understood as in-pugning the justice of God: their punishment certainly had not been equal to their crimes.

9:34-37. Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law. God had in the clearest possible manner, and in

the most minute detail, conditioned inheritance in the promised land with its bountiful blessings upon continued obedience to His covenant law (Deuteronomy 11:26-28). The Levitical confession now reaches this dramatic conclusion: every calamity that had befallen them, including their present state of servitude, had been brought about by disobedience to that holy law. The apostle Paul reiterated their conclusion with these words, "Every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward" (Hebrews 2:2). But for our benefit he also hastens to add, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him" (Hebrews 2:3). Thus God's law must reign supreme over the hearts and lives of His people, whether under the Mosaic Dispensation or in the Christian Age. When it is otherwise, they become *Lo-ammi—not God's people!* (Hosea 1:9).

9:38. And because of all this we make a sure covenant. If the Holy People were ever again to enjoy the blessings of their God, there was but one course of action left open for them. Apostasy from God's law as the directive for their lives had led them to their present state; only a restoration of that law to its original intent would rectify their situation. So from this time forward they made a solemn covenant, confirmed by their oaths, to abide by the teachings of the word of God. This certainly marks an epoch in the history of the Holy People.

CHAPTER 10

THOSE WHO SEALED THE COVENANT

10:1-27

10:1-27. Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah, (v:2) Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, (v:3) Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah, (v:4) Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, (v:5) Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, (v:6) Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, (v:7) Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, (v:8) Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were the priests. (v:9) And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; (v:10) And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pellaiah, Hanan, (v:11) Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah, (v:12) Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, (v:13) Hodijah, Bani, Beninu. (v:14) The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, (v:15) Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, (v:16) Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, (v:17) Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur, (v:18) Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai, (v:19) Hariph, Anothoth, Nebai, (v:20) Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, (v:21) Meshezabeel, Zadok, Jaddua, (v:22) Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, (v:23) Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub, (v:24) Hallohesh, Pileha, Shobek, (v:25) Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, (v:26) And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan, (v:27) Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

10:1-27. Now those that sealed were. Nehemiah as the head of state, the priests and Levites as the religious leaders, and the chiefs of the various clans and families all signed the covenant as representatives of the people. Their signatures placed the whole nation under a sworn obligation to obey the terms of the covenant.

THE PEOPLE CONFIRM THE COVENANT

10:28,29

10:28,29. And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of

God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; (v:29) They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes.

10:28,29. And the rest of the people. The covenant had been sealed by their national and local representatives. But sacred history provided ample precedent for each individual among the Holy People to make his own personal commitment to the law of God. When Moses first received the law from Sinai and read it to the people, they responded, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Exodus 24:7). Joshua renewed the covenant at Shechem and challenged Israel to emulate his example. They replied, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey" (Joshua 24:24). When king Josiah restored the book of law to its rightful place of authority in Israel, the people individually exemplified his action: "And all the people stood to the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2,3). After all, any commitment short of a personal one is no commitment at all. **And all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God.** God chose Abraham and his seed as a channel for blessing all mankind (Genesis 12:1-3), made them special to Himself above all the other people of the earth (Deuteronomy 7:6-9), and entered into a covenant relationship with them (Genesis 17:7,8). The principle of separation from foreign elements was mandated by this special selection and divine mission (Deuteronomy 7:1-9), and there could be no renewal of the covenant aside from it. **And entered into a curse.** Joshua had warned the people, "Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you" (Joshua 23:12,13). The people now acknowledged this curse as a consequence of disobedience to God's covenant law, and placed themselves fully under it should they once more violate the Father's divine injunctions.

A RESTORATION OF DIVINE ORDINANCES

10:30-39

10:30-39. And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for your sons: (v:31)

And of the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt. (v:32) Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God; (v:33) For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God. (v:34) And we cast the lots among the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the law: (v:35) And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the Lord: (v:36) Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God: (v:37) And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. (v:38) And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house. (v:39) For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.

Valid restoration not only required commitment to a principle or a plan, it also demanded conformity—decisive action, reflected in reformation of life and practice. It instigated a search for the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16), an abolition of false systems contrary to the covenant (2 Kings 23:4-23), and a return to the primitive practices of the covenant people (Isaiah 30:15). This was true of Israel, as the following actions clearly show; it is still true of us today.

10:30. And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land. God's requirements with reference to heathen marriages were clear and precise (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). It now must be a committed practice of the people.

10:31. That we would not buy it of them on the sabbath. In memorial of creation and deliverance from Egyptian bondage, God commanded a weekly sabbath (Genesis 2:2,3; Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). On that day both man and beast enjoyed rest from their burdens and toil (Deuteronomy 5:13,14), and their ever pressing search for sustenance was temporarily suspended. Even fires in their homes were left unkindled (Numbers 15:32-36; Exodus 35:3). It was a capital offence to violate that holy day (Exodus 31:15; 35:2). But despite these stringent laws governing sabbath keeping, it was often profaned (Ezekiel 20:13; 22:8; Amos 8:5). It thus became a matter of the first priority for Nehemiah to see that the sanctity of this day was restored (see also 13:15-21). **And that we would leave the seventh year.** In addition to the weekly day of rest there was also the seventh year sabbath, required to be observed in the following manner. (1) The land stood idle for one year, and whatever grew of its own was reaped only by the poor (Exodus 23:9-11; Leviticus 25:1-7). (2) Debts against fellow-Israelites were cancelled (Deuteronomy 15:2). (3) All Hebrew slaves were released (Deuteronomy 15:12). (4) It was a special time for reading and hearing the law (Leviticus 25:1-7). Violations of these very humane statutes had nearly destroyed the poor inhabitants (5:1-5); their restitution was imperative.

10:32-34. Also we made ordinances for us. By commandment a half-shekel tax for the ransom of souls, and for use in the tabernacle services, was collected from both rich and poor alike. Originally this appears to have been collected only when a census was made (Exodus 30:12-16). The populace now bound on themselves a third-shekel annual contribution. This was later increased to the half-shekel mentioned in Exodus, and was still practiced during the time of Jesus (Matthew 17:24-27). **For the shewbread.** The required temple services performed on a regular basis cost a considerable sum. If such temple worship was to be restored, and indeed it must, the price would have to be paid—the temple tax would meet that need. **And we cast lots.** In addition to the funds required for their worship, menial tasks, such as providing wood for the burnt offerings and sacrifices, had to be performed. This job had previously been carried out by the Nethinims (Joshua 9:22-27), but apparently their number was not now sufficient for the task. So lots were cast to determine in what order the people would supply the necessary wood.

10:35-37. And to bring the firstfruits of our ground. The law made provision for the firstfruits of the harvest to be offered to the Lord (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 26:2). **And the firstborn of our sons.** Generally speaking God's legislation relating to the firstborn was as follows: (1) When God destroyed all the firstborn of Egypt, the Israelite households were passed over unharmed.

Therefore every firstborn in Israel, both of man and beast, was to be dedicated to the Lord (Exodus 13:2,14,15). (2) All clean animals were to be set apart for the Lord's service; unclean animals were either to be redeemed or killed (Exodus 13:11-13; 34:19,20). (3) In lieu of the firstborn males, God chose the tribe of Levi and set them apart for His special service (Leviticus 8:14-22; Numbers 3:12,45).

10:38,39. And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes. The Levites received no land inheritance as did the other tribes, but were supported with the tithes from the land (Numbers 18:20-24). Thus they had the responsibility for receiving and disbursing the tithes. But as a safeguard against abuse, the priest stood by as the tithes were received and transferred to the storage rooms of the temple. **The tithes of the tithes.** Even though they were supported by the tithes from people, the Levites still paid tithes of that which they received (Numbers 18:26).

So after many years of rebellion, captivity, and exposure to reproach of their enemies, the exiles were once more residing within the safety of their own walls. The temple of God stood proudly in their midst, and they had a leadership that was interested in their welfare, not striving to relieve them of their lands, houses, and children. They had turned in repentance and confession to God and His law, purged themselves from idolatrous practices made hoary with age, and restored the ancient and pure religion of their fathers. Jerusalem was now ready for shouts of joy—hearts filled with thanksgiving lifted in praise to Jehovah.

CHAPTER 11

A LIST OF THOSE WHO WILLINGLY VOLUNTEERED TO LIVE IN JERUSALEM

11:1-36

11:1-36. And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities. (v:2) And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

(v:3) Now these are the chief of the province that dwell in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants. (v:4) And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin; Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez; (v:5) and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni. (v:6) All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men. (v:7) And these are the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pediah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah. (v:8) And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight. (v:9) And Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer: and Judah the son of Senuah was second over the city. (v:10) Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin. (v:11) Seraiah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub was the ruler of the house of God. (v:12) And their brethren that did the work of the house were eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah, (v:13) And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two; and

Amashai the son of Azareel, the son of Ahasai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, (v:14) And their brethren, mighty men of valour, an hundred twenty and eight: and their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of one of the great men. (v:15) Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; (v:16) And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God. (v:17) And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zadbi, the son of Asaph, was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer: and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. (v:18) All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred fourscore and four. (v:19) Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, were an hundred seventy and two. (v:20) And the residue of Israel, of the priests, and the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance. (v:21) But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziha and Gispa were over the Nethinims. (v:22) The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God. (v:23) For it was the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day. (v:24) And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabeel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people. (v:25) And for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjatharba, and in the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and in the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and in the villages thereof, (v:26) And at Jeshua, and at Moladah, and at Bethphelet, (v:27) And at Hazarshual, and at Beersheba, and in the villages thereof, (v:28) And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and in the villages thereof, (v:29) And at Enrimmon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth, (v:30) Zanoah, Adullam, and in their villages, at Lachish, and the fields thereof, at Azekah, and in the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beersheba unto the valley of Hinnom. (v:31) The children also of Benjamin from Geba dwelt at Michmash, and Aija, and Bethel, and in their villages, (v:32) And at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, (v:33) Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, (v:34) Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, (v:35) Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen. (v:36) And of the Levites were divisions in Judah, and in Benjamin.

11:1-36. And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem had long served as the capital of Judah, it was but natural

that its present rulers would make their homes there. But its broken walls and depressed economy proved to be less attractive to the majority of the exiles, who had chosen to settle in the open areas of Judah (7:4). If the restoration movement was to be successful and the city defensible, more people would have to live in the city. **The rest of the people cast lots.** This provided a means for selecting at random a tenth part of the population of Judah to be moved to Jerusalem. **And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.** The newly constructed walls, a dedicated leadership, and a revival of religious zeal caused those selected to willingly make the move; and that with the blessings of those left in the other cities of Judah. The balance of this chapter is a catalogue of those who resettled Jerusalem, and for the purposes of this book needs no further comment.

CHAPTER 12

A LIST OF THE EXILES WHO RETURNED TO REBUILD JERUSALEM

12:1-26

12:1-26. Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, (v:2) Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, (v:3) Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, (v:4) Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah, (v:5) Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, (v:6) Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, (v:7) Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua. (v:8) Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren. (v:9) Also Bakkukiah and Unni, their brethren, were over against them in the watches.

(v:10) And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada. (v:11) And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua. (v:12) And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seriah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; (v:13) of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; (v:14) of Melicu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; (v:15) of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; (v:16) of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; (v:17) of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; (v:18) of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; (v:19) And of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; (v:20) Of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; (v:21) of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel.

(v:22) The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers: also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian. (v:23) The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. (v:24) And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks,

according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. (v:25) Mattaniah, and Bakkukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates. (v:26) These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

12:1-7. These were the chief of the priests. These were the chief or leaders of the priests who had returned with Zerubbabel to reestablish the temple worship in Jerusalem. David had originally divided the priests into twenty four courses (1 Chronicles 24:7-19), but only twenty-two are mentioned here. Perhaps the number of priests returning was insufficient for all the divisions.

12:8,9. Moreover the Levites. This section lists the names of eight Levitical family heads who returned with Zerubbabel. Some names not included in the list given by Ezra are added here (Ezra 2:40).

12:10,11. And Jeshua begat Joiakim. In these verses the author inserts the genealogical record of the high priestly families from Zerubbabel to Nehemiah (Ezra 2:2; Nehemiah 12:22).

12:12-21. And in the days of Joiakim were priests. This is a listing of a second generation of priests following Zerubbabel. Twenty one names are included in this record, one less than the preceding one.

12:22-26. The Levites in the days of Eliashib. This section contains still other lists of Levites who served during the period of Ezra and Nehemiah, and up to the time of Darius the Persian (probably Darius II, 423-404 B.C.).

THE DEDICATION OF THE WALLS

12:27-43

12:27-43. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. (v:28) And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi. (v:29) Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. (v:30) And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. (v:31) Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate: And after them went

Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, (v:33) And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, (v:34) Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, (v:35) And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets; namely Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph: (v:36) And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. (v:37) And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward. (v:38) And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them, and after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall; (v:39) And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the prison gate. (v:40) So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me: (v:41) And the priests; Eliakim, Masseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elieoenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; (v:42) And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. (v:43) Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

12:27-30. At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. Dedication was a celebration of joy, accompanied by sacrifice and praise, at the completion of a task (Numbers 7:10,11; 1 Kings 8:63; Ezra 6:16). In a short time God had granted to His people freedom from their enemies, and a real chance for vastly improved social, economic, and spiritual conditions—symbolized by the wall of protection that now surrounded them. It was highly appropriate that a special service, characterized by sacrifice and thanksgiving, be conducted to honor God, and invoke His blessings on both the wall and the people. **And the priest and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.** (For our notes on purification rites see Ezra 6:19-22).

12:31-43. Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall. A large company of the leaders of Judah were assembled on the wall. Having divided into two separate choirs, Ezra and Nehemiah then led the worshippers in separate directions along the wall until they met

and assembled for a mass worship service at the house of God. Grateful songs of praise and sacrifice were offered, and all the people joined in the exuberance of the occasion. Their sounds of joy carried throughout the city.

**PROVISION MADE FOR THE SUPPORT
OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES
12:44-47**

12:44-47. And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited. (v:45) And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. (v:46) For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. (v:47) And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron.

12:44-47. And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures. By divine appointment the Levites were supported from the tithes and offerings of the other eleven tribes (Leviticus 8:14-22; Numbers 18:21-24). Probably both from poverty and a disrespect for the law of God, this clear injunction had been ignored (Malachi 3:8-10). At certain times the Levites even had to take to the fields to provide their own sustenance (13:10,11). With the primitive practice of bringing tithes into the storehouse restored, honorable men were selected to distribute fairly the necessary provisions to the Levites.

CHAPTER 13

SEPARATION FROM THE AMMONITES AND MOABITES

13:1-3

13:1-3. On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; (v:2) Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. (v:3) Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

13:1-3. On that day. There is some difficulty in establishing the chronology of this and some of the events of the preceding chapter. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in 445 B.C. (2:1). The walls were completed in fifty two days, but his tenure as governor lasted for twelve years (6:15; 5:14). If the wall was dedicated as soon as it was completed, which would seem very likely, then the events of chapter thirteen are separated from the preceding one by more than twelve years. Some, however, think Nehemiah did not dedicate the walls until the end of his governorship; but we find this view very difficult to harmonize with the total context. **They read in the book of Moses.** The written word, restored to its rightful place among the Holy People, continued to remold them according to the ancient pattern. Given free course, God's word still has the power to do the same for us today (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16,17; 1 Peter 1:22-25; Acts 4:32). **That the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever.** The Ammonites and Moabites were blood relatives of Israel (Genesis 19:30-38). God gave them an inheritance on the eastern side of Jordan, and charged Israel not to meddle with them (Deuteronomy 2:9,19). Nevertheless Balak hired Balaam to curse the Israelites, thus inaugurating an effort to frustrate God's eternal plan for redemption through the Holy Nation (Numbers

22-24). God thwarted Balak's plan, and forbade either of these two nations ever to enter the congregation of Israel (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). This restriction may seem harsh to the casual reader, but the facts show otherwise. Israel inherited the promised land conditionally—obedience to God's covenant law (Joshua 23:6-13). God thwarted Balaam's initial attempt to curse Israel; but evidence indicates that Balaam infiltrated the Israelite camp, learned of their conditional inheritance, then introduced God's people to the abominable and lascivious rites of Baal worship (1 Kings 11:2; Peter 2:14,15; Jude 2:11; Revelations 2:14). That unholy alliance hung like a millstone around Israel's neck, and finally drowned her in her own iniquity (2 Kings 23). Is it any wonder, then, that God has wisely warned, "Stay away from these people for ever"? **And they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.** If they were to survive, they could not do otherwise.

TOBIAH DRIVEN FROM THE TEMPLE AREA 13:4-9

13:4-9. And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: (v:5) And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests. (v:6) But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: (v:7) and I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. (v:8) And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. (v:9) Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

13:4,5. And before this, Eliashib the priest. Eliashib served as high priest in Judah during Nehemiah's tenure as governor, and had even joined him in repairing the wall (3:1,20,21). At present he had the oversight of the storage chambers of the temple, and the responsibility of distributing to the Levites their due portion of the tithes and offerings. **Was allied to Tobiah.** Tobiah was an Ammonite, and a confirmed enemy of Nehemiah and his effort to restore the work and worship of the Holy People (2:10,19; 4:3,7,8; 6:12,13). He had always had

considerable influence among the captives (6:17-19); but through his close association with Eliashib, he had even been given one of the storage areas of the temple for his living quarters—an arrangement in total violation to the law of God.

13:6-9. But in all this time was I not at Jerusalem. After twelve years as governor of Judah, Nehemiah had returned to Artaxerxes, probably to resume his position as cupbearer. How long he was away from Jerusalem is a matter of debate. Conjectures have run from one to five years, but it had certainly been long enough for some radical changes to take place back in Jerusalem. **And I came to Jerusalem.** Nehemiah requested and obtained another leave of absence from Artaxerxes. Whether his return visit to Jerusalem was prompted by his concern for the continued welfare of his people, or whether he had been apprised of some new departures from God's law, we are not told. But in any case he was soon made aware of the wicked alliance of Eliashib and Tobiah. **And it grieved me sore.** It cut Nehemiah to the quick. He literally threw Tobiah's furniture out of the house, and commanded that the chambers be purified—made acceptable once more for their intended use. The incident causes one's mind to recall a similar instance when our Lord found His house of prayer turned into a place of merchandise, and reacted in much the same way (John 2:13-17).

THE LEVITES DEPRIVED OF THEIR SUPPORT

13:10-14

13:10-14. And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. (v:11) Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. (v:12) Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasures. (v:13) And I made treasurers over the treasures, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren. (v:14) Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

13:10-13. And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them. With the storage area being occupied by Tobiah, the tithes of the people were not being collected. Left with no means of support, the Levites had to abandon their full time religious service and take to the fields for their livelihood. **Then I contended**

with the rulers. A solemn covenant had recently been enacted and sealed by the rulers, binding them to faithfully support the Lord's house (10:39). But true to a pattern of long standing, devout intentions proved again to be a morning cloud and an early dew (Hosea 6:4); it brought a strong rebuke from Nehemiah. **Then brought all Judah the tithe.** As in the past, the people responded quickly to Nehemiah's leadership, and storehouses were soon replenished. **And I made treasurers over the treasuries.** Eliashib was removed from his position of oversight, and men proven for faithfulness were appointed to care for and properly distribute the collected tithes.

13:14. Remember me, O my God, concerning this. Though his contemporaries may have been quick to forget the reforms of this good man, others have not. Twenty four hundred years later we still honor his memory. And of course God will answer his prayer by remembering in eternity his work of faith and labor of love.

SABBATH VOILATIONS CORRECTED

13:15-22

13:15-23. In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. (v:16) There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. (v:17) Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? (v:18) Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath. (v:10) And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. (v:20) So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. (v:21) Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. (v:22) And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

13:15,16. In those days I saw in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath. God designed the sabbath as a day of complete rest for both man and beast (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:15; Jeremiah 17:21,22). But to the materialistic Israelite it eventually became an impediment to financial gain (Amos 8:5), and sabbath violations figured prominently in her captivity in a foreign land (Leviticus 26:34-43; Ezekiel 20:12-26). Recognizing this fact, the Jews who sealed the covenant bound themselves by stringent oath to obey all sabbath requirements (10:30). In the absence of Nehemiah, however, godliness soon yielded to gain. Wine flowed from the presses on the sabbath, and the streets of Jerusalem became beehives of activity as peddlers hawked their produce. **There dwelt men of Tyre also therein.** Tyre was a Phoenician city prominent in trade (1 Kings 5:7-12; Isaiah 23:1-3; Ezekiel 27). She was also steeped in Baal worship, and had been instrumental, through Jezebel, in converting Israel to that abomination (1 Kings 16:30-32). Such foreigners, allowed to openly violate God's sabbath on the streets of the Holy City, showed the utmost contempt for the law of God.

13:17,18. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah. Contend is from the Hebrew *rib*. It is a very strong term with a primary meaning of physical combat (Exodus 21:18; Deuteronomy 33:7); but it can also refer to a combat with sharp words, or a quarrel (Genesis 31:36). This was not a friendly confrontation; too much was involved for Nehemiah to mince words. **Did not your fathers thus.** Through Ezekiel God said to Judah, "Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. . . Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord" (Ezekiel 22:26,31). In a very stern rebuke, Nehemiah let the nobles know they had chosen the same path of destruction.

13:19-22. When the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath. The Jewish reckoning of time was from evening to evening (Genesis 1:3-5; Exodus 27:21). Thus the sabbath was in effect from sunset to sunset (Mark 15:42,43; Luke 23:50-54). To stop the illegal sabbath traffic, Nehemiah required the gates of the city to be closed during the celebration of the sabbath. He further insured compliance by stationing some of his servants at the gates. **So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.** No longer able to enter Jerusalem on the sabbath, the merchants set up shops outside the walls to continue their traffic. **Then I testified against them.** The Hebrew *ud*, here translated *testified*, indicates a

strong protest, or a solemn warning. **If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you.** If their practices were not discontinued immediately, they could face arrest, imprisonment, and maybe even the physical wrath of Nehemiah as well (vv. 8,25). **From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath.** The threat bore fruit; the sanctity of the sabbath was preserved. **And I commanded the Levites.** As a temporary arrangement, Nehemiah had stationed his own servants as guards at the gates (v. 19). Now the Levites were required to establish a more permanent system to enforce sabbath observance. **Remember me, O my God.** When the challenge to the sanctity of the sabbath day had been met, Nehemiah's often repeated prayer once more escaped his lips. He might well face the daily wrath of the displaced merchants and the busy shoppers, but it mattered not as long as God remembered his deeds and granted him His mercies.

PROBLEMS OF MIXED MARRIAGES

13:23-31

13:23-31. In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: (v:24) And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. (v:25) And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. (v:26) Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. (v:27) Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? (v:28) And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me. (v:29) Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. (v:30) Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; (v:31) And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

13:23-25. In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab. For a discussion of this particular problem, see our notes at the beginning of this chapter. **And**

their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod. In such mixed marriage relationships, families often consisted of both Jewish and foreign mothers. Each mother would naturally communicate to her children in her native tongue, resulting in the offspring speaking some in one language and some in another. It was a Babel of confusion, and a threat to the pure lineage of Abraham. **And I contended with them.** This is the same strong reaction as that voiced in vv. 11,17. **And cursed them.** The basic idea of the word curse (*qalal*) is that of slightness—a lowered or dishonorable position. When Hagar conceived, Sarah was *despised* (lowered in esteem) by her handmaid (Genesis 16:4,5). Nineveh, steeped in idolatry, had become *vile* in God's sight (Nahum 1:14). Nehemiah's curse would have those contracting forbidden marriage alliances to become contemptible in the sight of their peers. **And smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair.** Nehemiah, outraged by continual covenant violations, physically attacked the Jews guilty of inter-marriages with the heathen nations. **And made them swear by God.** God's people should be of such sterling character and reputation that a simple yes or no would be a sufficient act of confirmation (Matthew 5:33-37). This had not been the case with the exiles. In fact, even oaths seem to have been lightly regarded (10:28-30), or at least made, as they were in Jesus' day, with enough built-in loopholes to make them of little value (Matthew 5:16-22). Nonetheless, the gravity of this situation demanded every precaution possible to assure obedience to the covenant law; so Nehemiah again demanded an oath of allegiance.

13:26,27. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Of this incident the Bible says, "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:1-4). **Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil.** It would appear from this verse that, not only were these foreign marriages tolerated by the Jewish nobles, they were encouraged. Perhaps they looked on them as a means of assuring a peaceful coexistence. But there can be no peace in compromise.

13:28,29. And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite. Here is fur-

ther evidence that marriages were being contracted to ally the Jews to the nations about them. This had led to Solomon's downfall; it was certainly no less dangerous in the house of Eliashib. **Therefore I chased him from me.** Such alliances had defiled the priesthood, the covenant they were called to maintain, and those continually employed in the service of God. Having so polluted their religion at its very head, the poison would soon saturate even the remotest recesses of the restoration movement. With such a threat hanging over the exiles, Nehemiah saw but one course of action—he drove Eliashib's son-in-law from his presence.

13:30-31. Thus cleansed I them from all strangers. In his final statement, Nehemiah sums up his more than twelve years of sacrificial labor among the returned exiles. He separated the Holy Seed from strangers, set in order the positions of service connected with the temple, and arranged for the necessary funds to carry on the great work of being the People of God. **Remember me, O my God, for good.** Nehemiah often repeated this prayer as he labored in God's kingdom: how appropriate that he made it the grand finale of his inspired record! And even though the dust of the ground has now claimed his earthly remains for nearly twenty-five centuries, the faithful have not forgotten. Neither has God: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Hebrews 6:10).

Outline Of The Book Of Esther

I. INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL

- A. Time period covered in Esther: approximately nine years, 483-474 B.C.
- B. Author: uncertain, but perhaps written by Ezra.
- C. Time of composition: probably between 450 and 400 B.C.
- D. Theme of the book: The deliverance of the Jews from an extermination plot by Haman, and the establishment of the Feast of Purim in commemoration of the event.

II. SELECTION OF THE JEWISH MAID ESTHER AS QUEEN (1:1-2:20)

- A. King Ahasuerus' royal celebration (1:1-9).
- B. Vashti's refusal to appear at the king's banquet (1:10-12).
- C. Vashti's is stripped of her queenship (1:13-22).
- D. The king becomes depressed over the loss of Vashti's company, and a search is made to find a new queen (2:1-4).
- E. An introduction to Mordecai and Esther (2:5-7).
- F. Esther and the other virgins selected are prepared for their night with the king (2:8-14).
- G. Esther selected as the new queen (2:15-20).

III. HAMAN'S PLOT TO DESTROY THE JEWISH RACE BECAUSE OF HIS GRUDGE AGAINST MORDECAI (2:21-3:15)

- A. Mordecai thwarts the would-be assassins plot against Ahasuerus (2:21-23).
- B. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman (3:1,2).
- C. Haman formulates a conspiracy against the whole Jewish race for Mordecai's insubordination (3:3-15).
 - 1. The king's servants point out to Haman Mordecai's refusal to bow or pay homage (3:3,4).

2. In anger he decides to take vengeance on the whole Jewish race, and lots are cast to determine the time for their destruction (3:5-7).
3. Haman obtains a decree from Ahasuerus to carry out his plan (3:8-15).

IV. MORDECAI AND ESTHER TAKE STEPS TO SAVE THEIR PEOPLE (4:1-7:10)

- A. Mordecai informs Esther of the decree of death (4:1-9).
- B. With reluctance, Esther agrees to petition the king on behalf of her people (4:10-17).
- C. Esther prepares a banquet for King Ahasuerus and Haman, but refuses to make known her petition to her husband, extending only an invitation to a second banquet the following day (5:1-8).
- D. Haman's evil plot results in his execution (5:9-7:10).
 1. Mordecai's impertinence further agitates Haman, leading him to consult with his wife and friends about the situation (5:9-13).
 2. They advise him to have Mordecai hanged (5:14).
 3. King Ahasuerus has a restless night, and spends it reading the chronicles of his kingdom. He learns that Mordecai had never been rewarded for saving his life (6:1-3).
 4. Haman is selected to bestow public honors on Mordecai (6:4-11).
 5. Having suffered this further indignity, his wife and counsellors predict that he will be unable to prevail against this Jew (6:12-14).
 6. At the second banquet Esther exposes Haman's evil plot against her people (7:1-6).
 7. Haman is hanged on his own gallows (7:7-10).

V. THE JEWS GAIN A GREAT VICTORY OVER THEIR ENEMIES, AND SET A TIME FOR ITS ANNUAL CELEBRATION (8:1-9:32)

- A. Queen Esther urges her husband to reverse the decree of death (8:1-6).
- B. A second decree is issued, allowing the Jews the right to defend themselves against any attack made under the former decree (8:7-14).
- C. The Jews celebrate the potential victory afforded them through the new decree attained by Queen Esther (8:15-17).

- D. On the appointed day of slaughter, they gain a widespread victory over the Persians (9:1-11).
- E. A second day of slaughter in Shushan is granted under the terms of the decree, and Haman's ten sons are publicly hanged (9:12-16).
- F. The people celebrate their victory over their enemies (9:17-19).

Introduction To The Book Of Esther

KINGDOM OF THE MEDES AND PERSIANS

Land of the Medes and Persians. Isaiah said, "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them [Babylon], which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it" (Isaiah 13:17). The word Isaiah used for Medes is *Madai*, the same term used with reference to the son of Japheth mentioned in connection with God's division of the Gentile nations (Genesis 10:2). And while there is no concrete evidence linking the two together, it seems but logical to presume that such is the case, especially since this list apparently catalogued only those nations whose destinies played an important role in the history of God's Holy Nation. The land of Media spread out over a vast territory of nearly one hundred and fifty thousand square miles, and soon after Isaiah's time became an ever-growing threat to the nations about them. Persia was a lesser area, consisting of something over one hundred thousand square miles, and was located in the area of the Persian Gulf, the area of our modern Iran. In a vision, the prophet Daniel saw these two powers combine to dominate the eastern world: "Then I lifted up mine eyes, and saw, and, behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up fast. I saw the ram pushing westward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great. . . The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia" (Daniel 8:3,4,20). At its zenith the Medo-Persian Empire covered an area estimated at up to two million square miles.

Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.). In her developing years, Media had teamed up with the Babylonians to destroy Assyria, but from that time had grown into an ever increasing threat to her Babylonian and Persian neighbors. Her encroachment on Persian territory caused Cyrus the Great to lead Persia in a revolt against the Medes. Nabonidus, the king of Babylon, encouraged Cyrus and entered into a treaty with him. It was a final mistake for the Babylonians; for Cyrus

defeated the Medes, and judiciously joined the two kingdoms together, ruling them as independent but subject states. As his empire strengthened and spread, he turned his attention to Babylonia, swiftly cutting her armies to pieces, and weakening her to the extent that by 539 his general marched into Babylon and took it without a fight (Daniel 5:25-31). Belshazzar, sitting on the throne of Babylon in the absence of Nabonidus, was killed, and the great Medo-Persian Empire became mistress of the world.

Cyrus became well known because of his leniency toward subject people and their religions, but especially so for his beneficence with reference to the Jews of the *Diaspora*. Under him they were permitted to return to Palestine and begin the work of restoration detailed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. However, comparatively small numbers of the dispersed chose to return. They had enjoyed considerable religious freedom, protection of the state, and varying degrees of prosperity in the lands of their captors; and even though they still mourned the loss of the Holy City, weighed against their present life status, it simply did not offer them enough incentive to go home.

Cambyses and Pseudo-Smerdis, 530-521 B.C. While fighting in Central Asia in 530 B.C., Cyrus lost his life, and his son Cambyses inherited his throne. Cambyses was jealous of his brother Smerdis, had him immediately put to death, and concealed the fact from all but his most loyal subjects. Feeling that his throne was well-secured, he turned his attention to the subjection of Egypt, a project his father had been unable to satisfactorily accomplish. His armies were successful, and Psammetichus was brought to his knees. Ethiopia was next in his path; but it proved to be too much for his weary soldiers and their over-extended supply lines. Cambyses withdrew his armies and headed home. But upon his arrival in Syria, he learned that a Magian priest named Gaumata, pretending to be Smerdis had rebelled and usurped his throne. Rather than go home and confront the rebellion, evidence indicates that he chose instead to end his own life. Darius I shed the blood of Pseudo-Smerdis just seven months later.

Cambyses did not treat his subjects kindly. In fact, the Persians called him a master, a harsh and reckless despot; by contrast they had considered Cyrus a father. This same harshness was manifested by both Cambyses and Pseudo-Smerdis toward Zerubbabel in his efforts to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 4:6-23).

Darius I, 521-486 B.C. Darius was a direct descendent of Cyrus the Great, and is considered one of the greatest of the Persian rulers. He extended the boundaries of his kingdom eastward as far as the Indus River, and led his armies westward in battles against the Ionians, bringing a number of the Greek Islands under his domain. The

Greeks, however, eventually stopped the spread of his empire in the Battle of Marathon, 490 B.C. Darius devoted much of his energies, especially in his later years, to establishing a far more efficient system of government for his vast domain. He divided the Persian Empire into twenty satrapies (several provinces combined as one government), devised an efficient postal system, and equalized tax burdens. One of Darius' immortal gifts to posterity was his great rock-inscription at Behistun, dated at about 515 B.C. This lists the achievements of his earlier years, and thus gives us an accurate insight into many facets of the Medo-Persian Empire.

Darius reversed the decision of his predecessors against the temple project, and allowed Zerubbabel the right to resume his work on it. He completed it in the sixth year of that monarch, 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

Xerxes I, 486-465 B.C. Twelve years before his death Darius appointed his son Xerxes as viceroy of Babylon, and at his death he succeeded him to the throne of Persia. This is the Ahasuerus of Esther 1:1, and it is at this point that the history of that book begins.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Five Old Testament books came to be designated by the Jews as *Megilloth*—Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. This term signifies rolls or volumes, and these books were so designated because they were prepared as separate rolls for use in special Jewish festival celebrations. Of these special rolls, the Book of Esther was considered the greatest. Maimonides (1135-1204 B.C.) ranked it next to the Pentateuch in importance, and asserted that when all the rest of the Old Testament canon passed away, the law and Esther would remain. Some of the Talmudic rabbis even considered it above the law.

But many others have not been so kind in their appraisal and treatment of Esther. Martin Luther was a typical representative of this class. He declared himself very hostile to the book, and wished it had never been written. This present author, however, considers it, along with the other sixty-five books of the Bible, as a divine production, given by the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16,17); and it shall be treated accordingly throughout this commentary.

TIME PERIOD

The basic starting point of the book of Esther would go all the way back to the deportation of Jehoiachin, 598 B.C., for it was at this time that the ancestors of Mordecai, Esther's foster father, were carried to Babylon (Esther 2:5,6). But the story proper spans about nine years. It opens with the feast of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), king of Persia, in the third year of his reign, 483 B.C. (1:1-3), and ends with the establish-

ment of the Feast of Purim in the twelfth year, 474 B.C. (3:7; 8:12; 9:1). Chronologically, this would place the events of the book of Esther in the long period between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra.

CONTENT

The book narrates a plot by Haman the Agagite to eradicate the entire Jewish population from the Persian Empire because of his hatred for a Jew named Mordecai (3:6,13). To accomplish his evil intent, he obtained an irrevocable decree from King Xerxes "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day" (3:8,9,13). But Esther, a beautiful cousin reared by Mordecai as his own daughter, had become Xerxes' queen in the place of the deposed Vashti (2:16,17). Through the influence and persuasion of Mordecai, she risked her life to apprise her husband of the ramifications of Haman's plan (4:16). Being thus exposed, Haman was hung on a gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:9,10). Xerxes, although he could not reverse his decree, immediately issued another order which allowed the Jews to defend themselves against their exterminators. The result was a great victory for the Jewish exiles (9:1-11). In commemoration of their momentous deliverance on the thirteen and fourteenth days of Adar, 474 B.C., the Feast of Purim was instituted (9:17-19), and made a national celebration: "The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed" (9:27,28).

A unique feature of the book of Esther among Bible books is that it makes no reference to matters religious. It mentions neither law, covenant, sacrifice, temple, nor Jerusalem. In fact, God Himself is not even mentioned in the book. In striking contrast to this, the one hundred and sixty seven verses contained in our versions (based on the Masoretic Text) mention the king of Persia one hundred and ninety times. Nonetheless it is a revelation of God, and the hand of God can often be seen as it moves in the shadowy background of the events portrayed.

AUTHOR

Who committed to writing the events of Esther? This question has never been satisfactorily answered. It is said of Mordecai, "And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that

were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly" (9:20,21). This affords a presumption for Mordecai as its author, but nothing more; for this simply states that he by means of letters to the various Persian provinces spread the news to the Jews of the Diaspora about the legality and dates of the Feast of Purim. (Chapter 10 would present additional problems for this view, unless, of course, it is considered as an appendix added by a later scribe.) Some have ascribed the book to Ezra, others to the high priest Joiakim, and still others to the men of the great synagogue. The evidence for none of these is conclusive. All that can be definitely said is that it was someone well acquainted with all the facts, and who had an intimate knowledge of the Persian court. With all evidence duly considered, we lean heavily toward Ezra as the author of the book of Esther.

DATE OF COMPOSITION

At what period of time was the book of Esther composed? In his introduction the author saw the necessity of identifying the Persian monarch during whose reign the events of the book took place (1:1). This argues for a date sometime after Xerxes' death in 465 B.C. Also the reader is referred to the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia to learn of the greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3). This would not have been necessary had the recipients of this book been contemporary with the events narrated. From all facts considered, it would appear that the most likely date would fall somewhere between 450 and 400 B.C.

Commentary On Esther

CHAPTER 1

AHASUERUS' ROYAL CELEBRATION

1:1-9

1:1-9. Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:) (v.2) That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, (v.3) In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: (v.4) When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days. (v.5) And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace; (v.6) Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble. (v.7) And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. (v.8) And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. (v.9) Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

1:1. Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus. Excavations from Persepolis have demonstrated that the name, or rather the title, Ahasuerus was used by at least three or four Persian kings. Here, beyond a reasonable doubt, it has reference to Xerxes II, 486-465, the

oldest son of Darius I (Hystaspis). Darius had successfully expanded the borders of his kingdom during the greater part of his reign, but suffered a number of reverses in his latter years. The Greeks defeated him in the Battle of Marathon; and Egypt, taking advantage of Persia's precarious situation, proclaimed her independence. When Darius died, Xerxes was proclaimed king in his father's stead, and one of his first acts was to whip Egypt back into subjection. Having accomplished this, he assembled his armies, and in the third year of his reign, set out to avenge his father's defeat against the Greeks. He was no more successful against the Greeks than his father had been, and by his seventh year had returned to Shushan to lick his wounds and console himself with his harem, a fact which we will find helpful in later notes. **This is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia.** One need only to consult a map of the time to see the broad expanse of the Medo-Persian Empire, variously estimated from six hundred thousand to two million square miles. In one of his inscriptions discovered at Persepolis, Xerxes described himself as "the great king, the king of kings, the king of the land of many tribes, the king of this wide, far-stretching earth." It was not a highly exaggerated claim. **Over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces.** Herodotus mentioned that under Darius the empire was divided into twenty satraps; the author of Esther records a division of one hundred and twenty seven provinces. No doubt these provinces designate further governmental subdivisions into which the empire had been divided during the time of Xerxes.

1:2-4. That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom. The writer was looking back to a period of time in the past, indicating that a number of years had elapsed since the events about to be narrated had transpired. How long, we do not know; but at least a time of sufficient length to merit an explanation of which Persian king was seated on the throne when the events transpired. **Which was in Shushan the Palace.** Shushan (Greek Susa) was originally the capital of the Bible Elam. It was probably Darius who chose it, rather than Babylon, as the capital of the whole empire, built his beautiful palace there, and made it the chief residence of the Persian kings. **In the third year of his reign.** As previously noted, it was at this time that Xerxes was celebrating his victory over Egypt, and was formulating his strategy to invade Greece. This assembly was probably called for the purpose of unveiling his plans so to do. **He made a feast unto all his princes and servants.** The Hebrew *misheteh* (feast) is from a root word which means to drink. It may thus be defined as a feast, a drink, or a drinking bout. As a matter of fact, based on this word, the Jews in later times were encouraged at the

Feast of Purim to drink until they could not distinguish between “Blessed be Mordecai,” and “Cursed be Haman.” So Ahasuerus’ feast for his princes and servants involved the free flow of wine (v. 7), proved so by both the meaning of the word and its context, and would set the stage for some rash decisions to follow. **The power of Persia and Media.** A display of military might that should convince his nobles of his ability to successfully execute any expedition on which he might choose to embark. Some estimate the number of Persian soldiers sent to invade Greece as high as two million. **When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom.** The beautiful palace itself, the fabulous furnishings and decorations, the diverse serving vessels (vv. 6,7)—all attested the wealth of the Persian monarch. But beyond this, Ahasuerus probably exposed his guests to the wealth from subject nations that constantly flowed into his coffers. This dazzling display of wealth and military strength continued for six months, and must have left men of ordinary means awe-struck.

1:5-8. And when these days were expired. That is, the one hundred and eighty days that had transpired in feasting the princes and nobles of the kingdom. **The king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace.** The first and longer part of the feast had been for the purpose of entertaining the princes and nobles of his one hundred and twenty seven provinces, and no doubt informing and preparing them for his invasion of Greece. Now for the final seven days of the feast, all those assembled in the Shushan palace area, or perhaps even the city at large, were included. **Where were white, green, and blue, hangings.** A visit to the Museum in Cairo, Egypt cannot but impress one of the wealth and extravagance of ancient kings. It was to this kind of dazzling display that the people of Shushan were now exposed—expensive draperies, marbled pillars, even reclining couches of gold and silver. **And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another.).** Cyrus on one occasion feasted his entire army. Some authorities speak of Persian monarchs entertaining up to fifteen thousand people in this way. How many were present for Ahasuerus’ feast we have no way of knowing; but the number must have been in the thousands. Yet, each received his wine in a golden vessel that was unique—another display of “the riches of his glorious kingdom” (v. 4). **And royal wine in abundance.** (For comments on this see the notes on v. 3.) **And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel.** One may feel compelled to drink on such occasions for various reasons: (1) legal enactments; (2) custom; (3) peer pressure; (4) fear of ridicule. It is possible that the king had legislative guidelines for drinking at such festive occasions; but it appears more likely that overly zealous puppets of the king normally enforced drinking in conformity with the king’s exam-

ple. But by the king's order, on this occasion no undue pressure was to be exerted by the officers in charge; each one determined his own amount of consumption without compulsion or restraint.

1:9. Also Vashti the queen. This is our first introduction to Vashti the Queen. The absence of her name in historical records, and the statement of Herodotus that Amestris was Xerxes' queen during this period of time, have caused some to deny the credibility of the account before us. But this should cause the dedicated Bible student no concern at all. It is simply a matter of choice: do we believe the uninspired historians, admittedly in gross error on so many counts, or do we believe the inspired Word of God? With us it is a foregone conclusion. After all, names of many Bible characters, once believed fictitious, now occupy their proper place in historical archives, thanks to further study and exploration. We expect nothing less with Vashti. **Made a feast for the women in the royal house.** Some commentators believe it was against Persian custom for the king's wife (or wives) to be present during his banquets; this may not altogether be the case (see Nehemiah 2:1,6; Esther 5:3,6; 7:1,2). However, she and her companions would certainly have been present only by the king's invitation (4:11). This had not been the case, so the queen and her guests were banqueting separately in the royal house.

VASHTI'S REFUSAL TO APPEAR
AT THE KING'S BANQUET
1:10-12

1:10-12. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served the presence of Ahasuerus the king, (v.11) To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. (v.12) But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

1:10-12. On the seventh day. The last day of Vashti's banquet. **When the heart of the king was merry with wine.** The king, if not drunk, had certainly received enough wine to dull his sense of decorum and propriety. **The seven chamberlains.** Officials of the king, and in this case eunuchs; for only such were entrusted with the king's harem. **To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty.** For six months Ahasuerus had paraded the magnificence of his wealth and

glory before his subjects. Now, to climax his display of grandeur, he proposed to exhibit what was perhaps the most coveted possession of all—his beautiful queen. **But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains.** Why the queen refused the king's request has become a matter of much speculation. Since she was told only to put on her royal crown, many Jewish writers speculated that Ahasuerus wanted her to appear naked before the large assembly of men. Others have thought that her appearance at the banquet would have violated the womanly modesty of a Persian. The Bible writer simply does not tell us why. It seems most likely to us that it was the request of an intoxicated husband refused by a wife who also had tarried too long at the wine. **Therefore was the king very wroth.** For the queen to disobey her husband was presumptuous; for her to do so in the presence of the provincial dignitaries and the assembled masses was sheer folly. Such an act could have repercussions far beyond the palace walls. It is hardly reason for wonder that the king was very wroth. **And his anger burned in him.** Anger is from the Hebrew *chemah*. It describes a heated oven (Hosea 7:6), the fury of a whirlwind (Jeremiah 23:19; 30:23), or the venom of a serpent (Psalm 58:5). It means here a burning anger that drove the king into a rage.

THE DEPOSITION OF QUEEN VASHTI 1:13-22

1:13-22. Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: (v.14) And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) (v.15) What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to the law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? (v.16) And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. (v.17) For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. (v.18) Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. (v.19) If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him,

and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. (v.20) And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. (v.21) And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: (v.22) For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

1:13-15. Then the king said to the wise men. The word translated wise men (*chakam*) describes men skillful in various kinds of technical work (Exodus 35:10,11; Jeremiah 10:9), those wise in the affairs of state (1 Kings 5:7), or magicians and astrologers (Genesis 41:8). Here, certainly, they are the king's top rank and most trusted personal advisers. Though the king's command for Vashti to appear at the feast may have been prompted somewhat by inebriety, yet disposition of the matter concerning the queen's disobedience followed customary court procedure—to obtain and follow the best advice available. **What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law?** The queen's disobedience was a personal affront to Ahasuerus, and the proper punishment had to be forthcoming. But he seems here to have another concern: to treat the matter in accordance with the law, rather than on the basis of his own personal whim. For whether queen or peasant, disobedience to the king was a serious offence.

1:16-18. And Memucan answered before the king and the princes. While often criticized by commentators, the reasoning of the king's counsellors nonetheless reflects a great deal of wisdom: those in positions of authority and leadership exert tremendous influence by their examples. Need we be reminded of Jeroboam or Baasha who made Israel to sin? (1 Kings 14:16; 16:13). Or what about Jezebel, that synonym of all ungodliness and immorality? (Revelation 2:20), who manipulated her weak husband, and led most of the Holy Nation into Baal worship? (1 Kings 16:31; 21:25; 2 Kings 9:22). When a queen or a princess in England, or our first lady in the United States, appears in a new gown, a new trend in fashion is set; and cash registers all over the land reflect the power of example in high places. Elders of the Lord's church are to be men of exemplary character (1 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:4-7; 1 Peter 5:3); evangelists are to be examples of the believers (1 Timothy 4:12); every Christian is to let the light of his good works shine before men (Matthew 5:16). The reason? the power

exerted through influence—"A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Corinthians 5:6). **Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only.** As the king would lift his wine cup to his lips, so would his loyal subjects; as the queen would lift her voice in rebellion to her husband, so would her many admirers. Her act would have ramifications far beyond the palace wall.

1:19,20. If it please the king. The wise men had reached a decision: Vashti was to be deposed. Their plan called for strict and decisive action on the part of the king: (1) Issue an unalterable decree forever barring Vashti from his presence, and stripping her of all connubial rights; (2) give her royal estate to another; and (3) publish throughout the kingdom a decree requiring wives to honor their husbands by submission.

1:21,22. And the saying pleased the king and the princes. Ahasuerus approved and adopted the plan, and took immediate steps to implement it. **For he sent letters into all the king's provinces.** We have mentioned previously the very efficient postal system of the Persian Empire. It was by this means that the decree was published. **To every people after their language.** With many languages spoken in the vast empire, careful attention was given to see that each province received the decree in its own native tongue. **That every man should bear rule in his own house.** The rebellion of wives against the authority of their husband would not be tolerated. Their subjection was now made a matter of law.

CHAPTER 2

THE KING'S DEPRESSION OVER VASHTI

2:1-4

2:1-4. After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. (v.2) Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king; (v.3) And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification to be given them: (v.4) And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

2:1. After these things. That is, after the decree that led to the deposition of Queen Vashti. But it was a considerable length of time thereafter; for the decree was issued in the third year of his reign, 483 B.C. (1:3); after one year of beautification rites, Esther was selected as queen in the seventh year (2:16); so the time here mentioned is the sixth year of Ahasuerus, 479 B.C. **when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased.** Ahasuerus had just experienced a very humiliating defeat at the hands of the Greek army. Having thus suffered, historians tell us that he had returned to his palace at Shushan to console himself with the pleasure of his harem. **He remembered Vashti.** War had occupied his mind in the intervening years since he had deposed Vashti, but with more leisure time he felt the impact of her absence.

2:2-4. Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him. This was probably the same counsellors who had advised Ahasuerus to depose the queen. Therefore it was imperative that they quickly devise a plan to relieve the king's memory of his beautiful Vashti; otherwise, their positions, or even their heads, might be in jeopardy. **Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king.** Ancient kings often had

large harems. King Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Ahasuerus had so many women at his disposal that unless he called one specifically by name, she never entered his conjugal chambers but once (2:14). Woman by nature was created a being of subjection, being placed under the loving care and protection of her husband (1 Corinthians 11:3,9-12; Ephesians 5:23; 1 Timothy 2:11-13); but sin made her a virtual slave (Genesis 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:11-14). So women in almost every country of the world, and since time immemorial, have been subjected to the worst of indignities. The Athenians kept women in private chambers, guarded by dogs, and considered them to be fickle and contentious—nature's greatest misfits. Under Roman dominion, married females were the absolute property of their husbands. A Jewish writer said women were greedy, inquisitive, lazy, vain, and frivolous. Still another reminded us that they had received nine-tenths of the empty-headedness that ever came upon the world. But perhaps the most demeaning practice toward women is that of polygamy or a multi-mate system, reducing God's crowning work of creation to mere objects of physical use and abuse. While God tolerated this and other such practices due to the hardness of men's hearts (Matthew 19:3-9), yet He now demands absolute repentance of such ignorance (Acts 17:30,31; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:1-4). We must keep this in mind as we study the sordid suggestion of the king's counsellors. **And let the king appoint the officers in all the provinces of his kingdom.** Each province of the empire was to be canvassed for young virgins, and local officials would be in charge of their selection and delivery to the palace at Shushan. **And let their things for purification be given them.** The words for purification, *Tamruq* (vv. 2,9) and *Maruq* (v. 12), are both from the verb *marak* and mean to scour or polish. They have reference here to the body being rubbed with various types of ointments to produce a smooth, delicate skin (see further notes on v. 12). **And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti.** After a year's beauty treatment and training (v. 12), the king would select the one best suited for his pleasure, and for the queenship.

INTRODUCTION TO MORDECAI AND ESTHER

2:5-7

2:5-7. Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; (v.6) Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. (v.7) And he brought up Hadassah,

that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

2:5-7. Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew. The term Jew primarily designated one of Judean descent, springing from either of the two tribes that inhabited the Judean hill country as opposed to the ten tribes farther to the north (2 Kings 16:6). Often it was applied as a general term to the Holy People in contrast to the rest of the world (Esther 3:6; Acts 2:5; Galatians 3:26-29), but it never fully lost its original import (John 4:9,22). **Whose name was Mordecai.** It is here that we are first introduced to the real hero of the book of Esther—Mordecai. His great grandfather Kish, a Benjamite, had been deported to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar along with King Jehoniah (Jehoiachin), 498 B.C. (see 2:4,5, NKJV). By the time the story of the book of Esther began, Mordecai was a servant in the king's palace at Shushan (2:5), and sat in an exalted position in the king's gate (2:24). Shortly thereafter, the king bestowed special honors on him for services rendered (6:1-11). Once his arch enemy Haman had been executed, Mordecai was given Haman's signet ring (a symbol of the king's authority); and probably was made second in command in the kingdom (3:1,2; 8:1,2; 10:2). With the passing of time, Jewish tradition has added considerably to his greatness. **And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter.** Hadassah was Esther's Hebrew name; but, unlike Daniel (Daniel 1:5,6), her Persian name became dominant. She was evidently very young when death claimed both her parents, and Mordecai had reared her as his own daughter. **And the maid was fair and beautiful.** Esther was a perfectly formed woman, beautiful both in appearance and personality.

PREPARATION OF THE PROSPECTIVE QUEENS

2:8-14

2:8-14. So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. (v.9) And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women. (v.10) Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

(v.11) And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

(v.12) Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;) (v.13) Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house. (v.14) In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

2:8,9. So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard. The message of the king's wish for the fair virgins of the land to be selected from the provinces of his kingdom has been delivered, and a large number has been selected and brought to the Palace at Shushan and placed in the custody of Hegai. **That Esther was brought also unto the king's house.** Whether Mordecai had anything to do with Esther's selection, we are not told. But Mordecai was a public figure, and his beautiful adopted daughter could not have gone unnoticed in the palace. So her selection by the appointed officers is a matter of no surprise. **To the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.** To this point, Esther shared a common lot with all the other virgins selected—herded together as the king's possession to compete for the coveted prize, Vashti's throne. But all this was soon to change. **And the maiden pleased him.** Esther's charm had quickly won Hegai's heart, and he showed favoritism toward her from the very beginning. **And he speedily gave her her things for purification.** Hegai's position allowed his first hand knowledge of what the king might expect in his new queen: and he saw immediately these qualities in Esther. It would be both to her advantage as well as his own for him to give priority to her beauty treatment, and thus ingratiate himself to her. **With such things as belonged to her.** Either personal items of her own she had been allowed to bring with her, or maybe, as some translators understand it, an allowance from the palace for further necessities needed during her period of purification. **And seven maidens, which were meet to be given to her.** Seven choice slave girls were placed at her disposal. **And he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women** Hegai's favoritism toward Esther continued in the selection of her dwelling quarters.

2:10,11. Esther had not shown her people nor her kindred. Ahasuerus seemed not to be concerned about the nationality of the virgins he selected, for he had them chosen from all the provinces of the empire. But for some reason, Mordecai thought it best that Esther not reveal her true roots. **And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house.** Due to his high position in government, it might easily be assumed that Mordecai was a eunuch; thus he would have had more liberty around the house of women than ordinary men. At any rate, he was able to keep a daily vigil in the women's court to inquire of his niece's welfare, either personally, or from those who had access to her.

2:12-14. Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus. What a degrading abuse of womahood! Nonetheless, it was the custom of the time and the right of the king. **After that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women.** Each maid had her time with the king only after she had completed her twelve months beauty treatment and training. The time probably also served to demonstrate the discretion of the woman called so that a preconceived child could not be foistered off as an heir of the king. **To wit, six months with oil of myrrh.** Myrrh was a bitter but sweet smelling tree gum (Song of Solomon 5:5,13). It was used to anoint and sanctify the sanctuary and other holy objects (Exodus 30:22-29). It was also used to give garments a fresh smell (Psalm 45:8), but especially as a perfume (Song of Solomon 3:6; Proverbs 7:17). In the present context it seems to have been used basically as an unguent to cleanse and soften the skin. **And six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of women.** Various types of perfumes and other such cosmetics used for beautification (see also notes on 2:3). **Then thus came every maiden unto the king.** Once the year of refinement was completed, each woman was in turn invited to the king's conjugal bed, having first been allowed to select whatever she desired to make her a more appealing partner. **In the evening she went.** Each woman called spent only one night with Ahasuerus. **And on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women.** The sexual union established the woman as the king's legal concubine. She was then quartered in the permanent house of the concubines, but appeared no more in the presence of the king unless specifically called by name.

ESTHER SELECTED AS THE NEW QUEEN 2:15-20

2:15-20. Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai

the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. (v.16) So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. (v.17) And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. (v.18) Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king. (v.19) And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. (v.20) Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

2:15-18. Now when the turn of Esther. How many maidens had been to the king before Esther we have no way of knowing; but past preferences toward Esther would indicate that Hegai picked the most opportune time for his choice lady. **She required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed.** Hegai had prepared Esther for a full year for this moment; she now willingly entrusted his judgment with her final details of preparation. **So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month.** Vashti was deposed in the third year of Ahasuerus' reign (1:3). It was now the seventh year, thus dating the reign of Queen Esther as beginning in 479 B.C. **And the king loved Esther above all the women.** Esther was an immediate favorite of the king, but one would certainly question the king's concept of marital love. God from the beginning decreed, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). The apostle Paul added, "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself" (Ephesians 5:28). Such love, respect, and joy in the marriage relationship, this polygamous king could never know. **So that he set the royal crown upon her head.** Esther won instant favor with Ahasuerus, and it would appear that the search for a queen ended immediately: Vashti's crown was placed on the head of the Jewish maiden. **Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast.** The vacuum in the king's life and the vacancy on the throne had been filled. It was an occasion calling for pomp and festivity. **And he made a release to the provinces.** For their part in the search for a queen, the provinces received a release. Some view this as a release from tribute, but this is highly unlikely since all the provinces were involved in the search.

Probably it just means a release from the regular duties of life—an extended holiday—with elaborate gifts presented to the officials who had successfully executed their search.

2:19,20. And when the virgins were gathered together the second time. Since they were referred to as virgins rather than concubines, as were those who had visited the king (see v. 14), this second gathering of the virgins presents some difficulty of understanding. It could have been still another search for fair ladies for the king. However, it seems most likely that it was an occasion to honor those remaining maidens who had been gathered from the provinces, but never made it to the king's bed before the trials were ended by Esther's visit. **Then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.** The king's gate was probably a fortified entrance to the king's palace. Orientals used these areas as courts of justice or places of leisure for the wealthy and influential. It probably indicates that Mordecai was some sort of an official of Ahasuerus, and certainly one who had come under the personal observation of the king (6:10). **Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people.** Although the Persians were lenient toward those of other nationalities and religions, it would only be human nature to show preference to a native of Shushan over foreigners. For this, and perhaps other reasons, Esther had not made known the fact that she was a Jewess. **As Mordecai had charged her.** It was at Mordecai's strong request that Esther's identity was kept secret. There is so much to be said for this woman: she was beautiful, she had a winning personality, she was surrounded with luxury—she was the queen. But above all she was an obedient daughter who did not allow her splendid surroundings and attainments to cause her to forget the good Mordecai who took her as his own when she had nothing or no one.

THE WOULD-BE ASSASSINS' PLOT EXPOSED 2:21-23

2:21-23. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. (v.22) And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name. (v.23) And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

2:21-23. In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate. Sometime after Esther was selected as queen, Bigthan and Teresh plotted to assassinate Ahasuerus. Somehow Mordecai became privy to

the matter and told Esther, who in turn warned her husband. The charge was investigated and indeed found to be factual, and the two conspirators were hanged. This act of Mordecai was duly noted in the king's daily records, but strangely no reward or recognition was given him at the time for saving the king's life—a fact that will prove of supreme significance later in the book. As we pointed out earlier, God is not mentioned in the book of Esther. Yet here, as he does throughout his narrative, the author clearly depicts for the discerning reader the hand of God moving in the background, and controlling the minds and actions of men.

CHAPTER 3

MORDECAI REFUSES TO BOW TO HAMAN

3:1-7

3:1-7. After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. (v.2) And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. (v.3) Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? (v.4) Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew. (v.5) And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. (v.6) And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

(v:7) In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.

3:1,2. After these things. How long after the events just mentioned, we are not told, but probably in or close to the twelfth year of the king's reign (v.12). **Did King Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite.** Haman was an Amalekite, here called an Agagite after one of the former kings of Amalek (Number 24:7; 1 Samuel 15:8). The Amalekites were a vicious people with no fear of God (Deuteronomy 25:18), and had proven to be perennial enemies of the Holy People (Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 14:40-45; Judges 3:13; 6:3,33). Both Saul and David fought with them (1 Samuel 15:2,3; 27:8),

and they were finally eliminated as a threat to Israel by the Simeonites during the days of Hezekiah (1 Chronicles 4:43). **And advanced him.** Next to the king himself, Haman was exalted to the highest position in the Persian court. **And all the king's servants, that were in the king's court, bowed, and revered Haman.** Bowed is a translation of *kara*. It depicts one with knees bowed in reverence or fear toward a peer (2 Kings 1:13), a person on his knees with head to the ground so as to drink water (Judges 7:5), or a woman bowed together by labor pains (1 Samuel 4:19). So by specific directive from the king himself, all the palace servants were to prostrate themselves in reverence to the haughty Haman. **But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.** It was certainly no violation of Jewish law nor principle to bow before superiors; but for some unstated reason, Mordecai refused to so honor Haman. Most likely the reason is to be found in the fact that Haman was an Agagite, a people long recognized as confirmed enemies of the Holy People (see also notes on v. 1).

3:3-6. Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said to Mordecai. Mordecai made no secret of his revulsion for Haman, nor of his refusal to obey the king's command—the Agagite bore the curse of God (Exodus 17:14-16). Neither would he hide the hatred in his heart by an outward show of reverence. Rather, like Daniel (Daniel 3:13-18), he tenaciously clung to his ingrained convictions. **Why transgresseth thou the king's commandment?** Such contempt for the king and his chief servant demanded an explanation; but despite the servants' daily inquisition, none was forthcoming. His only answer was to inform his querists that he was a Jew. **And they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand.** Dissatisfied with Mordecai's answer, the servants conferred with Haman to see if a Jewish lineage was sufficient cause for Mordecai's refusal to do obeisance to a political figure of Haman's stature. **And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not.** Either Haman had not noticed Mordecai's insubordination (a thing that seems highly unlikely), or else he considered it a matter of little significance until others took note of the fact, and might well assume for themselves the same prerogative. Whatever the case, it was soon to become a passion that would consume him. **And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone.** Haman determined immediately to dispose of Mordecai; but in his extreme anger, he scoffed at the idea of destroying him alone—innocent or guilty, woman or child, stranger or neighbor, he would vent his wrath on the entire Jewish race. No wonder a proud look is an abomination to God (Proverbs 6:16,17); and that “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). But the haughty Haman will learn this truth the hard way.

3:7. In the first month, that is, the month Nisan. This corresponds to our March-April (see the Jewish calendar in our background material at the beginning of the commentary). **In the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus.** Ahasuerus deposed Vashti in his third year, crowned Esther in the seventh, and the events about to be narrated transpired in the twelfth year. So the divine record has taken us through nine years of the reign of Ahasuerus, or to 474 B.C. **They cast Pur, that is, the lot.** The lot was often used as a means to reach a fair and impartial decision (1 Chronicles 25:8; Nehemiah 10:34; 11:1; Psalm 22:8; Proverbs 18:18), or even to place the decision in the hands of God (or gods, as the case may be); and it would appear that God at times recognized this method of approach by His people, and responded accordingly (Proverbs 16:33; Acts 1:26). However it is clear that in this instance, He could have had nothing to do with the matter. **Before Haman from day to day, from month to month.** The wording of this text is very difficult, but it appears that the lot was repeatedly cast in Haman's presence in such manner as to eliminate certain days and months until the lot fell on the appointed time—the twelfth month, the thirteenth day of the month.

HAMAN'S CONSPIRACY TO DESTROY ALL JEWS

3:8-15

3:8-15. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. (v.9) If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. (v.10) And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. (v.11) And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. (v.12). Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. (v.13) And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day,

even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. (v.14) The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day. (v.15) The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

3:8,9. And Haman said unto Ahasuerus. Before he could destroy such a large number of the Jews, Haman had to gain the King's permission. He now set out to do just that. **There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom.** The selection of the Holy People was by specific design and intent to make them different from the rest of the world (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:16-19). The Jews had been carried from their native homeland to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 588 B.C. But even after years of dispersion, they had not lost their distinctiveness. Nor would they until God fulfilled His divine purpose through them (Romans 9:1-5). **And their laws are diverse from all people.** It was a law given from Mount Sinai by God Almighty Himself (Exodus 19:16-20; 24:15-18), perfect and holy in all its precepts (Psalms 18:30; 19:7,8; 119:96; 2 Timothy 3:15), and offered blessings immeasurable to those obeying it (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). In this respect Christians are much like the Jews: they are selected to be a unique and peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9), in the world but not of the world (John 15:19; 17:14; 18:36), and where ever they may sojourn, they are governed by a holy law, diverse in nature from all others, and far exceeding them in excellence (Hebrews 8:6-11; Romans 12:1,2; cf. also Matthew 5:27-48; Romans 12:9-21). **Neither keep they the king's laws.** It is true that the law of God often conflicts with the laws of men (Daniel 3:4-12; Acts 4:19,20). But knowing the beneficence of the Persians toward the religions of others, especially that of the Jews, this claim of Haman would appear to be highly exaggerated, or even totally fabricated. **Therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.** Again, an unsubstantiated claim! The Jews were industrious; and many held exalted positions, even in the courts of the kings. **If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed.** Haman must have been totally void of human emotion—bent on destroying a whole race of people just to avenge his wounded pride against one man. **And I will pay ten thousand talents of silver.** The loss of a whole race of people from his empire would make a considerable reduction in the king's revenues. Haman well knew this, but he was willing to compensate the loss from his own pocket. The sum

offered is staggering—probably about 375 tons of silver. This was to be delivered to those in charge of collecting revenue, then forwarded to the king's depository.

3:10,11. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman. The ring bearing the official seal of Ahasuerus, and by which the decree, once prepared, could be notarized (v. 12). **And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee.** Haman's request was granted, but his magnanimous gift was possibly refused, a rather extraordinary gesture for a king. It would indicate the high esteem in which Haman was held by his superior. However, the text may mean no more than that the king accepted the gift, and in return gave both the silver (that is the Jewish spoils) and the Jewish people over to Haman.

3:12-15. Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month. The decree of death was hurriedly drafted by the king's scribes in the various languages of the Persian Empire. It bore the official seal of King Ahasuerus, and was immediately sent to the satraps and governors of the provinces to be published among the people. **And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces.** The postal system established by the Persians provided an efficient means of getting the letters to the various provinces. **To destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day.** The repetitive wording of the decree simply emphasizes the urgency of the seek and destroy mission. None could be excluded because of age or sex—the Jewish race was to be totally annihilated. **Even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.** The month and day of the slaughter had been determined by lot (v. 12); it was now made a matter of law. **And to take the spoil of them for prey.** How do you get ordinary people to engage in such a bloody mission against their friends and neighbors? One way is to appeal to human greed and avarice, and that is precisely what Haman did. The people who murdered would be rewarded with the possessions of the deceased. It is a sad but true commentary on human nature (James 4:1-3). **The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people.** A copy of the king's decree was to be issued as law in every province of the empire, and to be widely published so the people would be prepared when the day of slaughter came. **The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment.** The matter of publishing widely the decree was treated with urgency. **And the decree was given in Shushan the palace.** The writing was published in every province, but it was only natural that those closest to the king would hear it first. **And the king and Haman sat down to drink.** Having completed their part of the mission of

death, Ahasuerus and Haman relaxed and returned to their customary life style. **But the city of Shushan was perplexed.** The plan was not one that struck joy in the hearts of the ordinary citizens of the empire, especially at Shushan, which apparently had a large concentration of Jews. But it was by decree of the king, and they would have to comply.

CHAPTER 4

MORDECAI INFORMS ESTHER OF THE DECREE OF DEATH 4:1-9

4:1-9. When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; (v.2) And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. (v.3) And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

(v.4) So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not. (v.5) Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was. (v.6) So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate. (v.7) And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. (v.8) Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. (v.9) And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

4:1-3. When Mordecai perceived all that was done. More accurately, when Mordecai knew what was being done, probably from the published decree. **Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes.** Sack was cloth made of rough, dark hair (Revelation 6:12), and was usually worn as a sign of mourning and humiliation (Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31), or in the face of national

offered is staggering—probably about 375 tons of silver. This was to be delivered to those in charge of collecting revenue, then forwarded to the king's depository.

3:10,11. And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman. The ring bearing the official seal of Ahasuerus, and by which the decree, once prepared, could be notarized (v. 12). **And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee.** Haman's request was granted, but his magnanimous gift was possibly refused, a rather extraordinary gesture for a king. It would indicate the high esteem in which Haman was held by his superior. However, the text may mean no more than that the king accepted the gift, and in return gave both the silver (that is the Jewish spoils) and the Jewish people over to Haman.

3:12-15. Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month. The decree of death was hurriedly drafted by the king's scribes in the various languages of the Persian Empire. It bore the official seal of King Ahasuerus, and was immediately sent to the satraps and governors of the provinces to be published among the people. **And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces.** The postal system established by the Persians provided an efficient means of getting the letters to the various provinces. **To destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day.** The repetitive wording of the decree simply emphasizes the urgency of the seek and destroy mission. None could be excluded because of age or sex—the Jewish race was to be totally annihilated. **Even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.** The month and day of the slaughter had been determined by lot (v. 12); it was now made a matter of law. **And to take the spoil of them for prey.** How do you get ordinary people to engage in such a bloody mission against their friends and neighbors? One way is to appeal to human greed and avarice, and that is precisely what Haman did. The people who murdered would be rewarded with the possessions of the deceased. It is a sad but true commentary on human nature (James 4:1-3). **The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people.** A copy of the king's decree was to be issued as law in every province of the empire, and to be widely published so the people would be prepared when the day of slaughter came. **The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment.** The matter of publishing widely the decree was treated with urgency. **And the decree was given in Shushan the palace.** The writing was published in every province, but it was only natural that those closest to the king would hear it first. **And the king and Haman sat down to drink.** Having completed their part of the mission of

now learned for the first time the details of the horrible crime about to be perpetuated by her husband against her and her people.

ESTHER RESPONDS TO THE CHALLENGE

4:10-17

4:10-17. Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; (v.11) All the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. (v.12) And they told to Mordecai Esther's words. (v.13) Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. (v.14) For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

(v:15) Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, (v:16) Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. (v.17) So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

4:10-12. Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai. Esther had been apprised of the danger to her people; she now sends Hatach to inform Her uncle of her precarious position with the king in the matter requested. **All the king's servants, and the people of the king's province, do know.** The message Esther sent to Mordecai was no palace secret: it was a published fact both in Shushan and in the distant provinces. **That whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called.** Security was tight around the king. Not even the queen herself could assume the prerogative of approaching him without a specific invitation. **There is no law of his to put him to death.** A threat to the king would naturally be assumed when any person appeared in the inner court uninvited. Those guarding the king were under orders to kill such intruders without hesitation. **Except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live.** The only stay of execution was when the

king saw no threat to his person, and acknowledged such with his raised sceptre. **But I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.** The king's former ardor for Queen Esther had subsided. She had not been called to his side for thirty days, and evidently was not expecting an invitation in the near future. **And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.** This message must have been a disappointment to Mordecai, but he was quick to realize that Esther simply had not grasped the gravity and extent of the decree of death.

4:13,14. Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther. Mordecai knew that Esther would risk her life approaching Ahasuerus uninvited, but it was at least a chance for survival for both her and her immediate family. **For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time.** If she refused to take the risk involved in petitioning the king. **Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.** Mordecai had a strong faith in God and the destiny of the Jewish nation; and he knew God would accomplish His purpose in them as a nation. But he further knew that those individuals who did not work in harmony with God's will would be cut off (cf. Exodus 32:7-10,30-33; Numbers 14:20-24). He and Esther occupied positions of influence in relation to the king. If they refused to take advantage of such, deliverance would certainly come for God's Holy People from another source, but they themselves would lose both their lives and their inheritance among the people of the covenant. What a powerful lesson and warning for those of us who have opportunities to stand for truth and righteousness, but refuse to do so! **And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?** Ahasuerus only thought that his was the sole voice in the selection of a new queen! God still rules in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4:25), and the good Mordecai wisely presumed that God had brought Esther to her position of preeminence for this very act of deliverance. God forbid that she should refuse to respond accordingly.

4:15-17. Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer. The queen had made her decision: she would in violation to the law approach her husband uninvited. But she requested the support of her people through fasting (and no doubt, by implication, prayer), and she herself would join with them in this preparatory effort. **And if I perish, I perish.** If the king refuses to raise his golden sceptre, then she will have died in the line of duty toward her people. A commendable attitude, but it would have been much more so had it not been first necessary for her to have been informed that she would also die if she refused. **So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.** That is, he took care of the preparation and details for three day's fast by the Jews in Shushan.

CHAPTER 5

ESTHER'S FIRST BANQUET FOR THE KING AND HAMAN 5:1-8

5:1-8. Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house; and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house over against the gate of the house. (v.2) And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. (v.3) Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom. (v.4) And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. (v.5) Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

(v.6) And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. (v.7) Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; (v.8) If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Hanan come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said.

5:1,2. Now it came to pass on the third day. Esther and her fellow-Jews had fasted for three days (4:16). And though not stated, she probably spent the time in prayer (cf. 2 Samuel 12:16-22; Daniel 9:3; Ezra 8:21-23), supplicating God to grant a favorable response at her appearance before Ahasuerus. **And Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house.** Esther,

dressed in her finest, made her entrance into what was probably a hall leading to the throne room, and from which she could see the king seated on his throne. **And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court.** The crucial moment for Esther had come; either the king would raise his golden sceptre, or she would immediately die at the hands of the court guards. **And the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand.** A higher Hand than the one that held the sceptre had prevailed: Ahasuerus lifted his sceptre, and the queen was allowed to approach the throne.

5:3-5. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? The king recognized an urgency in the queen's visit: nothing else would have caused her to risk her life by coming into his presence uninvited. He immediately pressed her for the cause. **It shall be given thee to the half of the kingdom.** This expression is quite a common one (cf. Mark 6:23), and the king may not have intended for it to be taken literally, but it does show his real admiration for Esther, and his intent to grant her request regardless of the cost. **And Esther answered, if it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet I have prepared for him.** The king was in such a good frame of mind, it has puzzled many why Esther did not carry through with her request at the time. But it is certainly no mystery to those who view these events as segments of divine history and providence: Haman's cup of iniquity was still not full (cf. Genesis 15:16); nor had his real pride and littleness been thoroughly exposed. **Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said.** The banquet was already prepared and waiting. The very thought of it caused Ahasuerus to immediately suspend all other activities, and urged Haman to do the same: the queen must not be kept waiting.

5:6-8. And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine. (For the meaning of a banquet of wine see notes on 1:2-4). **What is thy petition?** Again the king pressured Esther for an answer, and with the same promise he made her when she first approached his throne—up to half of his kingdom. **Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is.** A petition was presented the king, but not the real one. **If I have found favour in the sight of the king.** Instead of making her request for the lives of her people, once more Esther simply invited Ahasuerus and Haman to another banquet she would prepare for them the following day. However, the delay gave time for some very significant events to transpire—Haman would walk out still farther on the dangerous precipice of pride.

HAMAN'S RAGE OVER MORDECAI'S REFUSAL TO BOW 5:9-13

5:9-13. Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. (v.10) Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. (v.11) And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. (v.12) Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. (v.13) Yet all this availeth me nothing, as long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

5:9,10. Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart. Haman had been singularly honored by the invitation to dine with the king and queen, and doubly so with a second invitation for the next day. It filled him with joy and puffed him up with pride. **But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him.** With the adoption of the decree of death, Mordecai's attitude toward Haman had become more determined and obstinate. Not only would he not bow in the presence of his superior, now he refused to rise in respect as he passed, or even move to the side out of his way. **He was full of indignation against Mordecai.** Haman's joy quickly turned to a mixture of anger and depression. He was a great personage in a vast empire, but at least one man, and that a Jew, refused to recognize his greatness of position, seeing instead the littleness of his heart. **Nevertheless Haman refrained himself.** Strangely, in the heart of every person, regardless of how corrupt he might otherwise be, usually resides one or more good qualities. Haman was no exception. For a man of his stature he had shown extraordinary restraint toward Mordecai's impudence until it became a matter of public notice (3:2,3). Even at this stage he refused to make a public spectacle of himself over Mordecai's contemptible treatment. **And when he came home.** Public restraint was one thing; but in private he was about to reveal how jealousy and pride were sapping the joy out of his life. He had so much and lacked so little; yet it was the little that had come to dominate his total being. In this he exemplifies a very human, but very wrong, characteristic. **He sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.** Though a tremendously successful man in his own right, Haman seems to have been unduly influenced by the people around him. He showed little concern over Mordecai's disrespectful attitude until pointed out to him by others

(3:4), and here it would be the advice of his wife and friends that would set him on a path of destruction.

5:11-13. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches. The size of his fortune might well be understood in light of his fabulous offer to Ahasuerus for the lives of the Jewish race—three hundred and seventy five tons of silver. **And the multitude of his children.** How many offspring he had we are not told; but many wives and concubines were usually one of the rewards of the very rich, and they in turn became little more than breeding machines for their husbands. One mark of success was the number of children produced (Judges 8:30; 1 Kings 11:1-3; 2 Kings 10:1). **And all the things wherein the king had promoted him.** He had advanced Haman to the second highest position in the Persian Empire. **Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself.** Haman extolled himself as being the queen's favorite. At this point he did not know that he was instead the queen's target. **And tomorrow am I invited unto her also with the king.** Honors continued to be heaped on the head of Haman, or at least he so thought. **Yet all this availeth me nothing.** What could be more cruel than a head swelled with pride and a heart shriveled with jealousy? The wise man said, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Again, "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame" (Song of Solomon 8:6). Haman had it all; but he was so obsessed with Mordecai's impertinence that he could not enjoy any of it. What a miserable state of existence! "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" (Proverbs 15:17); "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" (Proverbs 16:16); "Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:19).

HAMAN'S WIFE AND FRIENDS RECOMMEND MORDECAI'S DEATH 5:14

5:14. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

5:14. Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him. Haman's political success contrasted to his inability or unwillingness to decide the fate of Mordecai is strikingly strange. But his wife and

friends appear to have had neither reservation nor compunction of conscience in the matter. **Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high.** Why a gallows of such height—seventy five feet or more? Perhaps for two reasons: (1) to show his utter contempt for the irreverent Mordecai; and (2) to make his execution visible to all, even from a great distance. But the tall gallows may have handily served still another purpose as we will point out in our notes on 9:14. **And to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon.** Even a man with the authority of Haman could not perpetuate such an act against the king's servant without his prior approval. **Then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.** The one thing that had kept Haman from total enjoyment of all his honors and prosperity was Mordecai. That cancerous growth, so they all thought, would be removed before another day had passed, so there was no reason for him not to enjoy the queen's banquet to the fullest.

CHAPTER 6

A KING'S RESTLESS NIGHT

6:1-3

6:1-3. On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. (v.2) And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. (v.3) And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

6:1-3. On that night could not the king sleep. The psalmist said, "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:4), and often to accomplish His purposes, He disturbs or withholds the sleep of others (Genesis 41:8; Daniel 2:1; 4:5; 6:18; Psalm 77:4).

The absence of the name of God from the book of Esther has caused some to wonder if it should even be in the canon of Scriptures; but one would have to be blinded by Satan not to see God's silhouette shadowing the entire narrative. The evidence is cumulative and irresistible. (1) Vashti strangely rejected her husband's request, and her queenship was wrested from her (1:19). (2) The Jewish orphan Esther succeeded Vashti, and her very selection was probably to allow her to serve as intermediary for her nation (4:14). (3) If she did not perform her function, enlargement and deliverance would providentially rise from another source (4:13). (4) Mordecai exposed the king's would-be assassins, but the act went unnoticed and unrewarded until just the right time (2:21-23; 6:1-3). (5) The gallows upon which Haman was hanged was most conveniently constructed the night before his execution (5:14). (6) As the narrative moves rapidly toward its climax, the king had a sleepless night and opted to read his chronicles—the very section containing Mordecai's unrewarded heroic act (6:1-3). (7) Haman was forced to signally honor Mordecai on the day he had

hoped to hang him (6:4-11). (8) The king returned to Esther's banquet hall at the very moment Haman had fallen across her bed to entreat her for mercy, thus gaining the impression he was trying to force her into an illicit act (7:7,8). (9) An attempted defeat of the Holy People was turned into a glorious victory, celebrated even to the present time (9:1,21). Though some may ask where God is in the book of Esther; we ask, where is He not in the book? **And he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles.** The official record kept for the kings of Persia, dealing with important matters and events relating to the kingdom (10:2). **And it was found written.** Mordecai had saved the king's life from the hands of Bigthana and Teresh (2:21-23), and the act had been duly recorded in the king's chronicles. **And the king said, What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?** Strangely (except as viewed in the light of God's providential care for His people as revealed in the total context of the book of Esther), the heroic act had gone unrewarded.

HAMAN IS FORCED TO HONOR MORDECAI

6:4-11

6:4-11. And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him (v.5) And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. (v.6) So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? (v.7) And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighted to honour, (v.8) Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: (v.9) And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. (v.10) Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. (v.11) Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

6:4-5. And the king said, Who is in the court? Here is about to begin one of the most amazing turn of events in the book of Esther. As day broke Haman entered the court wondering how he might persuade the king to allow him to hang that hated enemy. But the king had passed the night reading about Mordecai and his alertness that saved him from assassination, and was wondering how he might reward him. At the appropriate moment he inquired, perhaps of a nearby guard, "Who is in the court?" There are two possibilities here. (1) The king had heard the flurry of activity in the outer court, indicative of the approach of a dignitary, and he wanted to know who was approaching him at that early morning hour. (2) He was inquiring about the presence of anyone in the court who might be able to advise him about the best means of appropriately honoring Mordecai. In view of the context, this latter view seems more likely, and adds even greater irony to the divine drama of interference. **And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court.** In response to his question, Ahasuerus was informed of Haman's presence; and he granted him immediate permission to enter his chambers.

6:6-9. So Haman came in. And the king said unto him. Haman had come to make a request of Ahasuerus, but immediately became the object of a query from the king. **What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?** That question triggered the pride resident in the haughty heart of Haman. After all, he was the number two man in the kingdom; and who else had attended the queen's banquet for the king the day before except himself? And was he not invited to another one that very day? It was thus obvious that the king wanted to bestow lavish honors on him, and he would be just as lavish in making the recommendations. First, Haman suggested that the king's very own royal clothing, animal, and crown be selected for this honorable parsonage. Then all this would be delivered to the king's most noble prince that he might thus array the man, and lead him on horseback through the city, proclaiming as he did so, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour." No doubt Haman was having mental visions of himself so splendidly attired, and so signally honored through the streets of Shushan!

6:10-11. Then the king said to Haman. The king was ready to give his reply, and no doubt Haman stood rapt as he awaited the decision that would waft him to glory and honor beyond belief. **Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said.** What a gleam there must have been in Haman's eye! The king heartily accepted his recommendation, and commanded its speedy execution. **And do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate.** Haman's dream house crashed around him. All his burning expectations of

glorious exposure in the king's apparel were suddenly doused, and the most despised man in the kingdom was designated for the honor—and that at the hand of Haman himself! **Let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.** Everything was to be done exactly as Haman had first suggested it. **Then took Haman the apparel and the horse.** Haman's humiliation was excruciating. In his own mind he had plummeted from the pinnacle to the pit as the proclamation was repeatedly forced from his lips, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

HAMAN'S FALL DECLARED A CERTAINTY

6:12-14

6:12-14. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered. (v.13) And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. (v.14) And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

6:12-14. And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. Once the king's honors had been bestowed, Mordecai returned to his position of service at the king's gate. **But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered.** Haman's part in honoring Mordecai was in itself an honor (v. 9); but he was so overwhelmed in grief and shriveled in soul that he could not recognize it. Instead, he felt that every one was mocking at his humiliation, so he covered his head to avoid recognition. **And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him.** As might be expected, Haman reported his whole humiliating experience to his wife and trusted counsellors, expecting to receive their moral support and sympathy. Again, he was destined only for more disappointment. **Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him.** Both his wife and his counsellors were in full agreement: Haman's fall was inevitable. **If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews.** Haman's advisers did not necessarily intend to question Mordecai's lineage: that had already been established beyond question (3:4-6; 6:10), and his whole sordid plan had been built around that fact. It was simply an emphatic way of predicting a reversal in Haman's success, and his certain fall from a position of eminence. **Thou shalt not prevail against Him.** The Jews may have been a hated race (even Christ was hated without cause,

John 15:25), but not even the heathen could fail to observe the providence of God working in a special way among them, and accomplishing His divine plan for that nation (cf. Joshua 9:8-11; Daniel 9:26-29). Haman's plan was not only immoral, it was in violation to the eternal purpose of the supreme Ruler of the universe. He had sought to destroy the work of God: he would succeed only in destroying himself (cf. Acts 5:35-40). **And while they were yet talking with him.** There was urgency on the king's part in implementing Haman's plan (3:15); there was now providential urgency in bringing it to a halt. Haman had dug a pit and was about to fall into it (Proverbs 26:27).

CHAPTER 7

HAMAN'S CONSPIRACY REVEALED TO THE KING

7:1-6

7:1-6. So the king and Haman came to the banquet with Esther the queen. (v.2) And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. (v.3) Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: (v.4) For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

(v.5) Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? (v.6) And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

7:1,2. So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. With the prediction of impending doom hanging heavily over him, this banquet hardly offered Haman the pleasure of the former one. In fact, one wonders how he was able to mask his depression in the presence of the royal couple. **And the king said again unto Esther.** Ahasuerus knew well he was being primed for an important decision; so as he had done at the former banquet (5:6), he urged Esther to express her wishes, and reiterated his previous promise.

7:3,4. Then Esther the queen answered and said. Unlike her hesitancy of the previous day, Queen Esther readily and concisely presented her petition. **Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.** Ahasuerus' admiration for Esther was evidenced both when he spared her life for entering his royal presence

uninvited, and by his magnanimous offer of half his kingdom. It must have been a real shock as he learned for the first time that his decree of death included his beloved queen. **For we are sold.** Haman had offered ten thousand talents of silver for the right to destroy the total Jewish race. It is not clear beyond question that the king had accepted the gift, but possibly the implication here is that he had. If so, the courage of Queen Esther becomes more striking in her direct and cutting remarks, "We are sold, I and my people" **To be destroyed.** Slavery would have been a degrading but acceptable disposition of Esther's race (after all, they had been virtual slaves to the Babylonians and Persians for years), and she would have passed such a decision in silence. But his decree of death demanded stubborn confrontation. **Although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.** No amount paid by the enemy in question could possibly compensate the king for his loss realized in such wanton slaughter.

7:5,6. Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen. It is evident that Ahasuerus was very upset over the plot to destroy his queen and her people. Mordecai was well known as a Jew, both by the Persian court and the king himself (3:4,13; 6:10); but his kinship to Esther had been a well guarded secret (2:10; 8:1). How he was able to do this for so long we are not told. At any rate, her lineage now comes to the surface. **Who is he?** Who is the man who perpetuated this shameful plot? To this point the king still had not made the connection between the decree of death and Esther's danger. **And where is he?** Ahasuerus was probably assuming the man was far removed from the palace, and certainly from his closest circle of friends. **That durst presume in his heart to do so?** To presume is to take upon one's self without permission or authority. The full authority of the king was behind the decree to destroy all Jews, but he was not privy to the full ramifications and intent of the plot. **And Esther said, the adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.** Esther's plan had reached full fruition: Haman stood exposed as the cruel and inhuman conniver he was. **Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.** It is probable that Haman now learned for the first time that his master-plot included the queen. The revelation brought fear to his heart, and with good reason.

HAMAN HANGED ON HIS OWN GALLOWS

7:7-10

7:7-10. And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. (v.8) Then the king re-

turned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. (v.9) And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. (v.10) So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

7:7-10. **And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden.** We have already observed that King Ahasuerus usually did not act out of haste or anger (1:13-15). This fact is again apparent in his retirement from Esther's banquet hall to gain his composure before deciding the fate of Haman. But the providence of God was also evidenced in prompting the king's return at the most opportune moment to have his anger further agitated. **And Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen.** When the two men entered the banquet hall, it was Esther's life that was on the line. That had been reversed, and Haman, perceiving the king's wrath, arose before Esther to beg for his life. **Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine.** Probably he had gained some control of his emotions, and returned to the hall to make some rational disposition of the matter. But Haman's judgment against others had been neither rational nor tempered with mercy; he would now receive in kind (cf. Matthew 7:1-3). **And Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was.** Haman in desperation had fallen prostrate on the couch to more effectively appeal for Esther's mercy. But it was precisely at this point that the king reentered Esther's banquet hall. **Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house.** Under such extreme circumstances it would seem impossible for one to rationally conclude that Haman was trying to force the queen into an immoral act; but Ahasuerus saw what he wanted to see. **As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.** The king needed to issue no order. Those standing by knew from his expression and tone of voice what should be done: they covered Haman's head for immediate execution. **And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king.** The high gallows Haman built had not gone unnoticed among the palace servants. They now point it out to the king as having been prepared for Mordecai, a good man in the king's service, and suggest that it be used instead of Haman. **Then the king said, Hang him thereon.** "For with what judgment ye

judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2). Haman had judged an innocent man worthy of hanging, and built a gallows for that express purpose. Now he would die on those same gallows, he also innocent of at least one of the charges made—that of forcing the queen. **So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.** An appropriate end for one who would have shed the blood of an entire nation because of foolish pride. **Then was the king's wrath pacified.** Having exacted the supreme penalty from Haman, the king was satisfied.

CHAPTER 8

AHASUERUS URGED TO REVERSE THE DEATH DECREE 8:1-6

8:1-6. On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her. (v.2) And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

(v.3) And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. (v.4) Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, (v.5) And said, If it please the king, and If I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's province: (v.6) For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?

8:1,2. On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. The state normally confiscated the property of a criminal. Having done so with Haman's, the king gave it to Esther as a gift for the affront made against her by Haman. **And Mordecai came before the king.** Esther told the king, probably soon after Haman's execution, about her kinship with Mordecai, and no doubt about the part he played in saving her. He was forthwith called before the king to be rewarded. **And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman.** This was the same ring Haman had used to seal the death decree against Mordecai and the Jews (3:10-12). It is ironic that it now circled the finger of the very

one Haman had determined to destroy. **And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.** It would have been inappropriate for Esther to have given up her husband's gift to her uncle. Instead, she made him overseer of it.

8:3-6. And Esther spake again before the king. Regardless of the honors bestowed on Esther and Mordecai, the death sentence still hung over their people in every province of the empire. With this in mind, the queen once more hazarded her life to approach her husband uninvited. **Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther.** As he had before (5:2), her husband extended his mercy in the form of his golden sceptre. **So Esther arose, and stood before the king.** When the queen approached Ahasuerus, she bowed at his feet (v.3). Having gained his approval, she arose to face him. **And said, If it please the king.** The same salutary approach she used when she made her first successful petition (5:4,8). **Let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite.** Ahasuerus certainly was not ignorant of the decree issued by the wicked Haman. Nonetheless, Esther proceeded with caution, choosing every word carefully, to make sure there was no misunderstanding on the part of the king as to what decree she had in mind. **For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people?** Regardless of lineage, there was no longer a question about the safety of Esther and Mordecai. But the sentence of death still stood against her people; and if it were carried out, her grief would be more than she could bear. Surely the king would not allow her to suffer such emotional anguish.

A DECREE OF SELF DEFENSE ISSUED FOR THE JEWS 8:7-14

8:7-14. Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. (v.8) Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse. (v.9) Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, and hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according

to their writing, and according to their language. (v.10) And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries: (v.11) Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, (v.12) Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. (v.13) The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. (v.14) So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.

8:7-8. Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew. Esther's poignant appeal for her people hit home, bringing quick assurance from Ahasuerus that wicked Haman had been hanged on a gallows for his conspiracy against the Jewish race, and indicating his willingness for continued cooperation in sparing the queen's people. But his hands were tied, for a decree issued and sealed by the king was irreversible (1:19). **Write ye also for the Jews.** Haman wrote the original decree of destruction against the Jews with the full knowledge and approbation of the Persian king. Likewise Mordecai received legal sanction from the same source to draw up a petition for the same condemned race. It could not nullify the decree written by Haman, but it gave the Jews the right of self defense.

8:9-12. Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month. Less than two and one-half months had transpired since publication of the original decree (3:12); but that was long enough for providence to change the exalted to the beggar (3:1,2; 7:7,8), the hunter to the prey (3:13; 7:9,10), and the noose from the neck of Mordecai to the neck of Haman (5:14; 7:10). Haman had promised his plunderers the Jewish spoils (3:12), but instead his spoils were given to a Jew (8:1,7). The king's scribes were ordered to draft a decree, that would turn potential Jewish disaster into victory and celebration. **Unto every province according to the writing thereof.** The second decree was to be as widely published as the first (3:14), but special priority was given to preparing manuscripts in the native Jewish tongue—a necessary provision enabling them to prepare for their defense. **And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name.** This decree

was made as binding and irreversible as the first, bearing the king's full authority, and dispatched with the same urgency to the provinces. **Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life.** The Jews were granted a license of defense, to reciprocate all Persian assaults against life and property, and to confiscate the property of those thus destroyed. **Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus.** The original plan called for one day's slaughter, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (3:13); the decree of defense contained the same limitation. This, however, would be extended another day in Shushan by the queen's request.

8:13,14. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people. By means of the efficient Persian postal system, copies of the decree were quickly circulated, enabling the Jews to have ample time for defense preparations.

THE JEWS CELEBRATE THE GOOD NEWS OF DELIVERANCE 8:15-17

8:15-17. And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. (v.16) The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. (v.17) And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

8:15-17. And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white. With the exception of his refusal to bow to Haman the Agagite, Mordecai always manifested a humble spirit of servitude. But now, having been cast into the role of leader and example for his people, he appeared before them, donned in the royal symbols of position and authority. Joy filled the hearts of the Shushan Jews as they savored the sweet victory already won, and anticipated an even greater one ahead. **The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.** Their joy came as the morning light breaking over the eastern horizon as they were suddenly transformed from a nation under judgment to a people of respect and honor. **And in every province, and in every city.** As the decree circulated, waves of joy and gladness surged through the hearts of the exiles. **A feast and a good day.** A holiday was proclaimed, and the people celebrated the good news with feasting. **And many of the people of the land**

became Jews. Previously, the Jews had been the underlings, but events of dramatic proportion had changed all that. The woman who sat as queen was a Jew with a powerful influence over her husband; Mordecai wielded authority second only to the king; and Ahasuerus himself had shown favorable inclination toward the Jews of the empire above that of his own people. It gave the Persians just cause for concern, leading many of them to cast their lot with the Jewish people.

CHAPTER 9

THE JEWS GAIN A VICTORY OVER THE PERSIANS

9:1-11

9:1-11. Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) (v.2) The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. (v.3) And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. (v.4) For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. (v.5) Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. (v.6) And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. (v.7) And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, (v.8) And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, (v.9) And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, (v.10) The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand. (v.11) On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.

9:1-4. Now in the twelfth month, that is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same. The date selected by lot for the annihilation of the Jews dispersed throughout the Persian Empire (3:7,13). **In the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them.** The decree devised by Haman called for the death of "All Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day" (3:13).

(Though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them.) The author here moved forward parenthetically in his narrative to insert the victorious outcome of the long and dramatic chain of events. **The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus.** The Jews formed tight-knit units of defense in the cities to better defend themselves. **To lay hands on such as sought their hurt.** Essentially, the decree issued to them permitted defensive action only, so only those determined to destroy the Jews were the initial objects of retribution. **And no man could withstand them; because of the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.** The number of Jewish exiles was insignificant compared to the other subjects of the Persian Empire. By sheer strength of numbers, they could easily have devastated the exiles. But they were greatly intimidated by the powerful Mordecai. **And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews.** Not only did the people of the provinces fear Mordecai, but so did the officials of the kingdom as well. They knew his influence with the king, and considered it a matter of prudence to join with the Jews in their defense. Essentially, those attacking the Jews risked the wrath of the king and the intervention of the whole Persian army. It is little wonder that the Jews gained a great victory on that day. **For Mordecai was great in the king's house.** Mordecai was a prominent figure, both in the palace and throughout the provinces of the Persian Empire. He was a growing force to be reckoned with, a fact well recognized by those who might otherwise have joined in the Jewish slaughter.

9:5,6. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction. Despite the favorable conditions created for the Jews, some, motivated either by intense hatred or the lust for plunder, engaged the Jews in conflict. But the Jews proved masters of every situation. **And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.** With Ahasuerus, Mordecai, and the leading officers of the court backing the Jews, it is surprising that an attack was even initiated in the palace area. But hatred often knows no bounds nor restraint.

9:7-11. And Parshandatha. Among the slain, who probably instigated and led the palace attacks, were the ten sons of Haman. For their treachery, these men, along with Haman, have found their place in infamy among the Jews. Esther had their dead bodies hanged on a gallows for all to see (v.13). Later, when these ten names were read publicly at the Feast of Purim, they were read in one breath to indicate they all died at the same instant. Also Jewish scribes contrived a means of expressing their abhorrence for them by writing their names in three perpendicular columns of 3, 3, and 4, as if they

were hanging on three parallel cords. **But on the spoil laid they not their hand.** To show their motives as defensive rather than offensive and selfish, the Jews did not exert their legal right to pillage the possessions of their enemies. **On that day the number of those that were slain.** As was customary in war, a body count of casualties was carefully made and given to the king.

A SECOND DAY OF SLAUGHTER GRANTED

9:12-16

9:12-16. And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. (v.13) Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. (v.14) And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. (v.15) For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand. (v.16) But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey.

9:12-14. **And the king said unto Esther the queen.** No doubt the queen had been moved to a place of safety, and was unaware of what had happened. So Ahasuerus personally informed her of the enemies slain in the palace. **What have they done in the rest of the king's province?** In the context, this appears more as an exclamation than a question. If five hundred people were killed in the palace area alone, how many must have died throughout all the provinces! **Now what is thy petition.** The decree of death had been successfully countermanded. Ahasuerus now inquired of Esther if there was further action she wanted him to take to rectify his first error. **Let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according unto this day's decree.** Evidently the one day's slaughter had not totally alleviated the danger to the Jews. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for Esther to request this extension. **And let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.** (See notes on vv. 7-10). **And the king commanded it so to be done.** The king readily granted

Esther's additional requests for the extension of the decree, and the dishonorable display of the bodies of Haman's sons.

9:15,16. For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar. Under the extension granted for a second day of slaughter, three hundred more Shushan residents died. But as before, there was no pillage of their possessions. **But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives.** Outside Shushan, the Jews had defended themselves, and inflicted a tremendous loss on their attackers: seventy-five thousand in all (the Septuagint lists the number here as fifteen thousand, indicating a copyist's error in one of the sources). But as in Shushan, the Jews observed generally the principle of self-defense, and did not lay hands on the prey of their attackers.

THE CELEBRATION OF A GREAT VICTORY

9:17-19

9:17-19. On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. (v.18) But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. (v.19) Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwall'd towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

9:17-19. On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they. The Jews of the provinces had accomplished their mission on the thirteenth, and used the fourteenth for a day of celebration and rest. But those of Shushan engaged in a second day of battle, so their rest did not come until the fifteenth. For this reason, when Mordecai determined the time for an annual celebration of the victory, both the fourteenth and fifteenth were set aside (v. 21). **A day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.** These were the elements of the original celebration; but as time passed, considerably more were added. For a discussion of these, see the notes on v. 22.

THE FEAST OF PURIM INSTITUTED

9:20-32

9:20-32. And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus,

both nigh and far, (v.21) To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, (v.22) As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. (v.23) And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; (v.24) Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; (v.25) But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. (v.26) Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, (v.27) The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; (v.28) And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. (v.29) Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. (v.30) And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, (v.31) To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. (v.32) And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

9:20-22. And Mordecai wrote these things. This first letter of Mordecai urged the Jews of all the provinces to voluntarily set aside the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar as a time for celebrating nationally their victory over Haman's scheme to end the Jewish race. His suggestion was well received (v. 27), so he and Esther later wrote to confirm it as a law (v. 29). **That they should make them days of feasting and joy.** Joy was the key-note of Purim: for defeat had been turned to victory, sorrow to celebration, and fasting to feasting; and it

was basically simply in its celebration—feasting, sharing portions with each other, and by giving gifts to the poor. Time, however, brought changes, often elaborate and excessive ones, so that it has been characterized through the centuries by the following practices, some even continuing down to the present: (1) Reading the *Megilloth*, consisting of the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. (2) Drinking in excess, even to the point of being unable to distinguish between the phrases, “Blessed be Mordecai,” and “Cursed be Haman.” (3) Setting aside various biblical principles of conduct to the extent of allowing even the transgression of priestly law during the celebration. (4) Masquerading, and Purim plays. (5) Actions designed to engender and perpetuate the hatred of Haman, such as: (a) hissing, shaking the fist, and stamping the feet (especially by children) each time the name of Haman was read; (b) hanging or burning him in effigy; (c) writing the name of Haman on two stones, then knocking them together until his name was blotted out; (d) writing his name on the soles of their shoes, then stamping the feet as a sign of contempt; (e) shouting, “Cursed be Haman! May his name perish!”; (f) burning wax figures of Haman, his wife Zeresh, and his house; (g) children pelting each other with nuts in the presence of a doll representing Haman, which was eventually burned at the stake.

9:23-25. And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them. That is, the annual feast became a part of Jewish custom in accordance with their first celebration and the wishes of Mordecai. **Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews.** In vv. 24,25, the author reviews the facts of Haman’s scheme to destroy the Jews, but being thwarted in his devices by the good Queen Esther, he ended up on his own gallows.

9:26-28. Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Pur, or a lot, was cast in the first month of the twelfth year of Ahasuerus to determine the time for the destruction of all Jews in the Persian Empire (3:7). From this act, the Feast of Purim gained its name. **Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter.** The Holy People had observed and celebrated a great deliverance from catastrophe (vv. 17,18). Mordecai then urged by letter a national annual remembrance and celebration of the providential event (vv. 20,21). For these reasons, a festival of joy and gladness became traditional throughout the provinces on the anniversary of the deliverance. **The Jews ordained, and took upon them.** That is, they established it as a legal holiday, and bound themselves to observe it. **And upon their seed.** They would do all within their power to perpetuate it in future generations. **And upon all such as joined themselves to them.** Any proselyte to the Jewish religion would be expected to observe the feast.

So as it should not fail. That it might be kept each year in the same spirit in which it had been originated. In this aspiration, they were eminently successful. Nearly twenty-five hundred years have passed, but the Feast of Purim is still a favorite holiday among the Jews.

9:29-32. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. The first letter calling for a national observance of Purim was simply an urgent appeal (v. 20). Having been well received by the populace in general, the feast was then declared legally binding by the authority of both Esther and Mordecai. **And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus.** Carefulness was observed in getting copies of all important documents to each Persian province (1:22; 2:13-15; 8:10-14). This authoritative endorsement of Purim was deemed worthy of the same wide publication. **To confirm these days of Purim.** To declare the feast legally binding upon the Jews of the empire. **And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.** The decree was duly recorded in the chronicles of the kingdom.

CHAPTER 10

THE GREATNESS OF MORDECAI

10:1-3

10:1-3. And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. (v.2) And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? (v.3) For Mordecia the Jew was next unto King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

10:1-3. And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land and upon the isles of the sea. The author of Esther frequently extolled the greatness of King Ahasuerus, noting that his kingdom extended from India to Ethiopia, and that it was divided into one hundred and twenty-seven provinces (1:1; 8:9). These subject provinces provided a constant flow of wealth into the king's treasure houses. **And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him.** We now see the reason for the author's choosing to elaborate further on the greatness of Ahasuerus. As he advanced in authority and wealth, so did Mordecai the Jew. It was a matter of national Jewish pride that the man who had saved them from destruction was now the second most powerful person in the world. **Are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.** The authenticity of the material just narrated was a matter of public record, and subject to confirmation by anyone who cared to examine the chronicles of Ahasuerus. Or in the words used by Paul in his defense before Festus, "For this thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). So despite the constant attacks of modern critics, the reader can have complete confidence in the historical accuracy of the book of Esther. **For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus.** From the time his saving the king from assassination came to the attention of Ahasuerus

Mordecai's advance to position and power was progressive: "For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater" (9:4). **And great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren.** Not only was he second in command in the kingdom, but he had gained the respect of his own people, and was accepted as their leader and benefactor. **Seeking the wealth of his people.** Though a man of tremendous wealth and influence, Mordecai never forgot his heritage. He sought constantly to improve the living conditions of the exiles, and encouraged a peaceful co-existence between Persian and Jew. It is hardly any wonder that the fame of the man himself continued to grow among the Jewish people long after his body had returned to the bosom of the earth.

APPENDIX I

RESTORATION, A VIABLE PRINCIPLE

THE POSSIBILITY AND EVER-PRESENT DANGER OF APOSTASY

Hardly had the waters of the Red Sea closed behind Israel until her lust for the leeks and onions of Egypt caused her in heart to turn back to the land of bondage (Numbers 11:4,5; Acts 7:39). Hosea castigated the Holy People as a nation bent to backsliding (Hosea 11:7), and exclaimed, "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea 6:4). God through Jeremiah questioned, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32). Even in the pristine purity of the Edenic paradise, Adam and Eve fell from the grace of God (Genesis 3:6; Romans 5:12).

Nor should we think that apostasy is a problem involving only ancient and primitive cultures. The New Testament places frequent danger signs to warn us all of the possibility of the shipwreck of our faith: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1). "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12). "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1). Paul probably described each of us well in this respect when he said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I

do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:18-23).

RETRACING OUR STEPS— REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION

As surely as there is sin and apostasy, there must also be repentance and restoration. The Scriptures abound with examples of such, but space limitations restrict us to an examination of only two of these: the restoration movement under King Josiah, 621 B.C., and the great restoration effected at the return of the exiles from the Babylonian captivity under the direction of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, 538-428 B.C.

Restoration under King Josiah. Ahaz, king of Judah, refused to lead his people in the path of righteousness exemplified by the good King David: "But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his sons to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree" (2 Kings 16:3,4). Hezekiah reversed his son's official policy toward idolatry (2 Kings 18:4-6); but when Manasseh came to the throne, all stops were pulled out. "And Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel" (2 Kings 21:9). Thus the Holy People were led into a state of complete apostasy.

When Josiah came to the throne, he reversed national policy toward idolatry, and in his eighteenth year commissioned Hilkiah the high priest to repair the temple (2 Kings 22:3-7). In doing so, a copy of the book of the law was found in the Lord's house, and its sacred contents were made known to the king (2 Kings 22:8-10). When he was exposed to the cutting edge of that divine message, he ripped his clothing from his body in recognition of the fact that Judah's apostasy had exposed her to imminent danger of the wrath of God (2 Kings 22:11-20).

His newly acquired knowledge of God's conditional covenant with His people caused Josiah to effect a restoration hardly without equal in sacred history. (1) The Word of God was carefully read to all the people, both small and great (2 Kings 23:1,2). (2) Having heard the law, the king and all his people made a commitment to obey all the commandments, testimonies, and statutes of God's written covenant (2 Kings 23:3). (3) The idolatrous altars and sacred places were torn away or desecrated, and the immoral practices connected with them

ceased (2 Kings 23:4-20). (4) The ordinances and celebrations required by the law were restored (2 Kings 23:21-23). (5) All false teachers with their abominable practices were rejected that the people might perform the words written in the book of the law (2 Kings 23:24,25).

Restoration under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Because of disobedience to His covenant law, God brought the Babylonian armies against Jerusalem, and carried its inhabitants captive to Babylon for seventy years (Deuteronomy 28:15-39; Jeremiah 25:8-11; Habakkuk 1:5-9; Ezra 9:6,7; Nehemiah 9:30). But under the decree of Cyrus, the exiles were released and allowed to return and rebuild that which sin and alien armies had destroyed.

This forms the basis for another thrilling story of restoration that followed the same pattern as that under Josiah. (1) The word of God was the basis upon which the restoration was carried out. Ezra was a ready scribe in the law of Moses (Ezra 7:6), read it to the people (Nehemiah 8:1), and enforced stiff penalties against those not doing the law of God (Ezra 7:26). (2) The people were attentive to the book of the law (Nehemiah 8:3), wept when they heard it read (Nehemiah 8:9), and bound themselves by oath to obey all its holy precepts (Nehemiah 10:29). (3) All religious and immoral practices contrary to God's written law had to be abandoned (Ezra 9:1,2; 10:3; Nehemiah 9:1,2; 5:1-11; 13:2-22). (4) All divine ordinances of religious service were restored (Ezra 6:19-22; Nehemiah 8:14-17). (5) False and unscriptural leaders were deprived of their positions of influence among the people (Nehemiah 13:4-9,28).

RESTORATION IS A VIABLE PRINCIPLE

Some deny restoration to God's original order as set forth in the New Testament as a valid or workable principle for us today. They contend that the practices of nearly two thousand years ago cannot be applied in our modern society. But we not only can go back, we must go back! As long as men depart from the truth of the primitive gospel, they must retrace their steps, and return to the ancient boundary lines of truth. "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jeremiah 6:16). "For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved" (Isaiah 30:15). "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Revelation 2:5).

Churches of Christ are essentially a restoration movement. Based on the principles established in the two great restoration movements cited above, and on many other Scriptural precedents, we labor

diligently to: (1) Return to the Bible as the complete, final, and authoritative guide in all matters pertaining to life and godliness (John 20:30,31; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Corinthians 4:6); (2) make a firm commitment to follow as closely as humanly possible every requirement of the gospel—the commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:21-28; Luke 6:46; Hebrews 2:1-3; 5:8,9; James 2:10; Revelation 22:14); (3) reject all doctrines and creeds of men, human tradition, and human organizations not in harmony with the divine revelation of God (Matthew 15:3-9; Colossians 2:18-23; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 3:20,21); (4) reject all false teachers who labor to change the truth of God into a lie, and seek to turn people from the way of righteousness and true holiness (Matthew 7:15-20; Romans 16:17,18; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 2 John 9-11); (5) restore the divine ordinances of the New Testament, sanctioned by God, and exemplified by early Christians serving under the direction of inspired apostles and prophets (John 4:23,24; 1 Corinthians 11:1,2). These would include: immersion as the only valid form of baptism (Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:11,12); all congregations of the Lord's body remaining autonomous, and serving under the oversight of local elders (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:1-3); vocal music as a means of expressing praise to God (Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12); a weekly observance of the Lord's supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34); a weekly contribution to supply the needs of the Lord's cause (1 Corinthians 16:1,20; 2 Corinthians 9:6,7); and many other such changes which would now seem foreign to many churches.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah give us an inspired pattern for restoration. May God grant us the courage of these two men whose names these books bear, to lay aside every unscriptural practice, preconceived notion, and human tradition; and like them, without even a hint of compromise, return to the marvellous original plan which bears God's holy seal of approval. As it did these men and those who followed them, it will cost us dearly; but the sacrifice must be measured in terms of the reward (Matthew 10:35-42; Philippians 3:4-11).

APPENDIX II

PRESENT STATUS OF THE JEWISH NATION

THE HOLY PEOPLE OF GOD

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther deal with a very special people, who had a very special relationship to God—the Jewish race. For hundreds of years before the events recorded in these books transpired, God had appeared to the patriarch Abraham in the land of Mesopotamia, and made him a promise: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Seeking means for survival, the descendents of that man of faith found their way into Egypt, and were there enslaved for more than four hundred years (Genesis 15:13). But they always had before them the promise of their own country, and the knowledge of their special relationship with god: “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:7,8).

God took that infant nation, cut her umbilical cord, cleaned and swaddled her, and commanded her to live (Ezekiel 16:3-6). He placed her in the land promised (Acts 7:17,45), and declared of her, “For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 7:6). But her special calling and privileges endued her with a responsibility unlike that of

any other people on earth—to be a depository for God’s glorious revelations of Himself, His laws, and His services, and to present to the world the glorious Seed Who was destined to bring redemption to Adam’s fallen race: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Romans 9:4,5). “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Galatians 3:16-19).

CHRIST THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC PROMISE

Thus God selected the seed of Abraham and made them a special and peculiar nation of people, for a special and divine purpose—to present Christ to the world; and the New Testament affirms the fulfillment of that purpose when Christ made His first advent to the earth. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Galatians 3:16). “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4,5). “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:24-26).

THE PRESENT STATUS OF THE JEWISH NATION

Since the selection of Israel as a Holy Nation was for the purpose of presenting Christ to the world, it would logically follow that their peculiar status ended when Christ came. And the Scriptures indeed abundantly affirm this conclusion. The genealogical line that began with Abraham ended with Christ (Matthew 1:1-17). A fleshly line is

declared to be no longer of any value whatsoever in matters spiritual (John 6:63). In fact Paul had to give up any claim based on Jewish descent, counting it as dung, in order that he might gain Christ: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ (Philippians 3:3-8).

By the cross, the middle wall of partition dividing Jew and Gentile has been abolished, and the two have become one in Christ. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:12-16). With the dividing wall gone, there is now no distinction between Jew and Gentile: by faith and baptism into Christ, all become the seed of Abraham. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Romans 10:12). "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:26-29).

GOD'S HOLY NATION TODAY

Since the Jewish nation served its purpose in presenting Christ to the world, as stated in Romans 9:4,5; and since they are no longer God's special or peculiar treasure, does this mean God has no Holy Nation today? Indeed not! But that nation is neither fleshly nor

physical; it is rather a spiritual institution—the Church of Christ: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Peter 3:9,10); and this nation is composed of all obedient persons regardless of ethnic, racial, or social origins. The apostle Paul described it this way, “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:11). John had a beautiful vision of this international throng of the redeemed, and pictured it for us in these words, “After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9,10). So the church is God’s spiritual Israel, His Holy Nation (Galatians 6:16; Romans 2:28,29). It is His heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22,23), His holy temple (Ephesians 2:20,21), His spiritual priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), His peculiar people (1 Peter 2:9), and in this Holy Nation, all can enjoy the privilege of heavenly citizenship (Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20).

There is no wonder, then, that the inspired apostle Paul could pen the words, “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:15,16).

COMMENTARY ON Ezra- Nehemiah- Esther-



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He received his formal education at Milligan College and Immanuel School of Religion near Elizabethton, Tennessee, with the major emphasis of his training being concentrated on the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

In addition to this present work, Clayton is the author of a number of other books, study guides, and gospel tracts, and has contributed numerous articles for other brotherhood books and publications. He is also presently preparing a second volume for Quality Publications on *Kings—Chronicles*.

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