

Ezra/Esther/Ezra

“Several times the Jews rebelled against Babylon; but each time the Babylonians used military force against Judah, put down the rebellion, and took some of the people of Judah back to Babylon with them. This happened about 605 B.C. (As recorded in Dan. 1:1-4), a second time about 597 B.C. (2 Kings 24:10-17), and again about 586 B.C. After the Jews rebelled against Babylon in 588 B.C., King Nebuchadnezzar attacked the nation, conquered it, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and initiated a large deportation of Jews to Babylon (2 Kings 24:20-25:21; 2 Chron. 36:17-21” (Roper, p. 11).

It was while the Jews were in captivity to Babylon that Babylon fell to the Persians under Cyrus the Great.

“Early manuscripts indicate that Ezra and Nehemiah were regarded as being one book in the Hebrew Bible” (Roper, p. 4).

Note that the last two verses of Second Chronicles are identical to the first two and one-half verses of Ezra. This indicates that Ezra was considered a continuation of the history given there.

Why had Israel found itself in bondage?

“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).

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy GOD hath driven thee, And shalt return unto the LORD thy GOD, and shalt obey

His voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; That then the LORD thy GOD will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy GOD hath scattered thee” (Deuteronomy 30:1-3).

Why was Judah going “home?” Only those who were very old were actually going home. Most of those who returned had never seen this land. They were returning by faith in the One they loved. Christians today speak of going home (Heaven) in the same way.

“For our conversation (citizenship — ASV) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

Ezra — Chapter One

Ezra 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, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD GOD of Heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his GOD be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD GOD of Israel, (he is the GOD,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of GOD that is in Jerusalem.”

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath Jehovah, the GOD of Heaven, given me; and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whosoever there is 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 Jehovah, the GOD of Israel (he is GOD), which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever is left, 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, besides the freewill-offering for the house of GOD which is in Jerusalem.” (ASV)

“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)” (Winters, p. 1).

Before moving forward in this study, the student should first read Second Chronicles chapter thirty-six, where the brief account of Judah’s fall and the beginning of her captivity is given.

Ezra began by stating that the following events took place in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia. This cannot mean the very first year of Cyrus’ reign as king, for that would have been the year 559 B.C. as noted above. The year 559 B.C., would have been too early for the captivity to end. Since the captivity began in 606 B.C., it would not end until about 536 B.C., a full twenty-three years after Cyrus first became ruler of Persia. What the initial phrase of this book must therefore mean is the first year of Cyrus’ reign over captured Babylon.

How was it that the word of the Lord came to Cyrus? Did he have a dream like Nebuchadnezzar, which caused him to seek out a prophet to explain it to him? Was it Daniel who brought him GOD’S word by showing him the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah? Or, in his reading, did he happen to read the prophecies written by these men? There is no definitive answer as to how he came to know GOD’S will in this matter.

It would be good for us to notice the prophecies regarding this time before going on with this study. We begin first with the prophecy of Daniel, where Daniel predicted that after the Babylonian kingdom, **“another kingdom inferior to thee”** would arise (Daniel 2:39). This was the **“breast and arms of silver”** in the great statute

Nebuchadnezzar saw (Daniel 2:32). So Daniel, in captivity, had predicted the kingdom of Cyrus. But other prophets also predicted the rise of the Medo-Persian empire.

“That saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid” (Isaiah 44:28).

“Thus saith the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron: And I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the GOD of Israel. For Jacob My servant's sake, and Israel Mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known Me” (Isaiah 45:1-4).

“And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations” (Jeremiah 25:12-13).

“Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say shall be desolate without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of

hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 33:10-14).

After the Lord stirred Cyrus up, he made a decree (“command” – NKJV) which not only allowed the people of Israel to go, but also authorized the rebuilding of the Temple. But notice something very important in verse one. This was not just an oral command. It was put into writing. This would be extremely important later when the Jews had to prove they were authorized to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

It is obvious from this text that Cyrus recognized that there is a divine command behind his edict. But when one looks at the life of Cyrus, he sees that he did this with all the nations which formerly belonged to Babylon. He released the captives and authorized the rebuilding of their temples to their gods of all the nations over which he ruled.

“I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been in ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I settled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidas has brought into Babylon...to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy.

May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me” (A. Leo Oppenheim, translation, (Cyrus Cylinder), Ancient Near Eastern Texts: Relating to the Old Testament, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 316.

This brings up an interesting question: **Did Cyrus have**

a true understanding of the GOD of heaven? While one would like to say he did, it must be recognized that this may simply have been his way of looking at all the gods of the nations around him and over which he had dominion. According to G.E. Wright, as quoted by Butler, Cyrus *“makes similar reference to the gods of the Babylonians”* (p. 11). Cyrus may have used the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah as his authority for allowing the people of his land to return to their lands and rebuild their temples. Note the way Cyrus described the GOD of Heaven: *“the LORD GOD of Israel, (He is the GOD,) which is in Jerusalem”* (v. 3, *Emphasis mine, RK*). Would a true follower of GOD speak of Him as being in Jerusalem? A true believer would recognize GOD as being omnipresent, not simply the god of a locality.

Not only did Cyrus authorize the return of any of the people who were inclined to return to Jerusalem, but also provided for the financing of their projects. Those who decided to remain in Babylon were to help their brethren. Some have thought this would also include any in the land where they were going, i.e., the people who were presently living there. This would probably be true based on the evidence one sees in Nehemiah.

“Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah; And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my GOD upon me” (Nehemiah 2:7-8).

Why did some (apparently most) of the Jews who had been in captivity, not go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and city?

“They had become comfortable in a foreign land” (Wacaster, p. 50).

He then went on to make this interesting observation.

“Perhaps some do not long for heaven, neither do they have the will to make the sacrifices necessary to attain that Heavenly ‘home’ because they have become comfortable with this world” (IBID, p. 50).

One might also consider here what happened when Israel prepared to build the Tabernacle. Freewill offerings were made by the Israelites to provide for its

furnishings. In fact, so much was offered that Moses had to tell them to stop giving — they had enough (Exodus 35:20–36:7).

“And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much” (Exodus 36:6-7).

When is the last time you heard of elders having to tell a congregation to stop giving because it was giving too much?

Ezra 1:5-11 “Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit GOD had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.”

“Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit GOD had stirred to go up to build the house of Jehovah which is in Jerusalem. And all they that were round about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered. Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of Jehovah, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put in the house of his gods; even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. And this is the number of them: thirty platters of gold, a thousand platters of silver, nine and twenty knives, thirty bowls of gold, silver bowls of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. All the vessels of gold and of silver

were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when they of the captivity were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.” (ASV)

Who would return to Jerusalem? The chief or head men of the Jews, especially those from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. While it is possible others from the ten northern tribes of Israel joined their brethren of the south in this venture, it would seem there were probably not many, as none of the other tribes are mentioned here. It is also noticed that a contingent of priests and Levites were among the number returning. They would especially be needed to resume the worship at the Temple.

It should be considered that there were individuals from the ten northern tribes which came back to Judah.

And “there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the Temple, but served GOD with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:36-38).

Thus it is seen that some came back from the tribe of Asher, one of the ten northern tribes.

What does it mean when the text says, “all them whose spirit GOD had raised?” This seems to indicate those whose hearts were attuned to glorifying GOD through obedience and sacrifice to His will. When GOD caused the prophecies to be fulfilled, such men would gladly leave behind the land of captivity to suffer the hardships and danger such a journey would entail.

Who is being spoken of as “they that were about them strengthened their hands?” These were probably the Jews who stayed behind, who had grown comfortable in their surroundings. To be fair, there were probably also many who because of age or other reasons did not go back as well. This may also include Babylonians who were favorable to the Jews, possibly to some degree like those who showered the Israelites with gifts when they left Egypt, although the circumstances are different here. These provided the needs and necessities for this journey and effort.

Verses seven through eleven show the favor bestowed by Cyrus. Since he allowed them to return home and rebuild their Temple, it simply makes sense

that he would also send back the items which had been taken from the Temple, which were needed for the worship. Thus, he instructed his treasurer, Mithredath, to place these items in the hand of Sheshbazzar.

Who is Sheshbazzar?

“this was probably the Chaldean name of him who was originally called Zerrubbabel....Some think this quite a different person; a Persian or Chaldean, sent by Cyrus to superintend whatever offers or men Cyrus might have sent to assist the Jews on their return; and to procure them help in the Chaldean provinces, through which they might be obliged to travel” (Clarke, p. 731).

“Older commentaries identify Sheshbazzar with Zerubbabel (Keil 26-27; George Rawlinson in The Pulpit Commentary 9); the more recent works believe that Zerubbabel succeeded Sheshbazzar and was his nephew (Leon J. Wood, A Survey of Israel’s History 334, footnote 59; Elmer W.K. Mould, Essentials of Bible History 407-408). Sheshbazzar is identified with the Shenazar of 1 Chronicles 3:18, a son of Jehoiachin of the Davidic dynasty” (Willis, p. 4).

Why is there a difference in the number of vessels, et cetera, seen in verses nine and ten and the total given in verse eleven? (1) Verses nine and ten may be a list of the more important vessels, and verse eleven a grand total of the minor and major. (2) This could be a scribe’s error. It should be remembered that it is often easy to transpose numbers or make a mistake in copying. Since the original text is not available, it cannot be checked.

“The Septuagint adds up to 2,489” (Winters, p. 6).

Ezra — Chapter Two

Ezra 2:1-2 “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; Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:”

“Now 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 unto Babylon, and that returned unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:" (ASV)

The majority of this chapter is given to genealogical records, which have a great importance. Winters gives three reasons why the genealogies have importance, and after studying them, this writer must agree with his thoughts.

"(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 descendants 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)" (Winters, p. 9).

Verses one and two give a list of the leaders of this mission, with the exception of one which is mentioned in 1:8 — Sheshbazzar. This is why some seem to think that Sheshbazzar is another name for Zerubbabel, because he seemed to be too important to be left out. There is no way to verify this. Also in this list, there are some familiar names from the books of Nehemiah and Esther — namely, Zerubbabel and Mordecai. These may or may not be the same as those prominent characters found in Nehemiah and Esther. There is a greater possibility that Mordecai is the same, since he lived in this general time frame. Another list of these names is given in Nehemiah 7:6-73, with some minor differences which may be attributed to scribes errors or the possibility that one was known by a second name.

This writer likes the way Wacaster divided this chapter.

"The list before us may be divided into the following parts: (1) the leaders of Israel (v. 2); (2) those who returned according to families (vv. 3-19); (3) the number of those who returned according to localities (vv. 20-35); (4) the number of priests arranged according to their families (vv. 36-39); (5) the number of Levites, likewise arranged according to families (vv. 40-42); (6) the families of the Nethinim (vv. 43-54); (7) the families of 'Solomon's servants' (vv. 55-57); and (8) those who could not show their genealogy (vv. 59-63)" (Wacaster, p. 52).

Not much time will be spent dealing with the names found in this list, but one is urged to take the time to read them and the comments made by some of the commentators. A simple list of the verses of each section with a title of the individual sections will be given. Fuller comments will resume at verse sixty-four.

Those who returned according to families.

Ezra 2:3-19 “The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three.”

“The children of Parosh, two thousand a hundred seventy and two. The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. The children of Pahath-moab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. The children of Jorah, a hundred and twelve. The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three.” (ASV)

Those who returned from localities.

Ezra 2:20-35 “The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three. The men of Netophah, fifty and six. The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. The children of

Azmaveth, forty and two. The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. The children of Nebo, fifty and two. The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.”

“The children of Gibbar, ninety and five. The children of Beth-lehem, a hundred twenty and three. The men of Netophah, fifty and six. The men of Anathoth, a hundred twenty and eight. The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. The children of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. The children of Ramah and Geba, six hundred twenty and one. The men of Michmas, a hundred twenty and two. The men of Beth-el and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. The children of Nebo, fifty and two. The children of Magbish, a hundred fifty and six. The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.” (ASV)

The Priests who returned.

Ezra 2:36-39 “The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.”

“The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.” (ASV)

Levites who returned.

Ezra 2:40-42 “The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight. 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.”

“The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. The singers: the children of Asaph, a hundred twenty and eight. 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 a hundred thirty and nine.” (ASV)

Nethinim who returned.

Ezra 2:43-54 “The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth, The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon, The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmal, the children of Hanan, The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, The children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai, The children of Asnah, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephusim, The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah, The children of Nezhiah, the children of Hatipha.”

“The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth, the children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon, the children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub, the children of Hagab, the children of Shalmal, the children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai, the children of Asnah, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephusim, the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur, the children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha, the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah, the children of Nezhiah, the children of Hatipha.” (ASV)

Solomon’s servants who returned.

Ezra 2:55-58 “The children of Solomon’s servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda, The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami. All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon’s servants,

were three hundred ninety and two.”

“The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Hassophereth, the children of Peruda, the children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel, the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the children of Ami. All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.” (ASV)

Those who returned without genealogical records.

Ezra 2:59-63 “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: The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two. 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: 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. 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.”

“And these were they that went up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses, and their seed, whether they were of Israel: the children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two. And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood. And the governor said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.” (ASV)

Two classes of people are mentioned in these verses who could not prove their genealogy. The common people (vv. 59-60), and those who were of the priestly class (vv. 61-63). This would be a problem for these people, especially for those claiming to be of priestly families.

“And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD: and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart

before the LORD continually” (Exodus 28:30).

“And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (1 Samuel 28:6).

Apparently, when asked a question which had a yes or no answer, the High Priest would reach into the pocket of the breastplate and pull out the answer which was determined by GOD.

“There is no record of the priest’s possession of these after the return from Captivity” (Butler, p. 30).

As for a king, the Scriptures are quite plain on whom Israel could have as its king.

“When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy GOD giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy GOD shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother” (Deuteronomy 17:14-15).

The major problem for anyone in not being able to prove his lineage was in his worship. He would be able to go to the court of the Gentiles — but no further.

Not being able to prove one’s lineage was more of a problem for the priests. Like the king, a priest had to come from among the people. More specifically, the priest had to come from the tribe of Levi and from the lineage of Aaron.

“And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father’s house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood....Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest’s office for 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 18:1, 7).

“For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to GOD, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the

people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of GOD, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:1-4).

In this list of those who could not prove their lineage, one finds the name “Barzillai.” In studies of the Bible, one finds a man by this name who befriended David when he was forced to flee from his son Absalom (2 Samuel 17:27; 19:1ff; 1 Kings 2:7). It appears that those mentioned in the present text were the descendants of this man. Since they could not prove their lineage, these men were to be treated “as if” they were polluted. One who was polluted could not serve as a priest before the people, and thus his living would have to be maintained in another way. (Remember — the priests were provided for through the sacrifices, and one who was polluted, or not of the priestly tribe, could not eat of these things and live.)

What was to be done with those who claimed priestly descent? Since they could not prove their genealogy, they could not serve as priests. But what if they had a legitimate claim? Should they unfairly be kept from serving if such were the case? Someone had to make a decision, which was based upon GOD’S word. That person was the “Tirshatha.” The margin of this author’s Bible says this was the governor. His decision left the door open, if their genealogy could be proved. How could this be accomplished? Apparently the written records were missing, so the Urim and Thummin could tell them the answer.

“Those who could not trace their Jewish ancestry were most praiseworthy. Having no proof of their heritage, and thus no guarantee of acceptance into the community of God’s chosen people, they nevertheless believed in the promises made to the Jews and wanted to be part of their fulfillment” (Roper, p. 46).

Ezra 2:64-67 “The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, 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. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.”

“The whole assembly together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore, besides their men-servants and their maid-servants, of whom there were seven

thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred singing men and singing women. Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five; their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.” (ASV)

Ezra 2:68-70 “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: They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. 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.”

“And some of the heads of fathers' houses, when they came to the house of Jehovah which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of GOD to set it up in its place: they gave after their ability into the treasury of the work threescore and one thousand darics of gold, and five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priests' garments. So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.” (ASV)

Here the time is seen when the Jews arrived at Jerusalem. Also seen is the freewill offering they made to advance the work of rebuilding the Temple. Throughout the Scriptures, it can be noted that this is always the kind of offering (sacrifice) which GOD’S people must make in order to be pleasing to Him.

“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Corinthians 8:12).

There is no way to evaluate properly the amount of funds given on this occasion. But one thing is certain — it was a very large amount.

Ezra — Chapter Three

Ezra 3:1-5 “And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the GOD of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of GOD. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them

because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening. They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.”

“And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem. Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the GOD of Israel, to offer burnt-offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of GOD. And they set the altar upon its base; for fear was upon them because of the peoples of the countries: and they offered burnt-offerings thereon unto Jehovah, even burnt-offerings morning and evening. And they kept the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt-offerings by number, according to the ordinance, as the duty of every day required; and afterward the continual burnt-offering, and the offerings of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of Jehovah that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill-offering unto Jehovah.” (ASV)

The seventh month of the Jewish year is Tishri (September or October), and it may have been the most important month of the Jewish religious year. The month began with the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah). Next came the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) on the tenth day, followed by the Feast of Tabernacles which lasted from the fifteenth to the twenty-first. This was also the beginning of the Jewish civil year.

The people had made a long journey, finding Jerusalem in the ruins Nebuchadnezzar created in the three destructions of the city. They had probably not had time to do much more than make temporary dwellings for themselves. But now, it was time for the Feast of Tabernacles, which originally reminded them of their escape from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness. How appropriate that the first great Feast they celebrated was the release from the bondage of Babylonian/Persian captivity. And so, they all gathered at Jerusalem, as one man, with one purpose.

The priests raised up the altar, which was absolutely essential to Jewish worship, on the exact spot it had been found when Solomon built the Temple. But notice a very important statement in verse two: “**as it is written**

in the law of Moses the man of GOD.” It should be noted that they were following the **written** law of GOD, not following oral traditions. They understood, if their efforts were to be pleasing to GOD, that they must do everything exactly as GOD commanded. This is an important message for mankind, no matter in what dispensation one lives. If GOD’s acceptance of worship is desired, then it must be done according to His commands, not according to man’s desires.

“Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after” (Hebrews 3:5).

Being faithful to GOD demands that everything be done as He has directed. One also sees the daily sacrifices were restored. Again, all they did with regard to their sacrifices was “as it was written” and “according to the custom.”

What was the fear the people had in verse three? Did they build the altar in spite of the fear they had of the people? Or, did they build the altar because they were afraid of the people? When comparing the texts of the KJV and ASV, either one of these interpretations may be placed upon this passage. As for this writer, he prefers to think they built the altar in spite of their fear of the people, because this would reflect a proper understanding of Who should be feared. Do we fear man and what he might do to us, or do we fear GOD who can condemn us for eternity?

“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Who were the “people of those countries?” When the Assyrians conquered Israel (ten northern tribes), they deported many of the Jews and replaced them with people of other conquered nations. These people intermarried with the Jews who were left in Israel. From these people came the Samaritans, who were not allowed to participate in rebuilding the walls (See Nehemiah) nor participate in Jewish worship. See Ezra 4:1, where they are called “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin.”

It is also noted that the offerings were “freewill offerings.” This is a very important concept in the Scriptures. If what one offers to the Lord, whether speaking of finances or service rendered, is not freely given, it is worthless. Man must learn to give himself first, i.e., “Thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”

(Matthew 22:37). Speaking of the great sacrificial giving of the Macedonians, Paul said, “**This they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of GOD**” (2 Corinthians 8:5). Offerings must be freely given, i.e., they cannot be given “**grudgingly, or of necessity: for GOD loveth a cheerful giver**” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Ezra 3:6-7 “From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the Temple of the LORD was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.”

“From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt-offerings unto Jehovah: but the foundation of the Temple of Jehovah was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and food, and drink, and oil, unto them of Sidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar-trees from Lebanon to the sea, unto Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.” (ASV)

Since the Jewish calendar was based upon the new moon, this would seem to indicate the first sacrifices were the new moon sacrifices. The question one might ask here is, “**How did they know what to do in these sacrifices?** Obviously, they had continued to study the law in their captivity, and though it is not mentioned, they may have offered some sacrifices while in captivity. This author’s personal belief is that they did not continue the sacrifices in captivity. His thinking is based upon the fact that they knew the Temple was the place where they were to offer their sacrifices.

Assuming they did not sacrifice while in captivity, how would a person know how to **restore** the worship which GOD demanded in order for him to be acceptable to Him? The answer to this question should be readily seen. They had GOD’S instructions as to how to worship. They had the law of Moses which guided them. In Second Kings, chapter twenty-two, there is an account where the law of GOD had been lost to the people for some time, being found in the ruins of the Temple by Hilkiah the priest. This law was given to the young king Josiah. Josiah commanded that the words of this law should be researched, and then they were to do whatever the law told them to do. He recognized that nothing less than complete obedience to this law could turn the wrath of GOD away from them.

Today, if the New Testament had been missing for the past seventy years or more, the New Testament church could be fully restored, because GOD'S directions for it are written.

The note is then made that the Temple foundations had not yet been laid as they restored the sacrificial worship services. It was going to take a long time to rebuild the Temple. As seen in the next verse, they were going to have to wait for the building materials to arrive. But the process had already begun. Many times a number of goals cannot be completed at the same time, but parts of each one can be worked on while finishing one at a time.

The masons and carpenters were hired. The workmen of Tyre and Zidon, who were quite skilled in construction were paid. It was workers from these same places which helped David accumulate the materials for the Temple and helped Solomon build it.

How was all of this building financed? The answer is found in Ezra 6:3-5. "Let the expenses be given out of the king's house." Verse seven of this text notes specifically that they built with Cyrus' blessings.

Ezra 3:8-10 "Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of GOD at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of GOD: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. And when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel."

"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 rest 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 have the oversight of the work of the house of Jehovah. Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to have the oversight of the workmen in the house of GOD: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. And when the builders laid the

foundation of the Temple of Jehovah, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Jehovah, after the order of David king of Israel.” (ASV)

It was time to begin the process of rebuilding the Temple. The laying of the foundation began in the second month (Zif – April/May). Is it coincidence or planning which caused this month to be chosen for the work to begin? This question is based on First Kings 6:1.

“And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.”

This writer's opinion is that it was planned to coincide with the original building's beginnings.

The Levites were chosen to be the superintendents of this work. Since they had originally been designated to be the workers in assisting the priests, this is very understandable. Coffman takes the following quote from the **Teacher's Bible Commentary**.

“There were 24,000 Levites to see after the work of Solomon's temple (1C 23:4); and only 341 Levites returned from Babylon” (Coffman, p. 28-29).

He then made the following comment.

*“It hardly takes a genius to figure out why they lowered the required age: **they needed more men!**”* (IBID).

Indeed, as in all ages, more men are needed to do the work of the Lord; in fact, there can never be enough men to do the Lord's work!

“The age at which Levites began their work varied at different times in Israel's history based on the nature of their work and the number of Levites available. For transporting the sacred vessels through the wilderness and wanderings the age had been ‘thirty’ (Num. 4:3), for general tabernacle service it had been ‘twenty-five’ (Num. 8:24), and in later times it was ‘twenty’ (3:8; 1 Chron. 23:24; 2 Chron. 31:17)” (Roper, p. 57).

Moving along in this narrative, one needs to be reminded that this work was not accomplished in a day or even a week. This would have taken a much longer time. Evidence of this is still seen today, where it can take a month or more to prepare a foundation site and

then allow the concrete to set. Possibly one of the important things to see here is the planning, followed by actually putting the plan into practice.

When the foundation was laid, there was a celebration. Today it would be called a “ground-breaking ceremony.” The Priests were gathered and dressed in their official clothing (cf. Exodus 28:40, 42). One cannot help but wonder how people today can say the way one dresses is not important when gathering for worship (Romans 15:4). There is no uniform specified today as was specified for the priests then. But Christians are the priests of GOD today. It is this writer’s **personal belief** that one should “dress up” before the Lord in times of worship.

Ezra 3:11-13 “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. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.”

“And they sang one to another in praising and giving thanks unto Jehovah, saying, For he is good, for his lovingkindness endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised Jehovah, because the foundation of the house of Jehovah was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, the old men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.” (ASV)

Of particular interest here is the phrase “**sang together by course.**” It comes from the Hebrew word anah — “*A verb meaning to answer, to respond, to reply, to testify*” (Baker/Carpenter, p. 851). The celebration, ground breaking, included singing which was done in turn. It is not known for sure how this was done. It may have been that each one simply took turns singing their praises to GOD and songs of rejoicing. It may be that they sang back and forth to

each other, or it could be a leader sang a verse or section, and then the people answered by repeating what was sung by their leader.

Their singing reminds one of Psalm 136, where a magnificent display of gratitude for the mercy of GOD is expressed. It should be noted that at first there seemed to be one voice among the people. The text says all the people shouted with praise. GOD had fulfilled His promise to bring His people back to the land, to Jerusalem; the proof lay before them in the foundation of the new Temple. Therefore, they rightly praised His name.

Next is seen a division, probably as those who were older took time to contemplate the scene before them. Those who had seen the magnificent Temple Solomon built began to weep as they saw the foundation of this one. *Why did they weep?* It has almost always been assumed that their weeping was sadness because they assumed this Temple would not be as majestic as the former one. And this may have been the case, especially in light of Haggai 2:3-9.

“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the High Priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts: According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.”

In the above passage, Haggai was encouraging those who returned to continue their work in building the second Temple. Just because the building itself did not look as impressive did not mean it was inferior. In fact, Haggai said this Temple would be greater than the former. *How was this so?* Because this Temple is where the Lord of peace, Jesus the Christ, would appear, ushering in a kingdom which would never be

destroyed. It is the common lot of man primarily to focus on the physical, but there is the need to refocus on the spiritual, which is far more important.

Is all weeping a sign of sorrow? Anyone who has ever been to a wedding and watched the bride weep as the ceremony progresses knows that weeping is sometimes done from joy. It would seem that most of this weeping, if not all of it, was an expression of joy at seeing the fulfillment of GOD's promises to them.

There may also have been tears of sorrow over the sins which had caused the original Temple to be destroyed and the people taken into captivity. Since the contrast here is between "weeping" and "joy," the "weeping" probably signifies sorrow of some kind. Whatever the weeping was about, the noise of those who wept could not be distinguished from the noise of those who shouted with joy.

Ezra Chapter Four

Ezra 4:1-5 "Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the Temple unto the LORD GOD of Israel; 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. 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. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia."

"Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a Temple unto Jehovah, the GOD of Israel; then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' houses, and said unto them, Let us build with you; for we seek your GOD, as ye do; and we sacrifice unto Him since the days of Esar-haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us in building a house unto our GOD; but we ourselves together will build unto Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose,

all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.” (ASV)

The “adversaries” spoken of here are the Samaritans. It is noted that from this chapter onward, everything the Jews attempted in GOD’s service was challenged by adversaries. The Samaritans were a mixed race of people which developed after Assyria conquered the land. Assyria, under Sargon II, deported Israelites to other lands and imported people of other lands into Israel in about 722 B.C. By mixing the people together, it made it hard for any one of them to rebel. These foreign people brought their gods with them, and in their polytheistic thinking, mingled the worship of their gods with the worship of Jehovah. This was further complicated by the lions which GOD sent among the people of the land, and the reaction of Esar-haddon (681-669 B.C.) to them. Esar-haddon commanded priests of the Israelites be sent to instruct the people in the religion of “the god of their land” (2 Kings 17:24). If these had been true priests, there might have been much good derived from such an effort. But consider which priests he sent back to Israel. These were those originally taken, or their descendants, from northern Israel; and they had long ago compromised and corrupted the true religion of Israel. This was the very reason GOD had given them up into captivity — they had absorbed the religions of the people around them and corrupted the worship of Almighty GOD. It is little wonder then that the religion of the Samaritans was corrupted. Josephus states that Alexander the Great built a temple on Mount Gerizim for the Samaritans. Later he stated that John Hyrcanus destroyed this temple in 28 B.C. (Antiquities XI and XIII).

Judah and Benjamin represent those who came back to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. Word generally travels rapidly, especially when one has a vested interest in an area or project. These adversaries heard of this project, and a capsule of their reaction to this news is seen.

In verse two, if they had been sincere about building the Temple, why had they not attempted to rebuild it long before this time? This writer believes their motives, based on the word “adversaries” above, were sinister in nature. What was their goal? Obviously it was to stop the work or compromise it in some manner. As noticed above, they did not truly worship GOD as those who returned from Babylonian captivity were attempting to do. To allow them to help with this work

would have compromised the children of Judah and would have led to their failure. There is nothing worse than a half-converted person in religion. So often the compromisers are accepted into fellowship only to have their lack of dedication to total truth corrupt the original group. The simple truth is that these “adversaries” did not “seek your GOD, as ye do;” therefore, they could not be allowed to have any part in this effort.

“The kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6).

Let it also be observed — they did not become the “adversaries” of Judah and Benjamin after they were refused the opportunity to help build the Temple. **They were already adversaries** when they initially approached Zerubbabel and Jeshua; it simply was not evident yet.

In noticing Zerubbabel’s answer in verse three, it should be noted that help had been accepted from Cyrus, and also the people of Zidon and Tyre, et cetera. They were not opposed to help from outside sources. These Samaritans obviously did not want the Temple to be rebuilt. Possibly they were afraid of a little “rivalry” for their temple on Mount Gerizim. Or maybe it was guilt, i.e., because of an understanding that they were not truly worshiping as GOD directed.

“It made no sense for the Jews, whose nation had so recently suffered captivity as a consequence of idol worship, to involve themselves with people who might influence them to turn away from exclusive worship of the Lord” (Roper, p. 66).

Verse four shows that when they failed at compromise, they took a more pro-active position. They hired counselors against the Jews. There are two ways this may have been done: (1) Lobbyists to argue their point, or (2) Bribes to various officials. In either case, their goal was to “weaken” the efforts of the Jews in accomplishing their task. Further, they wanted the covenant the Jews had with Cyrus to be annulled.

“Weaken” — raphah – “To be slack, be remiss, be idle, discourage” (Zodhiates, CD).

“Troubled” — parar – “To dissolve, to violate (a covenant)]]” (Zodhiates, CD).

Verse five shows the length of their efforts and how successful they seemed to be in them.

“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” (Winters, p. 19).

This would include the reigns or partial reigns of four kings in Persia. Evidently their opposition caused the work of building the Temple to cease for about sixteen years (Haggai 1:1-4). During that time they built their personal houses, neglecting the Temple.

Ezra 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. 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. Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: Then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions; the Dinaites, the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Susanchites, the Dehavites, and the Elamites, And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble 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. 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. 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. 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. Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king; **That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed. 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.”**

“And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they an accusation against the inhabitants of

Judah and Jerusalem. And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of his companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian character, and set forth in the Syrian tongue. Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort: then wrote Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions, the Dinaites, and the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehaites, the Elamites, and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar brought over, and set in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River, and so forth. This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto Artaxerxes the king: Thy servants the men beyond the River, and so forth. Be it known unto the king, that the Jews that came up from thee are come to us unto Jerusalem; they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and repaired the foundations. Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and in the end it will be hurtful unto the kings. Now because we eat the salt of the palace, and it is not meet for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore have we sent and certified the king; that search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition within the same of old time; for which cause was this city laid waste. We certify the king that, if this city be builded, and the walls finished, by this means thou shalt have no portion beyond the River." (ASV)

The opposition got organized. First an accusation was written against the Israelites to king Ahasuerus (Xerxes). No reaction by Ahasuerus is seen regarding the accusations made by the Samaritans. Yet, in viewing the context, this writer would believe there was at least some delay which they caused. Remember, the queen at this time was Esther.

After Ahasuerus, the opposition seems to have become more intense when Artaxerxes came to the throne (465-B.C.). There may have been good reason why this was the case.

"After the death of Cambyses, one of the Magi named Oroporstus by Trogus Prompeius, Smerdis by Herodotus, Mardus by Aeschylus, and Sphenadiates by Ctesias, usurped the empire, feigning himself to be Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses, who had been put to death. This is the person named Artaxerxes in the text: or, following the Hebrew, Artachshasta. It is generally believed, that from the time of Cyrus the great, Xerxes and Artaxerxes were

names assumed by the Persian sovereigns, whatever their names had been before” (Clarke, p. 737).

Others this writer has read also seem to think there was a usurpation of power here, which would have led to unrest in the nation. This state of unrest would have been an ideal time for charges to be made against any group, and simply because of the unrest, it would have to be treated as if it were possible.

The term “**this side of the river**” could be interpreted in two ways: (1) the west side of the Euphrates, or (2) the west side of the Jordan River. Since those who wrote these complaints lived to the west of Jordan, this writer believes the latter of the two is under consideration here.

Verse eight is an accusation against the Jews after the Temple had been rebuilt. The time frame here seems to be about 445 B.C. and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Notice the charges leveled against the Israelites. (1) Jerusalem was a rebellious city, implying the people of this land, the Jews, had always been a rebellious people and would continue to be such. This was not meant in a religious sense, though such charge could have been leveled against the Jews in that realm (cf. Isaiah 30:9; 65:2; Jer. 5:23). What was probably being referred to in this passage was the rebellion of the Jewish people against Nebuchadnezzar on three occasions (2 Kings 24-25), and before that against the kings of Assyria (2 Kings 18:7; 2 Chron. 23:11). Their rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar had finally led to the utter destruction of Jerusalem and its magnificent Temple. (2) The second charge leveled was that the king would be damaged by the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The implication was that they would rebel again, and the king not only would lose income from them through taxes, but would also have to spend large sums of money to subjugate them again. Notice in this charge that they pretended they were doing this because of their loyalty to the king, and such an action by the Jews would lead to their loss of revenue as well.

Indeed, if the king had searched the records, he would have found the accounts of the rebellions of the Jews to Assyria and Babylon; but nothing is shown to indicate any rebellion against the Persians. In fact, every indication in Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther indicates their loyalty to this kingdom.

They ended their letter with a third charge, which seems to imply that the Israelites were already planning a rebellion against the king, and it would result in his losing the territory west of Jordan. What they really

seem to be afraid of is a loss of their power and influence in this region.

Ezra 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. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein. 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. 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. Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?”

“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 in the rest of the country beyond the River: Peace, and so forth. The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me. And I decreed, 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. There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the country beyond the River; and tribute, custom, and toll, was paid unto them. Make ye now a decree to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not builded, until a decree shall be made by me. And take heed that ye be not slack herein: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?” (ASV)

This section shows a king who acted but, apparently, not on full knowledge. It may be his command was only to look for instances of rebellion, but if so, the full knowledge needed for a proper decision was not given to him. Not only should it have been noted that they had been a nation who had rebelled, but the favorable attitude of Cyrus should have been seen as well toward these people. If they had shown signs of rebellion to the Persian kings, then surely Cyrus would not have granted them permission to return to Jerusalem, much less allowing them to rebuild the Temple.

The great kings of Jerusalem were probably David and Solomon; yet, others argue they were too far removed from this time to have been accounted as the reference here. David and Solomon were the two

greatest kings of Jerusalem in that their power extended far, and they indeed received great tribute from the vassal nations they conquered. If this reference referred to later kings, then it probably referred to Menahem (2 Kings 15:16) and Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:6-7; 35:18).

The Samaritans would probably have liked for all building to be stopped. But the Persians had a rule which stated that once a command had been given, it could not be reversed. One of the great examples of this is found in Daniel, where Daniel was thrown into the lions den, even though the king knew this should not be done (Daniel 6). This is seen in the fact that he spent all day trying to find a way to nullify his former command. Cyrus had already commanded the Temple be rebuilt, so these enemies could not stop that, nor could Artaxerxes reverse the command.

Ezra 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. 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.”

“Then when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went in haste to Jerusalem unto the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. Then ceased the work of the house of GOD which is at Jerusalem; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.” (ASV)

One can almost picture the Samaritans as they anxiously opened the letter from the king and then with glee rushed to Jerusalem to stop the building. Why did they stop the work with “force and power?” It would seem they might possibly have been spoiling for a fight, maybe hoping the Israelites would resist the order.

The work had been hindered to this point for approximately fourteen years, and now even the work on the Temple came to a complete stop. The Samaritans were guilty of breaking the law given by Cyrus. The work stopped until the second year of “Darius king of Persia.” Since Artaxerxes was assassinated in the seventh month of his reign, this means the work was totally stopped for a period roughly between one and a half to two years.

Considering chapter four, it should be observed that GOD's people are going to be opposed anytime they attempt to do GOD's bidding. This was true in the time

of Ezra, and it will be true no matter how long time exists.

“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

It should also be observed that the things in this chapter that kept GOD’s work from being completed were fear and discouragement. When fear and/or discouragement cause one to stop doing the Lord’s work, it is because that one’s faith is not as strong as it should be.

“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Proverbs 29:25).

“Every word of GOD is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him” (Proverbs 30:5).

When one allows fear to discourage him enough to stop doing the Lord’s work, he has abandoned GOD.

“The devil cannot stop God’s work unless we allow him to do so” (Roper, p. 78).

Ezra Chapter Five

Ezra 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. 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.”

“Now 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 prophesied they unto them. 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.” (ASV)

For a better understanding of this chapter, it would be good to read chapter one of Haggai and Zechariah 1:1-17. Zachariah was the grandson of Iddo (Zechariah 1:1). (The word “son” is used in its common way to indicate a male relative.) When these prophets’

messages are studied, the deplorable condition the people allowed themselves to be in was revealed. They had neglected the Lord's house in order to build their own. And when asked about the neglect of building the Temple, their excuse seemed to be the lack of economic ability due to famine. But such had not stopped them from building their individual dwelling places. They needed to understand priorities — GOD must come first.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:30).

The reason they were poor at this time was because they had neglected to put GOD first.

“Seek ye first the kingdom of GOD, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

The present text makes it appear that the work of Haggai and Zachariah began simultaneously. Zechariah actually began his work two months after Haggai (compare Haggai 1:1 with Zechariah 1:1). The role of a prophet is clearly seen in this passage. They instructed the people by rebuking them and then encouraging them with the word of GOD. The primary role of a prophet has always been to teach people the will of GOD.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua were probably first to be rebuked by these prophets because they were their leaders. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah (Haggai 1:1), and Jeshua served as High Priest (Ezra 2:2). They had failed to lead properly in the past. But thankfully, once rebuked, they picked up the mantle of leadership and determined to follow the commands of GOD. Together they, and the prophets with them, began to rebuild the Temple.

Ezra 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 this house, and to make up this wall? Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building? But the eye of their GOD was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.”**

“At the same time came to them Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai, and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who gave you a

decree to build this house, and to finish this wall? Then we told them after this manner, what the names of the men were that were making this building. But the eye of their GOD was upon the elders of the Jews, and they did not make them cease, till the matter should come to Darius, and then answer should be returned by letter concerning it." (ASV)

No doubt the enemies of Israel quickly rose up to challenge this work, probably going to the new governor, Tatnai. Under Darius, the Persian empire was divided into twenty satrapies and ruled over by governors (satraps). Each of these governors had a secretary who was responsible for keeping an eye on the affairs of each of these regions, and the satrap reported only to the king. It appears the region Tatnai governed was Syria, the Arabian desert, Phoenicia, and Samaria. Since he must answer to the king for whatever went on in his territory, it was natural for him to make an enquiry regarding this new work in Jerusalem. He was simply looking out for the best interest of the king.

This governor seemed to have a different attitude from those who came before him. This man was not about to be bullied or controlled by the Samaritans' hatred for the Jews. Instead, he was willing to make a fair examination of the facts and wait for instructions from his king. This is obviously another example of GOD'S providential care of His people. Just as He had allowed His people to return from captivity by placing Cyrus on the throne, He now raised up another sympathetic king and governor to accomplish His will. It is interesting to observe, that when the time was right, and a remnant was willing to accomplish GOD's task, then Cyrus was brought to the throne to accomplish it. But in between Cyrus and Darius, the people became unconcerned about rebuilding the Temple, so two kings were allowed to come to the throne which did not care about righteousness nor the people of GOD. But as soon as the people were ready to again accomplish their GOD-given task, GOD brought Darius to the throne.

Tatnai, logically, wanted to know who was responsible for the building and from whence did they get their authority for building. The same thing is seen in America today in the form of building permits and inspectors. If you begin building a building and do not have the proper credentials, the building inspectors will stop you from proceeding. Again, Tatnai seemed to be a fair and honest ruler, so he gathered the information and sent it to Darius for a royal ruling on the matter.

There is no doubt in this writer's mind that, when word came back, whatever he was commanded to do, he would have done it. But for the time being, he allowed the work to continue. GOD was truly watching over His people.

“Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy”
(Psalm 33:18).

It should be noted that the leaders of the Jews did not shrink in fear when asked who was responsible for this building project. They were not intimidated, because GOD had commanded this action. They also knew that, when GOD wanted something done, He would help the faithful to accomplish the goal.

Ezra 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: They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace. 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. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls? We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them. 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. But after that our fathers had provoked the GOD of Heaven unto wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of GOD. And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of GOD, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the Temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the Temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of GOD be builded in His place. 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. Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of GOD at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.”

“The copy of the letter that Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai, and his companions the Apharsachites, who were beyond the River, sent unto Darius the king; they sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus: Unto Darius the king, all peace. Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judah, to the house of the great GOD, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls; and this work goeth on with diligence and prospereth in their hands. Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall? We asked them their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were at the head of them. And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the GOD of Heaven and earth, and are building the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and finished. But after that our fathers had provoked the GOD of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon. But in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree to build this house of GOD. And the gold and silver vessels also of the house of GOD, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor; and he said unto him, Take these vessels, go, put them in the Temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of GOD be builded in its place. Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundations 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 completed. Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure-house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of GOD at Jerusalem; and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.” (ASV)

One is now shown the character of this governor, compared to those previously viewed. This man was quite different. He investigated in order to give an accurate report. There also appeared to be no hidden agenda with this governor, as seen in those earlier in this book.

He reported that there was a house to the Great GOD being built in Jerusalem, and that it was using

great timber and stones. He also stated that the work was going well and that great progress was being made. In gathering the facts to present to the king, he also “attempted” to get the names of those responsible for this work. One says “attempted,” because there does not seem to be any indication he reported any names to the king. Instead, he reported that they claimed to be the servants of the GOD of heaven and earth. Mention was also made of the great king (Solomon) who had built the original Temple.

In verse twelve, the answer to either an expected question or one which was actually asked was given. The question would have been, *“If your GOD is so great, then why did He allow His Temple to be destroyed?”* Basically the answer was very straightforward and simple: “We were disobedient to our GOD, and He punished us by bringing us into Babylonian captivity and destroying our city and Temple.” Implied is the suggestion that when they learned their lesson, then GOD (through king Cyrus) allowed them to return and rebuild this Temple. To show the favor of Cyrus, it was stated that when Cyrus sent them to rebuild their Temple, he also gave them all the instruments needed for worship. It was also reported that the building was still under construction.

Another interesting thought occurs here. When they were asked, *“Who commanded you to build this house,”* their answer began with, *“We are the servants of the GOD of Heaven and earth.”* Were they claiming that GOD Himself was the One who should be viewed as the authorizing agent? This author believes that that is exactly what they were telling Tatnai.

Tatnai did what any good servant would do. He did not have the records available to make an accurate decision, so he requested a search be made of the royal records to determine his future course of action. Interestingly, he allowed the work to continue while the inquiry was being made. He did not issue a restraining order. *Why was a restraining order not ordered?* Because GOD wanted this building completed!

When one looks back, he sees great rejoicing when the Temple foundation was laid (chapter three). In chapter four, he sees the construction stopped by GOD’s enemies. Chapter five shows the work of rebuilding being resumed after a number of years had passed. Chapter six records the Temple’s completion. *What caused the work to be resumed after it had been stopped?* GOD’s word as delivered by the prophets. Haggai told them that the circumstances around them

did not matter – they **must** rebuild the Temple. Zachariah encouraged them to finish the Temple because of the precious promises of GOD which He had made to them.

“When we do what God has instructed us to do, when we put first things first, obey God, and begin to do His work with steadfastness and wisdom, we allow God to work through us to accomplish His will” (Roper, p. 92).

Ezra Chapter Six

Ezra 6:1-5 “Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written: In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of GOD at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house: And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of GOD, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the Temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the Temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to his place, and place them in the house of GOD.”

“Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the archives, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of Media, a roll, and therein was thus written for a record: In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree: Concerning the house of GOD at Jerusalem, let the house be builded, the place where they offer sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits; with three courses of great stones, and a course of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house. And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of GOD, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the Temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto Babylon, be restored, and brought again unto the Temple which is at Jerusalem, every one to its place; and thou shalt put them in the house of GOD.” (ASV)

In the last chapter, the enemies of the Jews made their charge to the governor, Tatnai. Tatnai

investigated for himself, and in an honest inquiry, requested information from the king before he acted. As stated before, this was a good indication that he was a wise, good, and faithful governor for/to his king.

Darius is also shown in a favorable light in the present text. He received the request and ordered a search made through the royal archives, where the decree of Cyrus was found which allowed the Jews to rebuild the Temple. Further, the text of his decree was given, which not only allowed them to rebuild the Temple, but also ordered the return of all the Temple items needed for worship. And, an order was also given for funds to help with this project to be given out of the king's treasury. Regarding this last command, there is no written record that this was done, unless it might have been the trees from Lebanon and other materials which were gathered. It is, however, implied that it was done.

The search began in the treasuries of Babylon, but when nothing regarding this matter was found there, the search was expanded to other store houses. A lazy or incompetent ruler might have ordered the search stopped when the record was not found in Babylon.

The record was found in Achmetha (also known as Ecbatana), which was a palace in Media.

“Cyrus divided his time each year between three capitals, the one in Media being located in Ecbatana, the one in Persia at Susa, and one in the city of Babylon” (Butler, p. 72).

The details given in these verses should also be noted. The Temple's size was determined in the writings of Cyrus, as well as the expenses which were to be taken from the king's treasury. It should also be remembered that Daniel served under Cyrus the king (Daniel 6:1-2, 28), and therefore probably had some role in this.

Ezra 6:6-10 “Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of GOD alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of GOD in his place. 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. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the GOD of Heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and

oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail: That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the GOD of Heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.”

“Now therefore, Tattenai, governor beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and your companions the Apharsachites, who are beyond the River, be ye far from thence: let the work of this house of GOD alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of GOD in its place. Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to these elders of the Jews for the building of this house of GOD: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the River, expenses be given with all diligence unto these men, that they be not hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for burnt-offerings to the GOD of Heaven; also wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the word of the priests that are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail; that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savor unto the GOD of Heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.” (ASV)

Darius' reply not only reinforced the previous decree by Cyrus, but it also added his own backing for the Jews. When looking at the words in these verses, there seems to be a sense of Darius' previous knowledge concerning those who had tried to hinder the work. So, he told them to leave this work alone. Further, he told the people of the land that they were to provide revenue to help the Jews in their building projects through taxes which were raised. It is not hard to imagine how the Samaritans who had stood against the Jews would feel about their tax money's being spent to help rebuild the Temple and walls of Jerusalem. (How do Christians feel today when their tax dollars are used to pay for abortions, support homosexuality, or illegal aliens?) Further, note that these Samaritans were also burdened with paying for the sacrifices the Jews offered.

But what if the people disobeyed their king? What if they decided to continue hindering the work of the Jews in any way? It will be seen that Darius made it clear, that if they refused to obey him, they would be executed. He told them anyone who hindered this work in any way was to have his house torn down and an object for hanging him was to be built from these materials. Further, this guilty person's dwelling place was to be turned into a dung hill, i.e., it was to be an uninhabited garbage dump. It would seem this may indicate that his memory and/or family were to be removed from the face of the earth.

Was there a price to be paid to Darius for his

decrees? The Jews were instructed to pray for him and his sons. To “pray for the life of the king” was probably a form of expressing loyalty to the king.

Ezra 6:11-12 “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. 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.”

“Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let a beam be pulled out from his house, and let him be lifted up and fastened thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this: and the GOD that hath caused His name to dwell there overthrow all kings and peoples that shall put forth their hand to alter the same, to destroy this house of GOD which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with all diligence.” (ASV)

When one notices the idea of hanging here, he is probably tempted to think of the New Testament (or Roman) method of crucifixion. Most commentators refer to this as being a crucifixion in this passage. The word “hanged” in this passage comes from an Aramaic word.

“This Aramaic verb means to strike (in pieces); to smite; to kill, slay; to impale; to arrest; to hang; to destroy” (Zodhiates, CD).

This writer believes it would be safe to say that this word simply signifies putting one to death publicly in one of a variety of manners. Cook states that *“Crucifixion was the most common form of punishment among the Persians”* (Barnes, p. 447). In studying the Persians, we find there were two kinds of crucifixion commonly practiced: (1) Hanging, and (2) Impaling. The second is probably the case in this text since it was the most common practice of that time.

“Herodotus, the Greek who recorded Persian history, speaks of Persian crucifixions, though they were like those with which Julius Caesar later punished pirates, in that the victims were first killed and then affixed to crosses” (Butler, p. 75).

Darius not only pronounced his own curse on whoever would hinder the Jews’ work, he also called for a curse from the GOD of the Jews on anyone who would hinder their work. Some have thought this indicated his belief, or faith in, the GOD of heaven. But

polytheism would allow him to look at GOD as a god, yet also allow him to worship his own gods.

Notice the kind of action involved here. Judgment and the carrying out of punishment were to be done quickly. When punishment is swift for crimes, it tends to cause people to act in a less criminal way. Notice also that the aid which was to be rendered was included in the statement to **“let it be done with speed.”** The good which was to be done toward the Israelites was to be done as quickly as punishment to law breakers was to be rendered. Too often when good needs to be done, there is a long drawn-out process until sometimes it is too late to be effective. This ought not to be, just as Tatnai, Shetharboznai, and their companions understood, as seen in the next verse.

Why would Darius care about the Jews rebuilding their Temple?

“Concern for rehabilitating the religious institutions of captive peoples was a matter of Persian policy and as such Darius felt himself obligated to honor the decisions of the past” (Blenkinsopp, p. 128).

Ezra 6:13-14 **“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. 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.”**

“Then Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their companions, because that Darius the king had sent, did accordingly with all diligence. And the elders of the Jews builded and 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 decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.” (ASV)

As soon as they heard of the king’s command, they acted swiftly to fulfill it. The work prospered, but then **why should it not?** GOD had commanded it, and any time people do what GOD commands, there is a blessing which follows. Included in this brief section is a list of those who furthered the building of the Temple. The list includes the elders of Israel, prophets of GOD and three kings of Persia. These kings are listed in the

order of when they reigned. This writer believes the Artaxerxes mentioned here is the grandson of Darius who is also known as Artaxerxes I and Longimanus. Cyrus and Darius' work in rebuilding the Temple is seen in the book of Ezra. Artaxerxes' contribution will be seen in greater detail in Nehemiah. His contribution to the restoration of the Temple and the sacrifices was vital.

Ezra 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."

"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." (ASV)

"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" (Winters, p. 32).

Ezra 6:16-18 "And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of GOD with joy, And offered at the dedication of this house of GOD an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of GOD, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses."

"And the children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of GOD with joy. And they offered at the dedication of this house of GOD a hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin-offering for all Israel, twelve he-goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of GOD, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses." (ASV)

The Temple was finally completed, and it was time

for joy. Were they happy because this Temple was more splendid than the one before it? Absolutely not, for it did not come close to the magnificent one Solomon built (Ezra 3:12). Their joy surrounded the fact that they had a place where they could worship GOD with His approval. Their fathers had transgressed GOD'S laws, they had been punished, and now it was time to begin anew. At that time, a central place of worship held great importance, but in the Christian age, the place does not matter (John 4:23).

On such an occasion, sacrifices were made, and this was no exception. By the count in this text, seven hundred and twelve animals were offered. This seems like a great number until the sacrifices offered by Solomon are remembered. These sacrifices numbered one hundred and forty-two thousand when he dedicated the first Temple (1 Kings 8:63).

One of the striking things about the present passage is that the sacrifices were made according to the tribes of Israel. The "ten lost tribes" of Israel have often been spoken of, and talk has centered around their once again being restored at some future time. This passage shows us they were in existence during the time of Ezra. Further, it also shows these tribes were represented at the time of this dedication. They could not have offered sacrifices "according to the number of the tribes of Israel" if they were not present. This was not a memorial service for what had been; it was a service reflecting what presently existed. This writer believes that every tribe of Israel was represented at this dedication.

Attention is now drawn to the priests and Levites being set in their places. How was it known what their places were? Was this simply tradition, or did they have a pattern to follow? The text states they were able to set them in their places "as it is written in the book of Moses." When studying the entire account of the rebuilding of the Temple and re-institution of the Temple services, it is seen that there was a careful attempt to follow the instructions of GOD in these matters in an exact manner. They could not guess at how GOD wanted things done and be pleasing to Him. Nor could they make the services the way they thought things should be. No, in order to please GOD in any era, one must do things the way GOD designates them to be done. There is a pattern GOD has given, and He expects it to be followed exactly as He gave it.

Ezra 6:19-22 "And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month.

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. 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, 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.”

“And the children of the captivity kept the passover upon the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure: and they killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. And the children of Israel that were come again out of the captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the nations of the land, to seek Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, did eat, and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for Jehovah had made them joyful, and had 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.” (ASV)

The children of the captivity were those who had been taken away, but had now been allowed to return to their homeland. They now kept the feasts they could not keep in captivity, because they had no altar or temple there. These had been polluted, and without a proper place to hold the feast, it could not be held. After observing the Passover Feast, they immediately observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days (See Exodus 12–13). It seems fitting that the first instituted feasts of the Jewish nation were these two feasts which remembered their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. Now when the nation had been delivered from bondage again, the first feasts observed were the Passover Feast and Feast of Unleavened Bread.

GOD demanded the purification of those who served Him then, and it is no less so today.

“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” (1 Peter 2:9).

“Draw nigh to GOD, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify

your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up” (James 4:8-10).

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, a “mixed multitude” came with them (Exodus 12:38). This indicated a group of people who gave up their former gods and became proselytes, serving the one true GOD. The same thing is meant in this text, for notice they had separated themselves “from the filthiness of the heathen.” All who were seeking to serve GOD under the system given to Israel were allowed to eat of the Passover Feast.

In their great joy on this occasion, mention is made of the “king of Assyria.” This no doubt refers to the Persian kings, in particular Cyrus, who aided them in re-establishing the Temple and its worship. Why was he called the king of Assyria? Possibly because he ruled the territory the Assyrians once ruled. From this writer’s research over the years, he found it was not unusual for a king to be announced as the king of each individual kingdom he had conquered.

Another “possibility would be that ‘Assyria’ stands for all of Israel’s captors – including Assyria, Babylon, and Persia” (Roper, p. 103).

There might also be an allusion here to the events which had started the captivity, thus reminding Israel not to follow the same path again. Their idolatry had caused GOD to allow them to be taken into captivity by the Assyrians and later the Babylonians.

Has one considered the idolatry of GOD’s people today and where it might lead? Many Christians have become idolaters by leaving the service of GOD to attend to the gods of science, wealth, education, family, et cetera. How many children, though not burned in the arms of Molech, nevertheless have been sacrificed to the above-mentioned gods?

Esther — Chapter One

Esther 1:1 “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:)”

“Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus who reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces),” (ASV)

One is introduced to 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)” (Winters, pp. 159-160).

In stating this, it is obvious that this is not the same Ahasuerus seen in Ezra 4:6, but rather a later king.

Ahasuerus is further designated as he who ruled from India to Ethiopia.

“The Hebrew word for ‘India’ is hoddu an old Persian word meaning Hindu or Sanskrit meaning, great river; hence, Indus River” (IBID, p. 273).

When one looks at a map and realizes that the empire stretched all the way to a small portion of Greece, he is compelled to recognize that this was a huge empire. This empire was divided into one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.

Esther 1:2-4 “That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, 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: When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.”

“that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, 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; when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days, even a hundred and fourscore days.” (ASV)

A number of the commentators mention that the Persian kings seemed always to be sitting on their thrones, even when traveling and in battle. These thrones were elevated so that their subjects always had to look up to them, while they looked down upon their subjects.

The place where this outlandish display of wealth and power took place was Shushan, which was otherwise known as Susa. There were three other capitals according to Roper — Persepolis, Ecbatana, and Babylon. These were occupied by the king according to the time of year or by whim. And the time was in the third year of Ahasuerus’ (Xerxes’) reign,

which would make this 483 B.C. (Ahasuerus began his reign in 486 B.C.). The feast was made to impress all the people of his kingdom, rich and poor, leaders and slaves. The term “power of Persia and Media” probably referred to his army. It is noted that the Medes ruled until about 550 B.C., when Cyrus (Persian) came to power.

Notice his “bragging” went on for half of a year. This might have been done not only to impress, but also so that these leaders could come in stages. In this manner, the empire could continue to be governed, and the empire would not have been without protection. This is similar to the times when America’s Congress meets in joint session. A cabinet official is always chosen to be away in case all of them are killed in some way by an enemy.

This feast seemed to be held after his defeat of Egypt and may have been held not only as a victory celebration, but also as a time to announce his plans to conquer Greece. His army for this venture has been estimated at over a million (and possibly two million) soldiers. But as shall be noticed in the following verses, the feast did not end at one hundred and eighty days; an additional seven days were added, where it seems to have gotten wilder.

In showing off his riches, Ahasuerus was guilty of the sin of pride. Pride is always a dangerous thing when it gets hold of someone.

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

“In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them” (Proverbs 14:3).

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

Esther 1:5-8 “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; 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. 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. 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.”

“And when these days were fulfilled, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. There were hangings of white cloth, of green, and of blue, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the couches were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and white, and yellow, and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from another), and royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none could compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.” (ASV)

The word “feast” in verse five comes from the Hebrew word Meshteh, which Zodhiates says “*means a drink, and by implication, (the act of) drinking; the place of drinking; a banquet, a feast*” (Zodhiates, CD). When one considers the passages which follow, he can see that this was very much an excuse simply to drink in excess.

It was after the one hundred and eighty days of feasting had taken place that this special feast for all the people took place. A number of commentaries mention that some of these feasts had fifteen thousand people in attendance, though no source is given for this information. It does seem that large feasts were not uncommon among the Persians, and on this occasion there must have been thousands in attendance.

The feast was held in the “court of the garden of the king's palace,” probably because there was no building large enough for so many guests. This court was extravagantly decorated, each guest was given a golden cup from which to drink, and they were all different. Further, there were “beds” (couches, R.K.) for the guests to recline on as they partied or rested. There seems to have been gold and silver in abundance in the decorations. It must be remembered that Xerxes was trying to impress his guests. The wine they were given was the very best, from the king's own “wine cellars.”

But notice the king had made a law regarding the drinking of the wine. No one was to be forced to participate, and while that seems good, it also opened the door for anyone to drink as much as he wanted — “do according to every man's pleasure.” There were no limits set. *Is it any wonder that rash decisions could and did come at this feast?*

Esther 1:9 “Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.”

“Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.” (ASV)

Hatcher states that the name “**Vashti**” means “*beautiful or excellent woman*” (p. 277). Butler states that it means “*beauty*” or “*best*” (p. 277).

Why was there a separate feast for the women?

Many immediately assume the women could not be at a feast where the men were, but this cannot be the case because of what is seen in Esther 5:3-6 and 7:1-2. As Winters points out, though women could feast with the men, if the king had not invited them, they could not come. So Vashti held a parallel feast for the women in the house, probably the wives of those who were invited to her husband’s feast.

Esther 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 in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, 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. 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.”

“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 ministered in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.” (ASV)

On the final day of the seven-day feast, Xerxes commanded seven of his trusted chamberlains to bring the queen to him.

“**chamberlain**” — **Saris** — “*This masc. noun stems from an unused root which meant to castrate. Therefore, the noun means a eunuch, a valet, a courtier, a minister, a chamberlain, an officer. Eastern kings were accustomed to putting castrated males over the care of their royal women and over other offices of the court*” (Zodhiates, CD).

His purpose in doing this was to show her off in some way to the people.

There is much speculation as to how she was to come before him and the people. Some believe it meant to show her off in her royal robes (Willis), some think it meant for her to appear without her veil (Hatcher, Coffman), and others believe she was to wear only her crown (Josephus, Zerr, the Jewish Talmud and Targum). One of the things this writer believes should be considered here is what had been going on for six months. Ahasuerus had been showing off his great wealth and possessions, and now — last of all — he was going to show off his beautiful wife. Question: since women of that era wore the veil, how could he show off her beauty unless she, at the least, came before them without the veil? Clothes can often hide the truth. For example, this writer and his wife were at Wal-mart recently, and both thought the person in front of them was a female based on the clothing worn, hair, et cetera. However when “she” turned around, it was definitely a male. Wearing the traditional dress of the Persian era, how could one tell if Vashti were beautiful and “fair to look on?”

“fair” — Tov — *“It means good, pleasant, beautiful, excellent, lovely, delightful, convenient, joyful, fruitful, precious, sound, cheerful, kind, correct, righteous; the good, the right, virtue, happiness, pleasantness”* (Zodhiates, CD).

So was the reason Vashti refused to come before her husband in the way he asked a sign of modesty? Maybe, but could there be more to this than first meets the eye? When one looks at the text, he sees what Xerxes’ counselors told him.

“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. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath” (vv. 17-18).

The counselors saw Vashti’s refusal to appear before the king as rebellion which would foster strife (“wrath”) in the kingdom when other women heard of what she had done and would then do the same thing with their husbands. This idea seems to be bolstered by the term “husbands” in verse seventeen. The word “husbands” in the Hebrew is Baal, of which Zodhiates says the

main idea is “owner” (Zodhiates, CD). Consider also the counselors’ advice as to what to do about this and the king’s decree which stated “that every man should bear rule in his own house” (v. 22). Here was the most powerful man in the world, and he could not control his wife. One might also consider that the word “feast,” as seen in verses three and nine, is the same word and refers to a drinking bout. Intoxicating beverages often make one bold to do or say what he otherwise would not do or say, because one of their first actions on the brain is to knock out the control center.

It is this writer’s belief that, in this context, there are several things at work. Nevertheless, Vashti’s refusal on this occasion caused a terrible anger to come upon the king.

“wroth” — Qatsaph — *“To be angry, break out in anger, fly into a rage; to fret; to provoke to anger. It is a strong emotional outburst of anger and usually of a superior against an inferior”* (Zodhiates, CD).

It is well documented that Xerxes’ anger could cause him to do some foolish things.

He *“beheaded the men who had built the famous bridge of boats across the Hellespont, because a storm had destroyed it; and he commanded the sea to be scourged, and to be chained by sinking fetters in it”* (Herodotus, as quoted from Coffman who quoted Keil, Coffman, p. 249).

No matter what was meant by her showing her beauty to Xerxes and his servants, she could very quickly have been put to death. On one occasion, Xerxes had the son of Pythius cut in two, causing his whole army to march between the halves, simply because Pythius asked for his son to be allowed to help him at home while his other six sons remained in Xerxes’ army.

“He (Xerxes) was reportedly very rich and indulgent and habitually acted like an impudent, petulant brat” (Butler, p. 266).

In view of all this, the romantic idea of her refusing the king’s request because of modesty may be true in part, but it seems to this student that there was more to it than this.

Another thing which interests this writer is that Vashti is neither praised or condemned by the writer of Esther. GOD has many times recorded the action or words of people in His word without rendering an immediate verdict of guilt or innocence — simply stating what took place.

Esther 1:13-15 “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: 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;) What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?”

“Then the king said to the wise men, who knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment; and the next unto him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom), What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not done the bidding of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?” (ASV)

Xerxes was known to do some rather rash things on a moment's notice, but here, even though intoxication seemed to play a part in his original order to Vashti, he turned to his advisors for instructions on this matter. Disobeying a king was a very serious offence, and it did not matter who disobeyed him.

These wise men were those who were skilled in the law and the punishments it decreed. They seem to be the seven which are next mentioned in the text and would be considered an inner circle of advisors, sort of a cabinet.

“There were seven families of the first rank (Ezra 7:14) in Persia, from which the king was supposed to take his wives. The chiefs of each of these seven families had access to the king at all times, except when he was in the company of one of his wives” (Butler, p. 281).

The king asked what they should do to Vashti because she had refused his commandment. But notice something very important here — her punishment had to be according to the law. Xerxes was very concerned that they act in a lawful manner, and such is very commendable. The Bible clearly teaches that one must be obedient unto GOD as faithful children — to act in a lawful manner.

“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance”
(1 Peter 1:14).

Without obedience to the law, one has nothing but destruction to look forward to.

“As the nations which the LORD destroyeth

before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the LORD your GOD” (Deuteronomy 8:20).

The Bible also teaches one to obey the laws of the land in which he lives (with the notable exception of when those laws contradict GOD’S law).

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of GOD: the powers that be are ordained of GOD. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of GOD: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of GOD to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of GOD, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are GOD’S ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Romans 13:1-7).

From all which is read in the Bible, great emphasis is placed upon mankind’s obeying law. Today, it is the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2) which must be followed by all who seek GOD’S blessings.

Esther 1:16-18 “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. 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. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.”

“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 peoples that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the

queen will come abroad unto all women, to make their husbands contemptible 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. And this day will the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the deed of the queen say the like unto all the king's princes. So will there arise much contempt and wrath." (ASV)

Memucan answered for all of the advisors, and his answer contained two basic ideas which blended into one. The first was the idea of influence, and the second was headship in the home. He stated that the actions of Vashti would be copied in the nation. If she rebelled against her husband, then the women of the empire would look to her example and do the same with their husbands. People today have succumbed to the silly notion that influence and example do not exist — at least in bad areas. But when one looks at GOD's word, he sees that influence and example have played a very important role in the lives of people from the beginning. In First Kings 14:16, GOD said He would give up Israel "because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and made Israel to sin." How did Jeroboam make Israel to sin? Through his influence as leader and his example of worshiping idols. In looking up this phrase, "made Israel to sin," it was noticed that the Bible says a number of people made Israel to sin — Baasha (1 Kings 15:34), Jehu (1 Kings 16:2), Zimri (1 Kings 16:13), Omri (1 Kings 16:26), Ahab (1 Kings 22:52), and many others. Is there a pattern here? They were all kings, men in positions of authority (and thus influence). Their actions caused others to sin. There is no difference today when men such as Presidents or Congressional leaders act in an immoral or unlawful way — they will influence people to sin against GOD and each other.

"Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33, ASV).

"Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33, NKJV).

The second thing Memucan spoke of was headship in the home. He and the other counselors of this text have been criticized because they were "male chauvinists." But there is a side to what he said which is true and must be upheld, and that is the headship of the husband in a home. This is the way GOD designed it from the very beginning when He made Adam and Eve. That principle has never changed in GOD's word. But, being the head of the family does not give the

husband the right to mistreat his wife; she is not merely a piece of property.

“The headship of the husband does not mean that he can be cruel, mean, and heartless”
(Hatcher, p. 282).

The Bible teaches that one should treat all men/women just as he himself desires to be treated.

“All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Does any sane person want to be treated disrespectfully, cruelly and heartlessly? Then he should not treat others in the same way, especially his mate, because they are one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Regarding the husband/wife relationship and the way one should treat another, here is what the Holy Spirit said through Paul.

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Ephesians 5:22-29).

It is suggested by this writer that American society has become so anti-male that these counselors are judged totally by the current society's standard. The truth is that both societies have no right to develop their own standards, but are to be judged by GOD's standard.

Esther 1:19-20 *“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. 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.”

“If it please the king, let there go forth 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. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his kingdom (for it is great), all the wives will give to their husbands honor, both to great and small.” (ASV)

“If it please the king” is a subtle way to gain the king’s favor. They had determined what the law should be, but they could not implement their decision. The first thing they said was that this should be made a law of the Persians and Medes, which would make it unalterable. Thus, Vashti could never be brought back to the side of the king as his queen; all of her power would be taken away. Second, “her royal estate” was to be given to another. The “pecking order” would be the queen and then all of his concubines, whose influence would be limited. Some have suggested that these counselors wanted this done so Vashti could not gain revenge on them by being brought back to the throne. This writer believes they simply wanted to get rid of any possible influence she might have over their wives. Third, it was felt that a decree issued to this effect would cause the women of the empire to fall into line and honor their husbands through submission. Again, when one looks at the word “husband” in verse twenty, he remembers that Zodhiates says the basic idea of the Hebrew word is “owner.” One shrinks from this designation, but it should be remembered that if he had been raised in such a society, such a concept would not be offensive to him in the least. As a Christian, one should remember that any time GOD’s way for him to do things is changed by man, then someone, or society as a whole, is damaged or even destroyed with time. Let all accept the roles given to them by GOD, and He will bless them and their society.

It should be considered here that **all** men are owned by somebody!

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (Romans 6:16)?

The word “servant” is doulos — “bond servant,” or a better term would be “slave.” Every human being who has reached an accountable age is either a slave of GOD or a slave of Satan. When one has become a

slave of GOD, that person should exalt in his servitude — **it is a position of honor to be a slave of GOD!**

Another thing which should be considered is that respect and honor cannot be legislated. Respect and honor are earned by proper speech and action. Fear can be legislated. If men truly want their wives to honor them, then they must treat them with respect and honor.

Esther 1:21-22 “And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: 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.”

“And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: 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 should speak according to the language of his people.” (ASV)

Memucan's advice was considered and adopted by the king and his princes. Therefore a decree was sent out to all the people of his empire. The Persians allowed the people they conquered to keep their own languages, often allowing them to keep their own rulers, as long as they were subject to the king. In keeping with that, when they issued a decree of any kind, they would write it in the languages of these people.

The decree was two-fold in nature. First, it decreed that every man was to bear rule in his own house; he was to exercise dominion there. This indicates that any wife who disobeyed her husband was breaking the law of the land. The clause “**That every man should bear rule in his own house**” is translated as “*in order that men might be feared in their own houses*” in the LXX (Roper, p. 467). Second, “**that it should be published according to the language of every people.**” This phrase does not give the proper meaning as it is found in the KJV. The reader is urged to compare the ASV and NKJV with the KJV. The idea seems to be that, if there was more than one language spoken in a household, the language of the father was the one which must be adopted by all. Different languages, whether they are in the home or society, cause misunderstanding and a lack of co-operation. One is reminded of the tower of Babel, where language was changed by GOD so that the people could not

understand and co-operate in building the tower (Genesis 11).

Esther — Chapter Two

Esther 2:1 “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.”

“After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was pacified, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.” (ASV)

The last chapter dealt with the events surrounding the disposal of Vashti as Ahasuerus’ queen. These events took place in the third year of Ahasuerus’ reign. This chapter begins in the seventh year of Ahasuerus’ reign, according to verse sixteen.

Verse one begins with “After these things.” To what “things” does this refer? Between chapters one and two is the time Ahasuerus went to war with the Greeks and ended up being defeated by them and losing a great part of his army and fleet. So the “after these things” would seem to be speaking of all which took place in those intervening four years. Note a short history of those events as given by Roper in his studies of Herodotus’ *Histories*.

“Xerxes (Ahasuerus) had launched his campaign to conquer Greece. In 480 B.C., the vast Persian forces won victories over a much smaller Greek army at Thermopylae (on land) and at Artemisium (on the sea). However, the Persians were then beaten in the Battle of Salamis (on the sea). The next year, in 479 B.C., they suffered a decisive defeat at Plataea (on land) that brought their invasion of Greece to an end. According to Herodotus, Xerxes consoled himself in such times of distress with the pleasures of women” (p. 472).

Now after his wrath had subsided, Ahasuerus remembered Vashti. He remembered two things: (1) what she had done, and (2) what he decreed against her. It appears that he may have been remembering her with fondness and regret over what he had done, but there is not enough information to say this with certainty. It may be that the suggestion of the next few verses lends weight to these thoughts, but maybe not.

Esther 2:2-4 “Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins

sought for the king: 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 be given them: And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.”

“Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: 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 Hegai the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them; and let the maiden that pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.” (ASV)

The servants of verse two seem to be those who served him on a daily basis, i.e., his regular servants, and not the seven princes or any of his professional counselors. This conclusion is drawn from the word “ministered,” which Zodhiates’ Hebrew Lexicon defines as *“to serve (as a menial person or worshiper), minister to”* [Zodhiates, CD, (Sharath)]. These servants must have seen a depression in their king because of the defeat at the hands of the Grecians and also as he thought about Vashti. Maybe it is wishful thinking, but there seems to have been a real bond between the king and his former queen, a genuine fondness. If so, he could not reverse his decree no matter how badly he may have wanted to.

The solution the servants had was for officers to be appointed to bring all of the “fair” virgins of the land to the king.

The word “fair” comes from the word Mareh, which means *“a sight, a vision, a revelation; a mirror, looking-glass. This noun can mean almost anything connected with outward appearance, i.e., the way things look, a phenomenon, something which is usually seen (Lev. 13:3ff.), something extraordinary (Ex. 3:3), the act of looking (Is. 11:3), the faculty of seeing (Eccl. 6:9), and superficiality (1 Sam. 16:7). The word also can mean face (countenance), the part of a person which is visible to the eye (Song 2:14; 5:15). Mar’eh is often used with adjectives for fair or ugly and desirable or undesirable”* (Zodhiates, CD).

The officers were to bring these young women to the “house of the women” — his harem. These young women were brought there, probably against their will, to become at least a concubine of the king, and at best one of them was to be selected as his queen. Others would have jumped at the possibility of possibly becoming his queen. It should be remembered that once they were in the king’s harem they would never leave it.

The things for “purification” refer to precious ointments, soaps, detergents (Tamrug). These are mentioned again in verse twelve by the terms “myrrh” and “sweet odors.”

The servants’ suggestion pleased the king. Coffman says, “*After Xerxes’ return to Sushan, Herodotus tells us that he consoled himself over his shameful defeat by sensual indulgences with his harem*” (Coffman, p. 262). This well matches the description this writer has found of him in every book he has read. It fit his personality well to indulge his lusts.

One needs to again remember that Ahasuerus and Esther’s actions in this book were not judged by the writer of Esther for their morals or lack thereof. What is being presented is what GOD did providentially to preserve or save His people from being destroyed. The seed line from Abraham must be preserved for the Savior to be brought into the world. At that time, the descendants of Abraham were in Persian captivity under a pagan king.

Esther 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; 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. 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.”

“There was a certain Jew in Shushan the palace, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benja mite, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives that had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter.” (ASV)

These three verses are an introduction to the hero and heroine of the book of Esther and its two primary characters for good. In the previous verses, it was noticed that the king's officers sent to search the land for a replacement for Vashti. They needed to search no further than the capital itself; she was already near the king.

Mordecai is described first as a "**Jew**," one who is from the tribes which made up "Judah." This is the first time one finds this designation in the Scriptures for the people of GOD. From this time forward, it is noticed that that is the term which would describe those born of the seed of Abraham. Today this term is offensive to the politically correct crowd who wish to use the term "Jewish." This writer prefers the Biblical term instead of the one the politically correct crowd uses, because it is usually on the wrong side of almost every issue. Mordecai's lineage is also given, because lineage was always important to the Jews.

Regarding the carrying away into captivity of the Jews by the Babylonians, one should observe that this was done three times. The first took place in 606 B.C., with the carrying away of Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1-2). The second was in 597 B.C., when Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) was carried away (2 Kings 24:8-16). And the third in 586 B.C., with the carrying away of Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:4-12). It is the second carrying away of which this text speaks. The question must be asked — **who is spoken of as being carried away? Was it Mordecai or Kish?** If it were Mordecai, then he was over one hundred years old at the time of the immediate text, which seems highly unlikely. It would seem that Kish is the one being spoken of as being carried away and that Mordecai was simply one of the descendants of this man. Mordecai's name seems to have been derived from the chief Babylonian god — Marduk. It seems to have been common for the Babylonians to give their captives Babylonian names, i.e., Esther, Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1).

Verse seven gives the two names of the woman known as Esther. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, which is thought to mean "*myrtle*," "*which is a large evergreen shrub with fragrant flowers and spicy-sweet scented leaves*" (Butler, p. 291). Her Persian name, Esther, means "*star*" (Willis, p. 40). Hatcher says "*her Persian name is Esther, referring to the planet Venus*" (Hatcher, p. 285). Esther seems to have been orphaned at an early age and taken in by her cousin, who adopted her as his daughter, or at the least treated her as if she were his daughter. Zodhiates states the

word Dodh is a masculine noun which means “*love; one beloved, friend; relation, cousin, uncle. Thirty–eight of the fifty–eight occurrences in the kjv are translated ‘beloved’ and (except for Is. 5:1) all are in Song (e.g., Song 1:2; 2:3). Eight times doMd is translated ‘love’ and seventeen times as ‘uncle’*” (Zodhiates, CD). From this one learns that she was his cousin and not his niece, as some have portrayed her over the years.

The description of Esther should be carefully observed. First, she is described as “*fair.*” The footnote in this writer’s Bible says this word means “*fair of form.*” Second, she is called “*beautiful*” meaning “*good of countenance.*” Of the phrase “*fair and beautiful,*” Winters says, “*Esther was a perfectly formed woman, beautiful both in appearance and personality*” (Winters, p. 168). Zerr says the word “*fair*” comes “*from two originals, the one meaning ‘beautiful’ and the other meaning, ‘outline, i.e., figure or appearance’*” (Zerr, p. 337). This was a very beautiful woman, or as is sometimes heard in society today, “*easy to look at.*” But these terms also seem to refer to the inner beauty of this woman of which more will be seen later. It should be considered that outer beauty means nothing if the inner person is not beautiful. It is better to have an ugly mate who is beautiful on the inside than a beautiful one who is ugly on the inside.

The compassion of Mordecai is seen in his taking her into his home and caring for her when her parents died. The Bible has always taught the care of widows and orphans as being important to the child of GOD and is, in essence, one of the qualifying marks of GOD’s people. Truly, Mordecai was a devout servant of GOD.

“*Pure religion and undefiled before GOD and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27).

Esther 2:8-9 “*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. 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.*”

“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 taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with her portions, and the seven maidens who were meet to be given her out of the king's house: and he removed her and her maidens to the best place of the house of the women.” (ASV)

The king's command was sent throughout the land, and many maidens were brought to the king's house. These maidens were placed in the care of the eunuch Hegai. Apparently Hegai had a great say in these women's care and in who might be chosen as the next queen. It may have been his responsibility to sort through the women to pick those most suitable to the king.

Esther quickly gained the favor of Hegai, who provided her with everything she needed for the purification process. He also moved her into the choicest living quarters, along with the seven maids she was given to care for her. In looking through a number of commentaries, it surprised this writer to read that the reason she came to his favor had nothing to do with the providence of GOD. If these writers thought providence was involved in all these events, they did not mention it. Instead, they mentioned things regarding her nature as that which gained Hegai's favor toward her. The reason she gained Hegai's favor was that GOD was working to make it so, and this fact needs to be emphasized. She had indeed been brought to the kingdom for such a time as this by GOD. Those who prepare themselves to serve Him are ready when the service is required.

Esther 2:10-11 “Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.”

“Esther had not made known her people nor her kindred; for Mordecai had charged her that she should not make it known. And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what would become of her.” (ASV)

Why did Mordecai instruct Esther not to reveal her nationality? Was there a prejudice toward Jews which in some way might have brought harm to her? Did Mordecai want her to become queen and think her

nationality would somehow eliminate her? Had he heard rumors in the courtyard of powerful men plotting to destroy the Jews? It is simply not known why this information was to be kept secret, but it does become an advantage later for the Jewish people.

Verse eleven shows the care Mordecai had for Esther. Somehow he checked on her every day. How could he do this, since the women of the harem were kept from the contact of outsiders? There are several possibilities which could answer this question. (1) It is possible he was a porter at one of the gates to this area. (2) He might have already held a prominent position in the king's court. (3) Some of those who waited upon his adopted daughter may have brought messages back and forth between them (4:4). (4) Winters suggests he may have been a eunuch (p. 170). However this communication happened is not known. What is seen is his concern, as evidenced by his walking before the court of the women every day.

Esther 2:12-14 "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;) 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. 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."

"Now when the turn of every maiden was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that it had been done to her according to the law for the women twelve months (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors and with the things for the purifying of the women), then in this wise came the 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. 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, who kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and she were called by name."
(ASV)

The term "every maid" seems to indicate that many

went in unto the king. But before she went in, she had to be purified. It would seem that there is more than initially meets the eye here. **Why such a long time for the purification process?** Surely several baths and a much shorter time would suffice for the king's purposes. Perhaps the key to understanding (at least in part) what is going on here is found in Daniel. Daniel was examined to see his character and fitness to serve the king and during this time was taught the learning and tongue of the Chaldeans (Daniel 1:4). Another possible reason might be to determine whether the young woman were chaste, i.e., not with child, having not been intimate with a man. Some believe it might be because these women were taken from every area of the empire and some probably from very humble origins. They may have needed a good bathing and teaching regarding how to practice proper hygiene and act like a queen.

When each maid's time came to go into the king's chamber, she was allowed to take whatever she wanted. This probably refers to items of clothing or jewelry which would make her more attractive to him and heighten her chances of being selected as the next queen. She spent one night with him and was sent in the morning to the **"second house of the women."** One is not left to imagine what this second house was; it was the house of the king's concubines. Apparently there were three "houses" or compartments which housed the women of the king. The first was where Esther was originally taken, the house for virgins. The second was the house for concubines once they had had sexual intercourse with the king. And the third would be the quarters for the queen and her attendants.

Once a woman entered the house of the king's concubines, she would never be able to leave — virtual slavery. She would never be given in marriage to anyone else, and she would not see the king again unless he specifically called for her. What a miserable existence this must have been.

Esther 2:15-18 "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. 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. 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. 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."

"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 favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her. 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. And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained favor and kindness 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. 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 bounty of the king." (ASV)

It is not known how many women may have gone in to Ahasuerus before Esther, but it appears there were a number, because it speaks of her "turn." When her time came, she did not ask for anything special, but rather let Hegai choose what she wore. She did not need anything special, because all who looked upon her favored her. She must have been an exceptionally beautiful woman, not only physically but inwardly as well. She was in a situation where many wanted to be the queen, a competition, yet there seemed to be no jealousy by the other women toward Esther. This would be quite unusual. Again, GOD's providence is no doubt involved.

The picture this writer gets, whether accurate or not, is that Ahasuerus was so impressed with her that he immediately ended the search for a queen and named Esther his queen. In his estimation, she was head and shoulders above the rest. When looking at the rest of the book, it is obvious there was more than physical attraction here; he truly cared for her.

To celebrate finding a new queen, Xerxes did three things. (1) He threw a party among his princes and servants, even naming the feast after her — Esther's Feast. (2) He made or declared a release. The margin in this writer's Bible says the Hebrew word here means "rest." It is not known what this release was.

"Rest" has been *explained by various commentators as (a) release from paying taxes; (b) release from forced labor; (c) release of*

some prisoners; (d) release from military service”

(Butler, p. 300).

It probably means a holiday was declared. (3) Ahasuerus gave gifts out according to the state of the king. **To whom were these gifts given?** They seem to have been in proportion to the king's wealth. This would have been some pretty expensive gifts.

“Is there any man so blind as not to perceive that it was entirely providential that one of the small number of captive Jews should be found more beautiful than all the virgins of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces? Can any one question that God gave her that exquisite loveliness for the very occasion” (Carson, Confidence in God in Times of Danger — Divine Providence).

Esther 2:19-20 “And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. 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.”

“And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate. Esther had not yet made known 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.” (ASV)

This gathering of virgins appears to be a second gathering. **Why?** A queen had been chosen. Some have speculated that these were young women from far reaches of the empire which had not arrived as yet. Others think it may have been the continuing development of his harem. Whatever it was, there is not enough information to make a judgment on the matter.

As yet Esther had not revealed her nationality. This was in obedience to her cousin's command. The point is made that she honored the wishes of her cousin who had raised her as his own child. When Esther took the throne, she did not forget or turn her back on the one who had cared for her in her youth. Again, Esther's noble nature is seen. She respected her cousin and his judgment and thus abided by his instructions, even though she was no longer under his authority.

Esther 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. And the

thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name. 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.”

“In those days, while Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those that kept the threshold, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the thing became known to Mordecai, who showed it unto Esther the queen; and Esther told the king thereof in Mordecai's name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, and it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.”
(ASV)

“**chamberlain**” comes from the Hebrew word Saris. *“This masc. noun stems from an unused root which meant to castrate. Therefore, the noun means a eunuch, a valet, a courtier, a minister, a chamberlain, an officer”* (Zodhiates, CD).

The text does not say why these two eunuchs were angry with the king. It simply states that they were, and they were going to do something about it. Political intrigue was nothing unusual in Persian courts, and in fact, Xerxes was later assassinated.

“Xerxes was ultimately murdered by Artabanus, the captain of the guard, and Aspamitras, a chamberlain and eunuch” (Barnes, p. 494).

Mordecai found out about the plot. Again, one is not told how he found out, but simply that he did. Jewish tradition says he knew a number of languages and overheard their conversation about the plot. Josephus tells of another Jew, who served in the palace, who overheard the plot and relayed the information to Mordecai. He passed it on to Esther who, in turn, passed it to the king. The only thing of real concern here is that Mordecai passed the information on, however he received it, and this would later prove to be the undoing of Haman.

Esther declared the plot to Ahasuerus and made sure he knew that Mordecai was the one who gave her the information. An investigation was held, and when the charges were proven to be true, Bigthan and Teresh were **“hanged.”** The Western idea of hanging is a rope around the neck which either snaps the neck or strangles the person to death. But the execution of these men was probably accomplished by crucifixion or impaling.

“Archaeological inscriptions have been found of the Mesopotamian civilizations which confirm that impaling victims on stakes was a method of execution” (Butler, p. 305).

Clarke gives this vivid picture of what impaling was.

“A pointed stake is set upright in the ground, and the culprit is taken, placed on the sharp point, and then pulled down by his legs till the stake that went in at the fundament passes up through the body and comes out by the side of the neck”

(Clarke, p. 812).

It might be thought that death would occur immediately, but sadly the victim of such inhumane treatment could live for some time.

It should also be observed that these events were carefully recorded in the king’s book of chronicles. All important events were kept in a record which could be reviewed at a later date. Someone has said that these records are much like those one finds in Presidential libraries today.

Esther — Chapter Three

Esther 3:1-2 *“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. 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.”*

“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. And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed down, and did reverence to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not down, nor did him reverence.” (ASV)

After the events of chapter two, possibly as much as five years later, Haman was promoted to “Prime Minister” of Persia. The reason for this promotion is not given, but there were some honors associated with this position.

One is also told that he was the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. This designation has caused many, including Josephus the historian, to assert that Haman was an Amalekite, a descendant of King Agag. It is remembered that the Amalekites were to have been destroyed utterly by GOD’s people, but possibly they were not (1 Samuel 15). If Haman were a descendant

of the Amalekites, then it would explain his hatred of the Jews and his seeking to destroy them utterly. If not, then his actions were based on pride and utter contempt for anyone who would not recognize his “greatness.” The latter of these two seems to be the case for his anger.

The exact reason for Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman is not specifically stated in the text (“reverenced” -- shachah -- “to bow down” -- Thayer). The answer may be found in verse four, where Mordecai announced the fact that he was a Jew. If this were the case, then it may imply that there was a religious reason for his refusal. Exodus 20:1-6 shows that the Jews were commanded by GOD not to make images of anything or anyone, nor were they to bow down to them. The context of that passage deals with worship. Man must never worship the things which GOD has created nor any imaginary being or thing, but only GOD. If bowing before Haman were considered some religious thing, i.e., Haman was claiming some form of deity, then Mordecai was right in refusing to bow to him. On the other hand, it is not wrong to show respect to one in a position of authority, and in fact it seems to be implied in GOD’s word for one to so do. It was not wrong to bow to the king, unless doing so was an act of worshiping him. When observing the text, it says the people “bowed and reverenced” Haman by the king’s command. There seems to be little doubt that this involved some kind of worship.

Did Mordecai violate the command of the king? Yes he did. Interestingly enough, the word “commanded” in this verse is different from the word “law” in the first chapter. The word “law” in chapter one seems to be a stronger word than the one used here. It is this writer’s belief that when the terms “bowed down” and “reverence” are used together here, an act of worship is intended to be understood.

Esther 3:3-6 “Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? 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. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. 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.”

“Then the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? 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. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not down, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. But he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had made known to 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.” (ASV)

The king's servants which daily gathered at the gate observed Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman and questioned him about it. It does not seem to this writer that they were concerned about a lack of respect shown to Haman. Rather, they asked why Mordecai was disobeying the king's command. They may have reasoned, *Why do we have to do this but you do not?*”

The text says they spoke to Mordecai daily about why he would not reverence Haman. But Mordecai would not hearken to them.

“**hearkened**” — Shama — “*to hear with attention or obedience; to give undivided listening attention*” (Zodhiates, CD).

From this, it seems they may have been trying to get Mordecai to heed their advice to go ahead and reverence Haman. Possibly they began by desiring that no harm should come to Mordecai; perhaps they had a genuine care for him, not wishing the king's wrath to fall upon him.

Apparently the only reason Mordecai gave for refusing to give Haman reverence was the fact that he was a Jew. Again this seems to imply that there is a religious reason behind his refusal. As stated before, there is no command not to give normal reverence/respect to a superior from an inferior in the Scriptures.

“**And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth**” (Genesis 23:7).

“**David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself**” (1 Samuel 24:8).

“**Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the**

king. And the king said, What wouldst thou” (1 Kings 1:16)?

But this seems to be a religious reverence which was being demanded, and he could not perform such an act and be pleasing to GOD. This shows that, above all else, no matter what the consequences, one’s goal should be to please GOD first. When they could not convince Mordecai, they went to Haman to see if the fact that Mordecai was a Jew was sufficient reason to exempt him from the command of the king.

“The midrash says that Haman ‘attached an embroidered image to his garment upon his breast, and everyone who bowed down to Haman bowed down to the image’” (Roper, p. 490).

It appears that Haman had not noticed Mordecai’s refusal to bow to him until these men pointed it out. But once it was pointed out, and he observed it for himself, his pride took over. He must have reasoned something like this, *“The king has made me the greatest in the land next to himself, so how dare anyone refuse to honor me in this way!”* The text says that Haman was filled with wrath over what he perceived to be a personal insult.

“wrath” — Chemah — “warmth, heat, anger, wrath, rage, indignation; poison” (Zodhiates, CD).

Haman’s pride caused him to be so full of wrath that he could not reason correctly. He decided that punishing Mordecai was not enough, but rather he would kill all the Jews because of Mordecai’s perceived rebellion.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

What a warning Haman is to all who observe this book. His pride caused him to think he was better than those around him. But his pride destroyed him.

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

“A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).

Esther 3:7 *“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.”*

“In the first month, which 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, which is the month Adar.” (ASV)

This passage simply shows the passing of time before Haman executed his plan to exterminate the Jews. The decision was made based on the casting of lots (“Pur”) to determine the best day to accomplish his purpose. This superstitious way of determining times has often been used in oriental societies, while other societies have not been free from using other methods to determine the same thing. Today, the horoscope has often been used by people to determine when they should do something they wish to do, and when it would be a bad time to try to accomplish some venture. Apparently this process of casting lots took some time, as they met with Haman from day to day. The time frame here is eleven months. The day the massacre was to take place was the month of Adar. This corresponds to February/March on today’s calendar.

The lot being cast by GOD’s people should be considered. Unlike the idolaters, when GOD’s people cast the lot, GOD determined the answer. With His people it was not a matter of chance, as it was for the Persians.

“The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Proverbs 16:33).

Esther 3:8-9 “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. 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.”

“And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those that have the charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.” (ASV)

Haman told the king that there was a nationality of people in his kingdom who followed different laws from those of the king and were law breakers. Indeed, the laws of the Jews were different from the laws of the

Persians, and for that matter, different from those of any nation. And, it is true that the Jews would not obey the laws of the king when those laws broke GOD's laws. But Haman seemed to be implying that they did not obey any of the laws of the king, but were a lawless, rebellious people who did not benefit society. He stated that, since these people were so horrible, there was no benefit to the king to keep them alive.

The question comes to mind, **Did he tell the king who these people were or just leave it as general as our text implies?** Surely the king would ask or demand to know who such a people were. If this writer were king, his suspicions would have been raised if he were told there were enemies of the kingdom and the one accusing them was going to pay for their extermination. But then, this writer is not Xerxes. The sum Haman was willing to give was enormous — ten thousand talents of silver. Winters estimates this at three hundred and seventy-five thousand tons of silver. At \$47.00 an ounce, this would be about \$493,500,000,000.00 (April 2011).

“According to Herodotus, the regular revenue of the Persian king consisted of 14,560 silver talents” (Barnes, p. 495).

There are some who believe Haman was not going to take this money from his own accounts. Rather it would come from the money and possessions taken from those he killed. If this were true then it indicates that the Jews had accumulated substantial wealth while in captivity.

Esther 3:10-11 “And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. 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.”

“And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. 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.” (ASV)

The ring Ahasuerus gave to Haman was the signet ring, a royal seal which proved that the document was official. This is still done, even in American society. Several years ago, this writer needed an original of his birth certificate. The copy would not do, because it did not have the imprint of the seal of the county in which he was born to make it official. He had to send a letter with payment to the county, and they sent back an

officially sealed copy. A notary public does the same thing for documents, impressing a seal signifying that the document is official. Rulers in that time often wore rings which contained their royal seals. In this way, wherever they were, if a decree needed to be made, the wax could be dropped onto the document and officially sealed.

The thought that Haman was a descendant of Agag is possibly enforced here by the fact the Spirit again used the formula of “Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite” (v. 1). And here the added mention is made of his being the “Jew’s enemy.”

In verse nine, Haman offered to give Ahasuerus ten thousand talents of silver for the privilege of killing the Jews. When one looks at verse eleven, he sees the king telling Haman, “The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.” Scholars are divided over who got the silver. At first glance, one would probably say that Ahasuerus refused the silver. But looking at chapter four and verse seven, Mordecai talked about the silver given to Ahasuerus by Haman. The second thought on this passage is that the king was saying, “*You can do whatever you wish with these people (Jews) and their wealth (silver).*” In other words, the spoils would belong to Haman and would allow him to recoup what he paid the king. This might also give those who would help him an incentive to accomplish this evil deed, because they probably would benefit from destroying the Jews. The old saying may apply here, “*To the victor belongs the spoils.*”

Esther 3:12-15 “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. 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. 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. 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.”

“Then were the king’s scribes called in the first month, on the thirteenth day thereof; and there was written according to all that Haman commanded unto the king’s satraps, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the princes of every people, to every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and it was sealed with the king’s ring. And letters were sent by posts into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to slay, 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. A copy of the writing, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published unto all the peoples, that they should be ready against that day. The posts went forth in haste by the king’s commandment, and the decree was given out in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed.”
(ASV)

The scribes, those who recorded the deeds and words of the king, were called. The letter was drafted which detailed the coming massacre, and Ahasuerus gave orders for it to be published throughout the empire. The date set for the slaughter was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, eleven months to the day from when the law was signed. The scribes were told that this decree was to be written in the languages of all the people he governed. Also notice the day the command was drafted, the thirteenth day of the first month. The Passover, which signified the deliverance of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, was observed on the fourteenth day of the first month. Thus, this decree to annihilate the Jews was given the day before they were to celebrate the greatest deliverance a people had ever had. If the Jews in Persia were celebrating the Passover as they should, it would be pretty hard to celebrate knowing this edict had been issued.

Why did they delay execution of the command for eleven months? Commentators puzzle over this, but the answer is simple and has already been stated. Haman was superstitious and cast lots to find out the best time for enacting the massacre. Further, it would have taken time to publish this decree throughout the empire.

How were the letters sent throughout such a vast empire? By post. The “posts” spoken of here were the equivalent of our postmen. It was their job to carry “mail” throughout the empire. The Hebrew word for

“posts” here is haratzim, which literally means “the runners” (Butler, p. 317).

The Persian postal system “*was one of the outstanding contributions of the Persian culture to the civilizations following theirs — a fast and proficient postal system...Persian mail-carriers were mounted on fast horses and had relay stations every fourteen miles, much like the Pony Express in nineteenth century America*” (Butler, IBID).

With this postal system, it would not take more than three weeks for any decree of Ahasuerus to reach the farthest place in his realm.

The destruction of the Jews was to take place in one day, which implies that they could not be killed on the day following, the fourteenth day of the twelfth month. Further, those who did the killing were allowed to take the spoil — the possessions of their victims. It can easily be seen how a mob mentality would develop. Further, it is known from studying Ezra that some of the people had inter-married with the people of the land. *Would this not allow these mobs to kill everyone linked to them in any way?* Once such a thing got started, it would be very hard to stop it.

Verse fifteen is quite interesting. The decree was made and sent out hastily, and then the reaction of three parties was seen: Ahasuerus, Haman, and the people of Shushan. Ahasuerus and Haman had the same reaction. They were “drinking buddies,” so they sat down to drink.

“We may be sure these two men had different motives for engaging in a round of imbibing. The king thought he was celebrating a fortunate escape from some national disaster at the hands of a gang of evil men. Haman thought he was regaling himself over a fiendish revenge for his wounded pride” (Zerr, p. 341).

But the people of Shushan, the capital, were “perplexed” over this command.

“perplexed” – buwk – “to involve - be entangled,” i.e., confused (Zodhiates, CD).

They were filled with uncertainty, puzzled over this command. And well they should have been, for there is no evidence that the Jews had caused trouble in the land during or after their captivity. They would question why the king issued such an order, and possibly ask if he had gone crazy. They might even be inclined to wonder if he would do this to some other group when he got through with the Jews. Further, if they had no knowledge of the Jews among them, *why would they be*

confused? It would seem they were perplexed because they knew Jews among them and knew they were not the evil people they were portrayed to be by Haman.

Esther — Chapter Four

Esther 4:1-3 “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; And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 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.”

“Now when Mordecai knew 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; and he came even before the king's gate: for none might enter within the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 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.” (ASV)

The word “perceived” is from Yadha, which means “*to perceive, understand, acquire knowledge, know, discern*” (Zodhaites, CD).

It is fair to say that Mordecai investigated the matter, and then he acted. He did not hear something and proceed to protest or raise a big fuss about it. When people go off half-cocked, they usually come to wish they had not. Mordecai investigated, and when he found that the Jewish nation was facing imminent annihilation, then he acted.

Mordecai put on sackcloth and ashes, which was a public display of anguish and extreme agony over something. Sometimes it was personal, and at others — like here — it was national. Sackcloth is thought to have been a course garment made of hair, which would be unpleasant if worn next to the skin. Notice that he did not do this in his home, but went out into the street and through the main part of the city to the king's palace. All the time he was crying with a loud voice with bitter outbursts. Sackcloth was sometimes worn to indicate repentance and confession of sin.

“In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books

the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord GOD, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my GOD, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful GOD, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love Him, and to them that keep His commandments” (Daniel 9:1-4).

But when he came to the king's gate, he could not go further because a law had been passed which forbade anyone from coming into the palace area in mourning. Kings quite often refused to allow anyone to come before them in mourning. Things had to be kept on a happy level of gaiety. So Mordecai went as far as he could, probably knowing Esther would become aware of his mourning and inquire about it. It seems possible from this account that Esther was secluded in such a way that she would not know what was going on in the kingdom. It is obvious here that she did not know about this decree against her people. But it is also seen in this account that she and Mordecai had people who relayed information between them.

Throughout the nation, as the word spread, the Jews began acting in the same way as Mordecai. Interestingly here, one finds them “lying” in the ashes.

“Sometimes the mourner sat in the ashes (Job 2:8; Jonah 3:6), placed them on the head (2 Sam. 13:19), or wallowed in them (Jer. 6:26; Ezekiel 27:30)” (Winters, p. 181).

Let each one who reads these words ask himself two questions. Does he mourn when he sees his people (the church) suffering? Does he mourn when he sees the cause of Christ suffer some defeat?

Esther 4:4-9 “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. 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. So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. 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. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.”

“And Esther's maidens and her chamberlains came and told it her; and the queen was exceedingly grieved: and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take his sackcloth from off him; but he received it not. Then called Esther for Hathach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and charged him to go to Mordecai, to know what this was, and why it was. So Hathach went forth to Mordecai unto the broad place of the city, which was before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and the exact sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show 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. And Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.”
(ASV)

Mordecai placed himself near enough to the queen's quarters so as to be noticed by her servants. This indicates that the servants knew there was a special relationship between her and Mordecai. It may have been through their own observation, or it may be that she had instructed them to keep her informed regarding him.

When Esther's servants reported that Mordecai was sitting in sackcloth, she showed her desire to help him by sending a change of raiment. But Mordecai refused to change his present position. By changing his garments, he would have been allowed to enter the king's gate, but the situation would not have been changed. Esther obviously did not know why Mordecai was expressing such grief, but his refusal of the clothes she sent let her know this was very serious. It is further seen that all of Shushan was in an uproar over the decree which was made, yet Esther knew nothing about it. This indicates the isolation which the king's harem endured.

Upon Mordecai's initial refusal of help from her, Esther called for the eunuch Hatach, who had been especially assigned by the king to take care of her needs. She instructed him to find out what the problem with Mordecai was and report back to her. Mordecai told him all that had been declared. Notice the detail of the money given to Ahasuerus' treasury by Haman. It

is obvious that Mordecai held a position which allowed him to have information not necessarily available to others. Again, it also shows he had well researched these events so as to have all the facts before acting in such a bold way. Mordecai even gave Hatach a copy of the king's decree in this matter.

But Mordecai did not leave matters there. Whereas he had previously told Esther to keep her nationality a secret, he now demanded that she go to the king and plead for herself and her people. This demand asked her to risk her life for her people.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Esther's love would be put to the test. **Did she truly love Mordecai and her people enough to put her life on the line for them? Did she love GOD's people and GOD's laws enough to give up all of her physical possessions for them? Do Christians love GOD enough to give up everything in this life to please Him if called upon to do so?**

Hatach faithfully fulfilled the charge of both Esther and Mordecai, reporting everything Mordecai told him.

Esther 4:10-12 “Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; All the king's servants, and the people of 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. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.”

“Then Esther spake unto Hathach, and gave him a message unto Mordecai saying: All the king's servants, and the people of 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 for him, that he be put to death, except those 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. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.”
(ASV)

When Esther heard the message of Mordecai, she sent Hatach back, basically saying that it was illegal for her simply to go to the king. The law had been established that no one could go to the king unless he were personally invited by him. To do so was to invite death. Many believe there were guards which had orders to kill anyone who came into the king's presence

uninvited. This law had probably been instituted as a means of protecting the king from assassination. The same kind of protection is afforded to the President of the United States — the Secret Service. They may not immediately kill someone who enters the White House uninvited, but they will disable him as quickly as possible, and if need be will kill him. The only thing which would save an uninvited person in the king's room was his extension of his sceptre.

Was Esther making excuses? Was she thinking, "What can I possibly do?" Was she afraid? It is quite possible that all these emotions and feelings were in her mind. She had not been summoned by the king for thirty days. This seems to be unusual and possibly had her wondering if she had displeased him. It may have been that some pressing matter had occupied his time, and he did not have time to think about too many other things. Whatever the reason, she felt uneasy about approaching the king and expressed such. The bravest of people hesitate from time to time and even sometimes back away from their responsibilities. Remember the excuses offered by the great man Moses when GOD called him to deliver Israel from Egypt (Exodus 4).

Esther 4:13-14 "Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. 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?"

"Then Mordecai bade them return answer unto Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house will perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (ASV)

Mordecai's answer was right. Because she was the queen, she need not think she was insulated from the decree formulated by Haman. Mordecai also warned her of the consequences of inaction. Mordecai knew the prophecies and knew that GOD had promised to continue with the Israelite people until a Messiah would come through them. Thus, Mordecai knew that this plot of Haman's could and would be overthrown by GOD. The question was — Whom would GOD choose to void

Haman's plan? Mordecai was certain that Esther was the one whom GOD had chosen. But since GOD has given man free moral choice, Esther could refuse to take advantage of the position in which GOD had put her. Mordecai warned her that, if she did not act, then GOD would choose another to save His people; but she would stand condemned.

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

Mordecai told her she had an opportunity to do good, and she must accept her responsibility under those circumstances. All have a responsibility to do the best they can under whatever circumstances they may find themselves. That means one **must** take advantage of whatever opportunity he may have to do GOD's will.

Even though the term “GOD” is not used in this book, it is evident that GOD is being referenced when Mordecai said, **“enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”** What an exhibition of faith Mordecai showed at this time. GOD had promised a Messiah through the tribe of Judah and it would be done as He had said!

Esther 4:15-17 **“Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, 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. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.”**

“Then Esther bade them return answer unto Mordecai, 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 in like manner; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.” (ASV)

Probably after some contemplation, Esther sent word back to Mordecai that she would go in to the king, even though her doing so would violate the law. But before she did this, she commanded Mordecai to gather the Jews of Shushan to fast for three days. She said that she and her maids would do the same thing. The book of Esther is amazing from the standpoint that GOD and prayer are not mentioned one time in it. But as one reads the book, there is no doubt that the providence of GOD is at work. Further, **“fasting”** is spoken of, which implies prayer was also taking place.

One thing to be assured of — “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). With all of this fasting (and prayer), how could Esther’s mission be a failure? There is a lesson here for the church today. When faced with some great difficulty or decision to be made, the church should unite in humble petitions to GOD.

Notice the resignation of Esther to her possible fate. She knew that what she was going to attempt to do was right, but if it were not GOD’s will, she was willing to die. This reminds one of a passage in Daniel and the answer of three young men to the king.

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our GOD whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).

One ought always to be willing to pay whatever consequence comes his way for doing what is right in GOD’s sight.

Mordecai did exactly what Esther commanded him. What a pair this was, each giving the other commands, and both obeying them.

“From this point on Esther, who had up till now done as Mordecai told her, herself takes the lead and assumes responsibility in her own right” (Joyce G. Baldwin, **Esther**, Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill, p. 76).

In the next chapter, Esther will be seen to break the Persian law with regard to approaching the king without invitation. Christians are taught to obey the laws of the land.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of GOD: the powers that be are ordained of GOD. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of GOD: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (Romans 13:1-2).

“Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is

the will of GOD, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of GOD. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear GOD. Honour the king” (1 Peter 2:13-17).

Is it ever proper then for a Christian to disobey the laws of the land? What if obeying the law of the land violates one’s conscience? The conscience should never be disobeyed.

“he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

“Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Timothy 3:9).

What if the law of the land demands one to do something which GOD clearly states or implies is contrary to His will? Examples: murder (abortion); acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle with all the rights of marriage, et cetera.

Esther — Chapter Five

Esther 5:1-2 “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. 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.”

“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 entrance of the house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor 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.” (ASV)

The third day spoken of here was probably the third day of the fast. There is no doubt that she and the Jews of Shushan had been earnestly praying for her safety and for the king’s willingness to accept her petition. She had prepared herself spiritually to undertake this life-and-death situation.

Her beauty had previously impressed the king, so

now she wisely dressed in her royal apparel. With all the Bible says about her beauty and the favor she gained from those who merely looked upon her, she must have indeed been striking. Since the king had not seen her in thirty days, this would undoubtedly work to her advantage.

The picture given is of a court where the king faced the door, probably across a wide-open space. He would naturally be surrounded by advisors, because this seems not to be a place of rest but, in essence, a place to conduct business and judgments as needed.

Verse two shows that Esther had entered the court and stood waiting. It is hard to imagine the thoughts which must have been going through her mind. She knew that if the king ignored her, she would be executed, and she apparently was not sure he would extend mercy for intruding on "his space." Obviously, she hoped for the best; yet there must have also been a sense of foreboding. The text says that when the king saw her, "she obtained favor in his sight." The noted scholar, Adam Clarke, spoke about the above phrase.

"The Septuagint represents 'the king as being at first greatly enraged when he saw Esther, because she had appeared before him unveiled; and she, perceiving this, was so terrified that she fainted away; on which the king, touched with tenderness, sprung from his throne, took her up in his arms, laid the golden sceptre on her neck, and spoke to her in the most endearing manner.' This is more circumstantial than the Hebrew, but it is not contrary to it" (Clarke, p. 818).

Nothing along these lines was found in anything else this writer read, nor does he find support for it in the limited use of the Hebrew language which he possesses. Second, it is doubtful this was the case, especially when one sees that he was willing to give her up to half of his kingdom (v. 3) if such were her request. **What caused the king to show favor to Esther?** This writer believes it must have been some providential act on GOD's part.

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will" (Proverbs 21:1).

Ahasuerus held the golden sceptre out to Esther, the token that her presence was welcomed. This sceptre was the symbol of his authority, and it can easily be imagined that this was all Esther saw until it was extended to her. Notice the humility of Esther and imagine how she must have unassumingly approached

her king and husband. She came close enough for him to extend the sceptre and for her to reach out and touch the top, which seems to be an act designed to show the sovereignty of the king and her submission to his rule.

Esther 5:3-5 “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. 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. 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.”

“Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom. And Esther said, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that it may be done as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.” (ASV)

It is obvious that the king knew there was something very important which his queen needed to ask him. **Otherwise, why would she have risked her life to approach him?** He immediately asked her what she desired. Notice the king said he would grant her request even before she made it known to him. He even went so far as to say he would grant her up to half of his kingdom. This cannot help but remind Bible students of another king in Mark 6:21-28. But there is a difference between these two kings. Herod made his offer to Salome because of his drunken lust, while Ahasuerus makes his offer out of genuine love for Esther. Further, there appears to be a trust of her good judgment here — he knew she would not make an inappropriate request. There is also a difference between these two women. Salome was impulsive and immoral, thinking only of what she could get, obeying a human being instead of GOD. Esther was just the opposite in all of these areas.

When one reads this book for the very first time, he may be surprised at Esther’s answer in verse five. There was a pressing issue at hand which she had risked her life to pursue. **This being the case, why did she not ask her petition right now?** Instead, she invited the king and his right-hand man (Haman) to come to a feast she prepared. This was unusual in itself, since everything this writer has read suggests the rarity of anyone but the king eating with his queen. It has often

been stated that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach.

Immediately Ahasuerus granted his queen's request, even sending word to Haman to present himself immediately for this feast. His words were "make haste." "Do not delay your coming; put aside everything which might hinder you from coming." Again, Ahasuerus seemed to understand that there was something very important on the queen's mind, which will be seen in the next passage.

Roper says the Babylonian Talmud gives four possible reasons worth considering as to why Esther wanted Haman at the feasts to which she had invited him to.

"(1) She was setting a trap for Haman (Rabbi Eleazar); (2) she wanted him to be at hand when she accused him (Rabbi Jose); (3) she did not want to give him the opportunity to form a conspiracy and rebel (Rabbi Meir); and (4) she wanted to prevent Ahasuerus, an erratic king, from having the time to change his mind (Rabban Gamaliel)" (p. 521).

All of these, if true, would have been wise strategy on her part.

Esther 5:6-8 "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. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; 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 Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said."

"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. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is: if I have found favor 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 Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said." (ASV)

At Esther's feast, the king again asked her what her request was. Notice that when he said this to her, that it was called the banquet of wine. There seem to have been two parts to many of these feasts. After the food had been eaten, there seems to be a general time when the wine was brought out. This might correspond to

today's coffee after a meal. The king again stated that he would give her her request, up to half of his kingdom.

Instead of announcing her petition, Esther asked them to attend another feast on the next day, at which time she said she would make her request known. **Why did Esther delay her supplication?**

“(1) To her prudence as she sought more time to ingratiate herself with the king, (2) or that her heart failed her as she did not find sufficient courage to make it known without further time for prayer, or (3) that it was due to God’s overruling providence which would use the intervening time prior to that second banquet to make the granting of Esther’s petition absolute and certain”

(Matthew Henry Commentary, p. 1136).

Viewing the rest of this text, there is no doubt in this writer’s mind that GOD’s providence was involved so that the events of Haman’s humiliation and Mordecai’s honors could be seen. It should be noted that those events further incensed Haman and led to the rash act which sealed his fate (chapter seven).

Esther 5:9-10 “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. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.”

“Then went Haman forth that day joyful and glad of heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up nor moved for him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself, and went home; and he sent and fetched his friends and Zeresh his wife.” (ASV)

Haman had just experienced a meal with the king and queen. Being the only guest, what an honor he had experienced. He left the banquet with a heart full of joy — a “glad heart” — a heart full of pride. How quickly this changed. His change of heart came not from a major disaster which suddenly struck, but rather because he saw one person – Mordecai. Haman was an important man in the empire, the prime minister. But Mordecai would not stand up when he came near and in fact did not even move out of his way for him to pass by. His joy seemed instantaneously to turn to a heated rage because one man would not show him the honor he thought he deserved. But Haman was in public and had enough control to realize he could not simply strike

out at Mordecai.

When Haman reached home, he called for his friends and wife so he could brag about how great a man he was. How shallow he was, for the greatest men do not have to brag upon themselves.

“He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12).

Esther 5:11-13 “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. 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. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.”

“And Haman recounted unto them 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. 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 also am I invited by her together with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.” (ASV)

Haman gathered his friends and started bragging about how great he was. He started by rehearsing his great wealth. He had to be very wealthy to offer to pay the king three hundred and seventy-five tons of silver to exterminate the Jews (3:9). Next he talked of his multitude of children (ten sons). Among the Persians, it is believed that, the more sons a man had, the greater he was.

“Next to prowess in arms, it was regarded as the greatest proof of manly excellence in Persia to be the father of many sons” (Herodotus quoted by Zerr, p. 498).

Third, Haman said, *“Look at me. I am the second greatest man in all the kingdom. I am the favorite of the king, and he has shown this by all the promotions I have received.”* And fourth, he thought he was also the queen's favorite. His reasoning seems to be, *“Why else would she invite only me to a banquet with her and the king?”* Little did he realize that he was not her favorite, but instead she was preparing his downfall. He was

saying, “*I am so favored that she has even invited me to another banquet tomorrow, just Esther, Ahasuerus and ME.*”

Notice that this man was greatly blessed — by earthly standards, he had it all. But amidst all of his blessings and advantages, there is a thorn which he allowed to irritate him beyond measure — that old Jew Mordecai. Haman said, “*yet all this availeth me nothing.*” All he had to do was look at Mordecai and forget all that he had and was. This is indeed the mark of a little man. As a Christian, let one not be a little man. No matter what happens to one in this life, he has been blessed far more than he deserves!

Esther 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.*”

“Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and in the morning 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.” (ASV)

His friends basically were saying that there was no reason for him to be so miserable when there was a ready solution to his unhappiness — just have Mordecai executed. This is the same thing, in essence, as that which was done to Jesus. The Jews could not get Him to compromise or give them the honor they thought they deserved, so they got rid of Him. Haman’s friends even suggested what means of execution should be used — the gallows. In the Bible margin, the word “**gallows**” is a “tree” in the Hebrew.

“A gallows, in the ordinary sense, is scarcely intended, since hanging was not a Persian punishment. The intention, no doubt, was to crucify or impale Mordecai” (Barnes, p. 498).

“Both from the written witness of Herodotus and from excavated stone reliefs, we know that the Persians built ‘gallows’ that were wooden stakes on which they impaled, not asphyxiated their victims” (Jobes as quoted by Roper, p. 525).

Haman’s “**friends**” told him to build this gallows fifty cubits high. This would have put him at least seventy-five feet in the air. **Did he follow their suggestion to the**

letter or simply build a sufficient structure to impale Mordecai? Who knows? It seems to this writer that they were saying to make an example of Mordecai, to make a spectacle out of him. This made Haman so happy to think that he could get rid of this disrespectful Jew. Little did he realize how quickly this was all going to change and how quickly he would lose all his wealth and power. He built his own gallows.

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

“A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

Esther — Chapter Six

Esther 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. 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. 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.”

“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. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of those that kept the threshold, who had sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the king said, What honor and dignity hath been bestowed on Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.” (ASV)

On the very night that Haman's friends and wife had encouraged him to ask for the life of Mordecai, the king could not sleep. This writer has had sleepless nights, sometimes because there was something troubling him which needed to be sorted out. But at other times, there have been sleepless nights for no known reason. On those nights, he figured he might as well do something profitable with that time, and so he read or studied. Ahasuerus called for the chronicles of the kings, which were basically records, or a history, of all

he had done. Was his sleeplessness by chance, or was the providence of GOD working here? Was it mere chance that he asked for the chronicles to be read to him, or was it the providence of GOD? Was it mere chance that the scroll brought to him was the one with Mordecai's account, or was it providence? Was it mere chance that this was the very night before Haman would ask for the life of Mordecai, or was it providence? How can providence in this record be denied by any rational man???

As the reader read to the king, the record of Mordecai's saving the king's life was read. In chapter two, one reads of the account of Mordecai's discovery of the plot of Bigthana and Teresh to kill the king and of his reporting it to Esther, who in turn reported it to Ahasuerus. When investigation was made, the two men were found guilty and hanged. Again the question is asked — Was it merely chance that the chronicles were opened so this account would be read, or was it the providence of GOD working?

The king asked what reward had been given to Mordecai for saving his life, but surprisingly the answer was none. This went against the whole grain of Persian kings.

“According to Herodotus those who had done great deeds of honor and benefit to the king of Persia had their names written on a special roll of honor and they were esteemed as a special class of people. It would be a serious violation of Persian protocol and law and a great dishonor to the emperor should he not honor someone who had saved his life” (Butler, p. 344).

Again, since it was the normal thing to honor someone who did a great service to the king, was it mere chance that Mordecai had received no reward for his actions, or was this the providence of GOD working toward a greater end?

This writer believes that anyone who cannot see the providence of GOD working in this is either unable to comprehend the Scriptures or prejudiced against the working of GOD in the affairs of men.

Esther 6:4-5 “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. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.”

“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. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in." (ASV)

Ahasuerus appeared to be anxious to ask someone for advice on how to reward the man who saved his life. Was this because the king did not know how to reward someone for a good deed? He asked who was in the court, and the answer was Haman. Who better to give advice than his right-hand man? But Haman was not there for any good purpose, but rather to approach the king and ask for Mordecai's life, the very man the king intended to honor. Again it is asked — Was Haman in the court at this time by accident? Was it accidental that the king asked him for advice on how to reward Mordecai? Or were these events the providence of GOD?

Esther 6:6-9 "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? And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, 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: 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."

"So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor? Now Haman said in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself? And Haman said unto the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and on the head of which a crown royal is set: and let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man therewith whom the king delighteth to honor, and cause him to ride 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 honor." (ASV)

When Ahasuerus asked what should be done to a man whom the king wanted to honor, the vanity and pride of Haman caused him to think that there was no one else the king would want to honor but himself.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

“A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit” (Proverbs 29:23).

In his pride, Haman put forth the proposition that such a man should be arrayed in royal apparel and ride the king's horse. The crown he proposed has been a source of puzzlement. It is thought by some that this was the royal crown of Ahasuerus, while others think it was a kingly headdress placed on the horse's head so it would definitely be known that it was the king's horse. And finally, he thought that one of the highest princes of the land should lead the horse through the streets, proclaiming in a loud voice, *“This is what is done to a man the king desires to honor.”*

The arrogance and pride of Haman are clearly seen. He had chosen the things which he desired, and it might be added, things which might prepare the way for him to try to overthrow the king himself. There is no doubt that Haman thought he was the man who would be honored. This writer can well imagine that Haman could already see himself on the king's horse being led through the streets, and he could also see the astonishment his friends would feel at the elevation to which he had been raised.

“The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity” (Psalm 94:11).

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind” (Ephesians 4:17).

Esther 6:10-11 “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. 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.”

“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. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and caused him to ride through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor.” (ASV)

The king's words must have been shocking to Haman. He had thought that surely there was no one the king would want to honor more than himself, but instead the honors were for the man Haman hated above all else. But he had no choice. He must carry out the king's command, or his own life would be taken. What effort it must have taken for him to walk from the king's presence and accomplish the assigned task. Also consider that Mordecai had refused to give honor to Haman, but Haman was forced to honor Mordecai.

Haman had conspired to kill the Jews, but the tide had turned, and he could not see the "handwriting on the wall." He had planned their destruction, but it was he (and his family) which should be destroyed. This reminds one of the sentiments of Proverbs 26:27.

"Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him."

Imagine the humiliation Haman must have felt on this occasion. This humiliation should have caused him to stop and consider his course, but like Pharaoh, he was simply more determined than ever. His heart was hardened.

Esther 6:12-14 "And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered. 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. 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."

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

Mordecai had not sought honors, but extremely great honor had been given him. Many under these circumstances would have gotten what the author's grandmother used to call a "swelled head," i.e., come to believe they were greater than they really were. But Mordecai was different. When the honors were finished,

he simply went back to his former position, happy and contented to do so. Herein was a great contrast to Haman. Haman desired the honors which had been given to Mordecai, and if they had been given to him, he would not have been satisfied but would have sought more. One sees Haman “*slinking*” away to his house. He was so humiliated by this turn of events that he covered his head either in mourning his fate or desiring that no one would recognize him (or maybe both).

Haman arrived home and immediately told his wife and advisors (wise men) all which had happened to him that day. The day before he had come home celebrating his achievements and the great honors which had been bestowed on him. But when verse fourteen is noticed, it appears he was so troubled that he forgot the invitation he had received to banquet with the king and queen that day.

Consider something else from this context. Haman **had been honored greatly that day**, but he was so blinded by hatred that he could not recognize it. When the king asked him what should be done to one whom he desired to honor, one of the things Haman had said was that those things should be done by “**one of the king’s most noble princes.**” When man is blinded by hatred, he often fails to see the good in anything, nor can he see the fateful end hatred will bring to him.

“**The bloodthirsty hate the upright: but the just seek his soul**” (Proverbs 29:10).

Something else should be seen in this passage. These wise men could see the hand of GOD in this, even if some of the modern critics cannot. Notice the latter part of verse thirteen.

“**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.**”

In this recognition, they remind one of Rahab, who clearly saw GOD’s hand in the Israelites’ victory over her people. It is quite possible that these men had studied the history of the Jews. Thus, after hearing of the events of this day, they knew Haman was doomed.

“**What shall we then say to these things? If GOD be for us, who can be against us**” (Romans 8:31).

But Haman did not have time to dwell upon their observation, nor was there time to formulate a new plan or seek their advice. The king’s chamberlains came and reminded him of his obligation to attend the

banquet, and they did it with haste. As one writer expressed it, he was being led as a lamb to the slaughter.

Esther — Chapter Seven

Esther 7:1-2 “So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. 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.”

“So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. 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? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.” (ASV)

Ahasuerus was anxious to hear Esther’s request and for the third time told her he would give her whatever she asked. Notice the three parties at this banquet: King Ahasuerus, who did not realize the nationality of his queen nor the intent of Haman to kill her along with the rest of the Jews. Esther, who had fasted and prepared to make a stunning announcement with hopes of saving her people. Haman, who had just suffered such a humiliating day and sat with the weight of his wise men’s prediction that he could not win against Mordecai (whom he probably had to pass by to get to this banquet). The stage was set, and it was time to open the curtain.

Esther 7:3-4 “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: 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.”

“Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favor 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: 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 peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's damage.” (ASV)

At this banquet, Esther did not hesitate as she had before. Esther asked for two things: (1) her own life,

and (2) the lives of her people. If one were the king, the first thought he would probably have is “*Who would dare threaten your life?*” (v. 5). Notice that she did not specifically mention whose lives were being threatened (except her own), for if she had, there would have been no need for the king to ask who was doing this.

Esther continued by saying that she and her people had been “**sold.**” **Who sold them?** Ahasuerus had. Look back to Haman’s offer to pay the king ten thousand talents of silver for the right to annihilate the Jews. This is another indication that Ahasuerus had indeed accepted the money as discussed in 3:11. This would further inflame the king when he found out the deception used against himself by Haman in order to achieve his “revenge.” She clearly said “**we**” were sold not into slavery but rather to be destroyed. Her humility was amazing when she stated that she would not have complained to the king or asked any favor of him if their status had been changed to slavery. But sold to be destroyed was another matter.

The time had come for Esther to identify herself as a Jew, and it does not appear that she hesitated for a moment to reveal herself as such. This author would suggest that she would not have hesitated when she was chosen to occupy a position in the king’s harem if Mordecai had not told her not to reveal her lineage. **Is there a lesson here for Christians? Should Christians shrink from being recognized as a Christian — no matter what the consequences might be?** It seems obvious to this writer that Mordecai originally told her not to reveal herself because he knew something about what the future would bring.

The last phrase of verse four (“**although the enemy could not countervail the king’s damage**”) means that the enemy who would do this could not adequately repay the king for the loss he would receive. When looking back to 3:15, one sees that the people of the city of Shushan had been perplexed when the decree was published to have the Jews killed.

“Perplexed” — buk — *“A verb meaning to be confused, complexed; to mill around, wander aimlessly. It indicates a confused state of mind and activity because of not knowing what to do”*
(Baker/Carpenter, p. 123).

What is indicated is that they could not see any just reason to destroy the Jews. Further, they probably would not have been perplexed if these had been an unproductive people, or if they had not been good citizens. Consider something else — the king and Persia were probably blessed because of GOD’s

people being among them. This is true of any nation which has a large population of GOD's people in it, because GOD's people are a stabilizing element in any society — economically, intellectually and ethically.

Esther 7:5-6 “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? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.”

“Then spake the king Ahasuerus and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.” (ASV)

Ahasuerus wanted to know who and where this person was who would dare do such a thing. This indicated that he had no suspicion that Haman could be the one. After all, Haman was a trusted servant who had been advanced above all others in the kingdom; he was Ahasuerus' prime minister. In the past, Esther had learned about a plot against the king's life and informed him of such (2:21-23). Now she informed the king of a plot against her own life, and one can be sure he would investigate it and mete out punishment where it was deserved.

Esther answered by leveling three accusations against Haman. First, he was an adversary [tzar “*Hebrew for adversary, persecutor, vexer*” (Butler, p. 354)]. Second, he was an enemy (ayav), one who wishes to overthrow or destroy another. He was an enemy not only of the Jews and queen, but his actions would greatly hurt the empire and king. Third, he was wicked [raa “*Hebrew for evil-doer, wicked one*” (Butler, IBID)].

Haman's reaction is terror [Baath — “*To be frightened, to overtake, to strike with fear, to be afraid, to dread, to be terrified, to be overtaken by a sudden terror*” (Zodhiates, CD)]. There is every indication in these passages that this was the first Haman knew that Esther was a Jew. Mordecai had warned her to keep her ethnic background a secret, and she had faithfully obeyed him (*Were his instructions to maintain silence with regard to her lineage providence working?*). Haman had struck terror in the hearts of the Jews with his decree, but now the shoe was on the other foot. It was his turn to feel the terror they felt. To oppose the king was a death sentence.

Esther 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. Then the king returned 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. 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. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.”

“And the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and 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. Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the couch whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he even force the queen before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Then said Harbonah, one of the chamberlains that were before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman hath made for Mordecai, who spake good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. And the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.” (ASV)

Why did Ahasuerus get up and go to the garden?

Maybe it was to allow his anger to settle down. Maybe it was to think over the charges which had just been made and determine what punishment should be given Haman.

While Ahasuerus was in the garden, Haman (recognizing his danger) approached Esther to plead for mercy. But at the moment he began pleading, the king came back. The text talks about a bed here, but this would be more properly translated “couch.” It seems to have been the habit of the Persians to eat in a reclining position. **Where did the king find Haman?** On the couch with Esther. This renewed the king's anger, for he viewed this as Haman trying to force himself upon Esther. Ahasuerus basically asked if Haman were going to force himself upon the queen in front of him, in his own house.

As the king spoke these words, his servants covered the head of Haman. This appears to be a sign of a

condemned man.

“According to Roman historians Livy (1:26) and Cicero (4:13) and some of the Greek historians, it was customary to place a hood or covering over the face of the condemned man who was no longer worthy to see the light. The Greeks and Romans must have copied the practice from the Persians” (Butler, p. 357).

One of the chamberlains told Ahasuerus about the gallows Haman had erected to kill Mordecai. This is interesting from the standpoint that the king may not have known the wicked plot of Haman, but his servants seemed to have had a good bit of information. Was Harbonah simply giving the king information which confirmed the queen’s charges, or was he suggesting the means of execution had already been set up, though it be for another? Notice also Mordecai’s being mentioned as the intended victim of Haman. The king would remember the honors paid to Mordecai that very day and why they had been paid. One might also wonder at the words of the chamberlain — *was there animosity behind them?* After all, Haman had acted very haughtily toward all around him, and would have probably treated the king’s servants very badly. At any rate, the king ordered Haman hanged on the gallows he had set up for Mordecai.

“He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made” (Psalm 7:15).

“Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him” (Proverbs 26:27).

“Be not deceived; GOD is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

The king’s wrath was only appeased after Haman was executed. But a problem still existed, for the law which was passed could not be repealed, and he was still in danger of losing his beloved Esther, as well as valuable citizens.

Esther — Chapter Eight

Esther 8:1-2 *“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. 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.”

“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. 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.” (ASV)

“On that day” is the day Haman was executed. On that very day the king confiscated the property of Haman. This is still done today, as the government confiscates the property of criminals. Haman had wronged Esther and her people, and thus it was appropriate for Ahasuerus to give this property to Esther. This was quite a gift, when one considers that his estate must have been huge. Remember that he had been able to give ten thousand talents into the king's treasury. In verse two, Esther is seen putting this property in the hands of Mordecai to oversee it.

Notice the honors Ahasuerus placed upon Mordecai. In seeing the whole story, Ahasuerus recognized just how valuable Mordecai was to the kingdom and promoted him to the position which had formerly belonged to Haman. What irony is seen in this. Haman had hated and desired to destroy Mordecai; Mordecai ends up with everything Haman formerly had — honor, prestige, and wealth.

Esther 8:3-6 “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. Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, 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 provinces: 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?”

“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. Then the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. So Esther arose, and stood before the king. And she said, If it please the king, and if I have found favor 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 that are in all the king's provinces: 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?" (ASV)

Haman was gone, but the problem he created was still in existence. The law had been issued, and it could not be revoked. Notice a similar situation in the book of Daniel.

"Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him. Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed" (Daniel 6:13-15).

Notice several things in the above passage. The charge was made against Daniel, and according to the context, Daniel must be put to death. Second, the king was upset with himself because he had been duped into making this law which would cause his good friend and valuable confidant to be put to death. Third, "he laboured to the going down of the sun to deliver him" (Emphasis mine, RK). He struggled to find a way to reverse his law in order to save Daniel's life. Fourth, he was reminded that the law could not be changed. Neither could Ahasuerus change the law he had already decreed. To do so would have undermined and eventually destroyed the entire legal system of the Persians.

Verse four is interesting, concerning when the golden sceptre is extended to Esther. Does this mean she had approached the king, as she had before, without being announced? Or, does it mean the extending of the sceptre was an expression which granted her petition? When the rest of the text is read, it is this writer's considered opinion that the first of these two possibilities is the right conclusion.

Esther pleaded for herself as well as her people (Israelites). But all the time she pleaded with him, she knew the law could not be changed. Obviously, she was pleading for a law which would counteract Haman's law, as the next few verses imply. This author finds the

following comments of Roper quite interesting.

“Esther’s formal request was prefaced by four “ifs” — four reasons she hoped the king would grant her petition. (1) “If it pleases the king” implied that she would not have him do anything against his will. (2) In saying, “If I have found favor before him,” she was asking him to remember his love for her. (3) “[if] the matter seems proper to the king” suggested that she wanted him to do only what was right in his own eyes. (4) By adding, “[If] I am pleasing in his sight,” she was inviting him to look at her and see how loving and lovely she was” (p. 552).

If Haman had been successful, the Jewish people would have been destroyed, including Esther. The law which Haman had gotten Ahasuerus to decree was still in effect. Though the word “we” appears here, it is very obvious that her main concern is for her people. This reminds one of the attitude which the apostle Paul had for the Jews.

“I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: 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” (Romans 9:1-5).

Esther 8:7-8 *“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. 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.”*

“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. Write ye also to the Jews, as it pleaseth 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.” (ASV)

It is interesting to notice that the king spoke to Esther and Mordecai. *Is this at another time after she has made her request, and the king has had time to*

think about it? Does this imply Mordecai was already there when Esther came in?

Ahasuerus showed his willingness to help Esther and Mordecai by recounting what he had already done in eliminating Haman and giving his possessions to Esther. But regarding the law he had allowed, his hands were tied; he could not change it. But there was a solution to the problem. He allowed them to write another decree which would allow the Jews to defend themselves against all attacks. This would in effect nullify the previous law without changing that law.

The latter part of verse eight is particularly interesting, when the unalterability of a law made by the king is considered.

“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.”

Notice that the law must be written in the king's name **and** must be sealed with the king's ring for the law to be unalterable. This seems to imply that if the king issued a law, it might be alterable unless he sealed it with his ring.

Esther 8:9-12 “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, an 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. 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: 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, Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.”

“Then were the king's scribes called at that time, in the third 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 satraps, and the governors and princes of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, a 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. And he wrote the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by post on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud: wherein the king granted the Jews that 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, their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar." (ASV)

The events of these verses were approximately two and one-half months after the original decree of Haman, which would leave approximately nine months for the Jews to prepare to defend themselves. Haman's decree had authorized people to attack the Jews, but Mordecai's decree only allowed the Jews to defend themselves from their attackers.

As widely as the first decree had been published, and in the languages of all the people, this decree was to be published. But there was an addition: the Jews were to be sent copies of this decree in their language. Verse ten shows the official nature of the decree: (1) written in the king's name, and (2) officially sealed by his ring.

The mention of the animals in verse ten shows the urgency involved and indicates that the postal system of the king was put into play.

Much of the wording of this decree was the same as the first decree (destroy, slay, cause to perish) in that the same people were mentioned (little ones, women). But again, it should be emphasized that the main difference was their right to **defend themselves** rather than launch an attack. Thus, this decree was issued for the very same day the attack on them was authorized. **Would women and children be killed by the Jews? ONLY** if they attacked the Jews. If mother and her children stayed home and only the father attacked the Jews, then he could be killed; but Jews could not then go to his house and kill those there.

It should also be noted that the Jews were given the right not only to defend themselves, but also to take the spoil of those who attacked them. But, as will be noted in the next chapter, they refused to take any of their enemies goods.

Esther 8:13-14 “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. 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.”

“A copy of the writing, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published unto all the peoples, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. So the posts that rode upon swift steeds that were used in the king's service went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment; and the decree was given out in Shushan the palace.” (ASV)

It is again emphasized that the decree was to be sent to all the people of the land as speedily as possible.

“**hastened**” – bahal – “*To be terrified, frightened, perplexed; to be quick, overhasty; to flee; to frighten, confound, perplex, to accelerate, to do something hastily; to scare away; to terrify, panic, alarm*” (Zodhiates, CD).

Notice that it was the king's zeal which was behind this decree. It could be speculated that his love for Esther spurred him to be sure this was accomplished without any delay.

It might also be considered how confusing this second order may have been. Imagine having a law passed and then in a couple of months receiving another law which, in effect, was opposite of the first one!

Esther 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. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. 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.”

“And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan shouted and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a good day. And many from among the peoples of the

land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them.” (ASV)

Mordecai had always acted as a humble man, never seeking the glory which was now thrust upon him. The position Ahasuerus gave him demanded that he act in a different manner, at least outwardly. There is no indication that power went to his head, and this writer believes he maintained his humility throughout all of these affairs. Now he appeared before the people dressed in royal apparel which befitted his new position.

What was the reaction of the general population at the turn of events? They had been perplexed when the initial edict came down for the destruction of the Jews (3:15). With this turn of events, there was no confusion, but instead rejoicing and gladness. **Was there an animosity toward Haman, and were they glad because he had been deposed? Were they happy because they recognized that an injustice had been done and were happy it had been corrected?** If so, it shows the Jews had lived in such a way as to gain favor with the people instead of making enemies. The reason behind their rejoicing will never be known, but from what is seen in the text, it appears to have been genuine.

Naturally, the Jews (wherever they were) would rejoice at this turn of events. (1) The king was showing great favor toward them, (2) Esther, the queen, was a Jew, and (3) Mordecai the Jew was the second most powerful person in the government. Things were surely looking up for them.

When things are going well, there are always those who want to jump on the bandwagon. Here it is mentioned that many of the people joined the Jews, i.e., became proselytes. Many of these may not have been sincere, because they did this out of fear.

“Fear” – *pachadh* – *Fear, terror, dread, awe; an object of fear. It may refer to the emotion or to the subj. which causes the emotion*” (Zodhiates, CD).

They saw which way the wind was blowing and the great power which the Jews had (which will be illustrated in the last paragraph).

Esther — Chapter Nine

Esther 9:1-4 “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;) 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. 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. 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.”

“Now in the twelfth month, which 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, on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them, (whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them,) 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 was fallen upon all the peoples. And all the princes of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors, and they that did the king's business, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai was fallen upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.” (ASV)

Approximately nine months had passed since the events of the last chapter. The thirteenth day of the twelfth month arrived and the implementation of both Haman and Mordecai's decrees. Interestingly, some of the people of the empire tried to implement Haman's decree, even though they knew the king and queen and their prime minister were on the side of the Jews. But they could not destroy the Jews.

Wisely, the Jews gathered themselves together in cities, where they could defend themselves against any who might attack them. All indications are that they followed a purely defensive posture, only destroying those who first attacked them. None of their enemies were able to stand before them, for the text says **“the fear of them fell upon all people.”** Surely this fear was in part due to their ability to see the hand of GOD in these events. Yet, though some or many of them could see GOD's hand in these matters, like the people of Jericho, they decided to fight anyway. How foolish it is for man to oppose the will of GOD.

Verse three shows that the officials of the kingdom joined the Jews, at the very least lending their moral

support for the Jews. The word “helped” in this passage would then cause one to believe that some of them probably brought the militaries might to bear on those who opposed the Jews. **Why did the officials of the kingdom help the Jews?** Because the fear of Mordecai came upon them. It was obvious to all that Mordecai had risen swiftly in prominence and power, and the text shows he was growing more powerful, as it might be said, day by day.

Consider: who would not want to gain the favor of Mordecai? Haman had used his position to glorify himself and did not have the respect of those around him. Haman did not care about the people around him. On the other hand, Mordecai cared about people and sought their welfare. People are drawn to such a character as Mordecai and are repulsed by those like Haman.

Esther 9:5-6 “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. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.”

“And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto them that hated them. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.” (ASV)

Hatred can be so intense that common sense will be thrown out the window. It seems like this was the case here. **How could these people in the capital city, in the shadow of the king, expect to be victorious over the Jews?** By attacking them, they were in essence committing suicide, yet they attacked them anyway. Consequently, five hundred of them were killed at the capital. Victory belonged to the Jews, but it was not completed on this day.

Esther 9:7-11 “And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, 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. On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.”

“And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, and Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, and Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jew's enemy, slew they; but

on the spoil they laid not their hand. On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.” (ASV)

Among those killed in Shushan were the ten sons of Haman, whose names are listed. Interestingly, though the king’s decree had stated that the Jews were allowed to take the possessions of those whom they defeated, the Jews took none of their possessions. They were not interested in gaining the possessions of their enemies, but simply in the preservation of their lives. This must have been shocking to the people around them, since the custom of war is “*The spoils belong to the victor.*” But their action did show the strong character of the Jews at this time, and showed them not to be a greedy people. Unfortunately, most wars are fought over possessions, but that is not what motivated the Jews. Rarely does one find a war fought merely because of some slight or insult.

At the end of the day, the result of the warfare was given to the king. This was important from the standpoint of keeping records of the events in the kingdom.

Esther 9:12-14 “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. 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. And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman’s ten sons.”

“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 then 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. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews that 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. And the king commanded it so to be done: and a decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged Haman’s ten sons.” (ASV)

Ahasuerus gave Esther an account of the destruction of the Jews’ enemies and specifically

mentioned the ten sons of Haman as having been killed. He next asked her if there were anything else which needed to be done regarding this matter. Esther asked for another day to do what is known as a “mop-up” operation (finish the job). She also asked for a public display of the bodies of Haman’s sons. This would serve as a warning to any who might contemplate violence against the Jews in the future, as well as being a symbol of the dishonor heaped upon them. All Esther asked for was granted to her. Again, the king’s great regard and love for Esther was demonstrated.

Esther 9:15-16 “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. 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,”

“And the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hand. And 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 them that hated them seventy and five thousand; but on the spoil they laid not their hand.” (ASV)

Esther had asked for one more day of purging their enemies in the city of Shushan, which the king granted. On the first day (13th), they had killed five hundred of their enemies in Shushan, and on this second day they killed another three hundred. Esther was rightly determined to finish the job which had been started. When looking at our modern times, the wisdom of this can be seen. In 1991, the United States went to war with Iraq, but it did not finish the job by removing Saddam Huessan. Consequently, the U.S. had to go back in the year 2003 to finish the job. But again, they did not finish the job and instead created a vacuum which ISIS filled.

The rest of the Jews had finished their work throughout the provinces, killing seventy-five thousand of their enemies. Barnes states, “*The LXX gives the number of fifteen thousand*” (p. 502). He believes this was more in proportion to the number killed in Shushan. But when it is considered that the kingdom had one hundred and twenty-seven provinces and stretched from India to the Sudan, it would seem that the number

seventy-five thousand would be more in proportion to the number killed in Shushan.

While the Jews were fighting a second day in Shushan, their brethren throughout the provinces were at rest, celebrating their deliverance.

Special note is made that they did not take the spoils of their enemies. The decree of the king authorized them to wipe out the entire families of their enemies and take whatever possessions their enemies might have for themselves. **Why did the Jews refuse to take the spoils of their enemies? Was it to show they were only interested in self-defense?** This writer's belief is that they did this as an act of mercy. If they had killed the entire families of their enemies, as authorized by the king, there would be no one left to leave the spoils to, so they might as well have taken them. This again seems to be an indication that they killed only those who actually took up arms against them, the spoils being left to care for the families of those slain. If this be true, what an unheard of event this was — mercy instead of vengeance.

Esther 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. 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. Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled 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.”

“This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews that were in 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. Therefore do the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the unwalled towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.” (ASV)

These passages show the reason for two days of celebration of their victory, which Mordecai will announce in verse twenty-one. They celebrated the day after their victory. Since the Jews of Shushan did not totally defeat their enemies until the fourteenth day, they could not celebrate until the fifteenth day. This victory is celebrated by the Jews even to this day and

is called the Feast of Purim. This was a day of giving gifts to each other in order to emphasize the greatness of their celebration.

Esther 9:20-22 “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, 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.”

“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 enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.” (ASV)

Mordecai sent out official letters to establish the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar as the celebration of their victory over Haman. This feast was to be characterized by great joy, because their sorrow had been turned to joy. Notice that gifts were to be sent to the poor, possibly so they could celebrate as well.

This feast *“was basically simple 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" (p. 208).

Esther 9:23-25 "And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; 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; 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."

"And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; but when the matter came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows."
(ASV)

It is again mentioned that Haman was an Agagite. This has been mentioned several times in this book (3:1, 10; 8:3, 5), which leads this writer to believe that this is an important point. The only thing which would really make it important is if he were indeed a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites (whom Saul was supposed to have utterly destroyed). If this be true, it is another indication in the Scriptures of how disobedience to GOD can have consequences many, many years later.

What the evil Haman had planned to do to others was brought back to himself. Instead of Mordecai's being hanged unjustly, Haman received his due. Instead of the Jews' being wiped out, it was the Agagites.

"He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into

the ditch which he made” (Psalm 7:15).

Esther 9:26-28 “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, 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.”

“Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur. Therefore because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come unto them, the Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to the writing thereof, and according to the appointed time thereof, 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 remembrance of them perish from their seed” (ASV)

In these verses one finds the word “**Purim**” used for the first time and designated as the name of this feast.

*“The word **Pur** is the Persian word for **lot**, which is a reference to Haman’s casting lots to determine the day when the Jews would be destroyed. The Jews took the Persian word **Pur**, and gave it a Hebrew plural **Purim**, either because the Persian method of casting involved several lots, or because Haman cast **Pur** several times (3:7)”* (Coffman, p. 322).

The Jews “**ordained**,” i.e., confirmed this feast which Mordecai established. Further, they promised to perpetuate this feast and have done so ever since. In Zerr’s commentary, he quoted an article from a 1939 issue of the *Chicago Tribune* which announced the 2500th anniversary of Purim at Temple Sholom (Zerr, p. 350).

Esther 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. 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, 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. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.”

“Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had ordained for themselves and for their seed, in the matter of the fastings and their cry. And the commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.” (ASV)

Verse twenty-nine speaks of a second letter (verse twenty began the first letter). In this letter, the feast of Purim was declared to be law. It should be noticed that this was a Jewish feast given to them by secular authority — Esther and Mordecai. This feast is not mentioned as a part of GOD’s laws for the Jews.

It might also be noted that it was the decree of Esther which confirmed this feast. “**And it was written in the book.**” Over the centuries, it has been debated as to what book is being spoken of here. Some believe it is the book of Esther itself. Others believe it is some book which has not survived until the present time. Others, this writer included, believe it is the book of the chronicles of the kings of Persia. The term “**the book**” is found in four places in Esther (2:23; 6:1; 9:32; 10:2). Outside of 9:32, it is clearly used of the book of the chronicles of the kings of Persia.

Esther — Chapter Ten

Esther 10:1-3 “**And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. 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? For Mordecai 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.**”

“And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. And all the acts of his power

and of his might, and the full account 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? For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.” (ASV)

This chapter, in a very concise way, gives an overview of the events after the defeat of Haman. Ahasuerus was a powerful king who laid much of the world of his time under tribute, and Mordecai was the second most powerful man in the world. The Bible does not elaborate on all of the deeds of Mordecai, but simply says he was a very mighty man whose great works were recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia (which shows they are one and the same nation). This reminds one of some other people of GOD who rose to great positions of power – Joseph and Daniel.

About Mordecai, the words of Jesus might be observed, and one will see in them what Mordecai was and became.

“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

Reference was made earlier in this study to the effect that the name of GOD is not mentioned in this book. Yet, one cannot study this book without seeing the hand of GOD “working behind the scenes” (providence). With that in mind, this study ends with the words of McGarvey.

“In the story of Joseph, God’s hand is pointed out, so that we can see how his providence wrought out his purpose. The story of Esther follows without even the name of God, and we are left, with the training imparted by the former story, to find God for ourselves in this. When we have found Him, we are prepared to find Him in our own lives” (J.W. McGarvey, Sermons, Gospel Advocate, Nashville, 1958, p. 246).

One thought which is interesting is that the book of Esther introduces Mordecai and then Esther. The book ends by talking about the greatness of Mordecai. Esther was advanced to be the queen for the purpose of putting Mordecai into a position of power that would benefit the Jewish nation. Remember that it was Mordecai who instructed Esther to hide her nationality. It was Mordecai who pushed Esther to reveal herself when the time was right in order to save the Jews. It was Mordecai who rose to great power and blessed not

only the Jews but also the king of Persia by his deeds. Perhaps consideration of Esther has been over emphasized, when it is the actions of Mordecai which actually seem more important. Nevertheless, one cannot see this deliverance, and blessing which followed, without both parties being involved. Esther is important from the standpoint that she helped Mordecai achieve greatness through the providence of GOD.

Ezra Chapter Seven

Ezra 7:1-5 “Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, The son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:”

“Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest;”

Between the last verse of chapter six and the first verse of this chapter, there is a gap of about fifty-seven or fifty-eight years. It was during this time that the events of Esther took place. Chapter seven begins with a second return from captivity, this time led by Ezra. His purpose for this visit was to correct the practices of the Jews in their marriages.

At the time of this text, Artaxerxes was the king of Persia. Barnes states that there were three kings of Persia who used this name — Artaxerxes Longimanus, Artaxerxes Mnemon, and Artaxerxes Ochus (Barnes, p. 448). It is believed by most scholars that this text speaks of Artaxerxes Longimanus, but there are some who believe it was Mnemon. Artaxerxes Longimanus was the son of Ahasuerus, the king of Persia.

Other than the title of this book, Ezra is now introduced for the first time. Because of the role he played in the return and restoration of the Jews and their religion, he began by showing his qualifications. He was a priest who could trace his lineage back to Aaron, first priest of the Levitical system set up by GOD at Mount Sinai. There is little doubt that there are gaps in this genealogy, for the purpose was not to give every

single name, but simply to establish his qualifications as a priest.

Ezra 7:6-10 “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. And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his GOD upon him. 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.”

“this Ezra went up from Babylon: and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, had given; and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of Jehovah his GOD upon him. 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 Nethinim, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king. And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon; and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his GOD upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Jehovah, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances.” (ASV)

Ezra is described as a scribe, but **what exactly was a scribe?** Winters gives a comprehensive description of the scribes which is worth studying.

“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" (p. 37-38).

It must be emphasized, as Winters noted above, that the term **"ready scribe"** does not refer to his being eager to do the work (although such would be needed), but rather to his ability to do the work. Many have been observed over the years who were eager to do some aspect of the Lord's work, but they simply did not have the abilities to be successful in their endeavors. Ezra was a skilled workman, and apparently a valuable one, as implied by his relationship to the king.

Ezra knew GOD'S Word because he had studied it and prepared himself.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to GOD, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV).

But notice the designation given here. He was a scribe, skilled in the **"law of Moses, which the Lord GOD of Israel had given."** As pointed out by a number of scholars, there is no difference between the "law of Moses" and the "law of GOD," for they both came from the same entity. GOD gave His law to mankind, and through whom He gave that law, whether it be through one of the prophets or Moses, did not matter — **IT WAS STILL GOD'S LAW!**

When noticing the letter Artaxerxes gave Ezra (vv. 11-26), it is evident that Ezra asked for many things. Artaxerxes gave him everything for which he asked. Again this points to a trusted and respected position which Ezra held in the eyes of the king. **Why did the king grant Ezra all of his requests? Does the phrase**

“hand of the Lord his GOD upon him” refer to Ezra or Artaxerxes, or both? If it referred to Ezra, then it would mean that Artaxerxes did this because of the GODLY nature he saw in Ezra, and recognized the call Ezra had to do this. If it refers to Artaxerxes, then it shows us the providential care of GOD for His people in working through non-Israelites.

Verse seven gives a general list of the categories of people who went up with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem. As will be seen later, the Nethinims were reluctant helpers in this endeavor.

When did the events of this chapter take place? The seventh year of Artaxerxes. In all it took four months for Ezra and his troop to make the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem. In a direct journey, the distance would be about five hundred and twenty miles through the Arabian desert, but the longer journey would be about nine hundred miles. Usually the longer journey was taken by travelers because it was less difficult.

Verse ten is a great passage to describe a true servant of GOD. First, Ezra prepared his heart. His efforts were not the result of chance or accident. His was a determined effort; it was purposeful. Second, the object of his preparation centered around seeking the law of the Lord. He sought the only thing which really matters in this life. If one does not seek the law of the Lord in this life, his life is a failure because he will be lost for eternity. Third, he was not satisfied simply to know what GOD taught, but was determined to do what GOD prescribes in His Word. Fourth, he would teach what he had learned and applied to his own life. This is a description of what every true servant of GOD is like.

Ezra 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. 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. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy GOD which is in thine hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the GOD of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst

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

“Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even the scribe of the words of the commandments of Jehovah, and of His statutes to Israel: Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the GOD of Heaven, perfect and so forth. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and their priests and the Levites, in my realm, that are minded of their own free will to go to Jerusalem, go with thee. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king and his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy GOD which is in thy hand, and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the GOD of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, and all the silver and

gold that thou shalt find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill-offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their GOD which is in Jerusalem; therefore thou shalt with all diligence buy with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meal-offerings and their drink-offerings, and shalt offer them upon the altar of the house of your GOD which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee and to thy brethren to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do ye after the will of your GOD. And the vessels that are given thee for the service of the house of thy GOD, deliver thou before the GOD of Jerusalem. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy GOD, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure-house. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers that 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 with all diligence, unto a hundred talents of silver, and to a hundred measures of wheat, and to a hundred baths of wine, and to a hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the GOD of Heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the GOD of Heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, the singers, porters, Nethinim, or servants of this house of GOD, it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll, upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy GOD that is in thy hand, appoint magistrates and judges, who may judge all the people that are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of thy GOD; and teach ye him that knoweth them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy GOD, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him with all diligence, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment." (ASV)

Ezra now included a copy of Artaxerxes' proclamation allowing the Jews to return and rebuild Jerusalem and specifically the Temple. It should be observed that verses twelve through twenty-six are written in Aramaic, which would have been the language of the king. It is noted that Artaxerxes is called the "king of kings." Some have thought this title was proclaimed vaingloriously by him. Others have said it is a title which belongs only to the Lord. It is suggested that it was neither vainglorious on his part nor a usurpation of the Lord's title. It should be noted in Daniel 2:37 that the prophet referred to Nebuchadnezzar as a "king of kings." In the present text, the term is used in the same way, for Artaxerxes was indeed a king of kings.

Notice that Artaxerxes granted permission for anyone who wanted to go back to Jerusalem to help in this effort to do so. This shows the people were still

under his authority and had to obey the laws of the land under which they lived. In America, one is so used to having the freedom to travel to any state he wants, that it is hard to imagine having to ask for permission to go to another state. But in other nations today, people often have to ask the government for permission to move around in their own country, even to another apartment (Indonesia, Singapore, et cetera).

Not only did the king give his consent for the Israelites to return to Jerusalem, but also his “cabinet” advised this should be done. Further, the material goods which they would need, especially those regarding their worship were to be provided not only by free-will offerings, but also with very generous limits from the king’s treasury. They would not be lacking in anything they needed. This also included a tax exemption for all the religious workers who served at Jerusalem.

Was Artaxerxes a worshiper of the GOD of Heaven and earth? At first glance, some might think the language of verse fifteen indicated such. But notice the language carefully, because he referenced **“the GOD of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem.”** Artaxerxes had the same view as many of his time and even some today, that GOD is a local GOD, one of many to be worshiped by this king and his subjects. Further evidence of this is seen in verse seventeen, where he referred to **“the house of your GOD which is in Jerusalem.”**

Verse eighteen shows the confidence Artaxerxes had in Ezra. Apparently Ezra had shown himself trustworthy through his past actions. He was given almost unlimited authority in using the funds given him as he saw fit. This is also seen in the power given him to punish any who violated the laws of GOD, even to the extent of putting them to death. At least part of his motivation for doing all of this is seen in verse twenty-three — his desire for the well-being of his kingdom and his family.

“They were to provide the funds Ezra needed to complete his mission, up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, and 100 baths of oil, as well as all the salt he required (7:22). Regarding modern equivalents, the silver has been estimated to have been 3 3/4 tons, a lavish amount. The other items were equal to 650 bushels of wheat, 600 gallons of wine, and 600 gallons of oil” (Roper, p. 118).

It should also be observed that Artaxerxes placed

the law of GOD and the law of the king on an equal basis. He would not have done this until he first examined the law of GOD. After doing such, he recognized the value of this law and the benefits it could bring to any people. Therefore he decreed swift justice to any who would violate either of these laws.

Just here the capable thoughts of Hunter on the idea of GOD'S providence and miracles are inserted for the reader's consideration.

"The providence of God, while at times a difficult subject to grasp, is repeatedly stressed in Scripture. Providence is different from miraculous intervention. In the former, God uses natural means and actions of men to accomplish His will, while in the latter God suspends natural law to secure His purposes" (Hunter, p. 110).

It was GOD'S providence for which Ezra gave thanks in the next few verses.

Ezra 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: 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."

"Blessed be Jehovah, the GOD of our fathers, who hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of Jehovah which is in Jerusalem; and hath extended lovingkindness unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened according to the hand of Jehovah my GOD upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me." (ASV)

The text now reverts back to the Hebrew language, and the first thing Ezra did after receiving the king's blessings was to offer thanksgiving to GOD. He praised GOD for putting the project of rebuilding the Temple in the heart of Artaxerxes.

The word beautify here, is PAAR, which Zodhiates states means, "to gleam; to embellish, adorn, beautify; to glean from a fruit tree; to glorify, be glorified, glorify oneself; to boast; to declare, to speak plainly. "Glorify" and "beautify" are the primary meanings" (Zodhiates, CD).

Ezra praised GOD for granting him mercy before the king. This may indicate the same thing seen in Esther when Esther approached the king.

"All the king's servants, and the people of 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" (Esther 4:11).

If a Persian king did not summon someone to come before him, that person took his life in his hands to approach him. Not only was Ezra shown favor by the king, but also by all his counsellors and mighty princes. Again, Ezra attributed their favorable reaction to GOD.

What reaction did this favor cause in Ezra? It strengthened him for the work he had before him. He understood by these events that GOD was with him, therefore he would be successful in accomplishing the mission of teaching GOD's law to the people. Also, he would be able to adorn the Temple through the gifts given him.

"If GOD be for us, who can be against us" (Romans 8:31)?

A key passage in chapter seven is found in verse ten. "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." What is said there should be the attitude and goal of every servant of GOD no matter in what dispensation he finds himself. GOD's word must be studied so that he can ably practice that law in his own life and with capability teach it to others. **Dear GOD, please send us more men like Ezra.**

Ezra Chapter Eight

Ezra 8:1-20 "These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king. Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush. Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty. Of the sons of Pahathmoab; Elihoenai the son of Zerahiah, and with him two hundred males. Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. And of the sons of Shephatiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael,

and with him fourscore males. Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males. And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males. And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males. And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males. And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males. Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males. 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. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, men of understanding. And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our GOD. And by the good hand of our GOD upon us they brought us a man of understanding, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; Also of the Nethinims, whom David and the princes had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinims: all of them were expressed by name.”

“Now these are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king: Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush. Of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males a hundred and fifty. Of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerachiah; and with him two hundred males. Of the sons of Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel; and with him three hundred males. And of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan; and with him fifty males. And of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah; and with him seventy males. And of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael; and with him fourscore males. Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel; and with him two hundred and eighteen males. And of the sons of Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah; and with him a hundred and threescore males. And of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of

Bebai; and with him twenty and eight males. And of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan; and with him a hundred and ten males. And of the sons of Adonikam, that were the last; and these are their names: Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah; and with them threescore males. And of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud; and with them seventy males. And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there we encamped three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi. Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, who were teachers. And I sent them forth unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia; and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and his brethren the Nethinim, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our GOD. And according to the good hand of our GOD upon us they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty; and of the Nethinim, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim: all of them were mentioned by name." (ASV)

This list is similar to the one found in chapter two, with just a few variations, but they are not the same people. It should be remembered that this is many years later. It appears that members of the same family groups are those who go, with three additional family groups listed: Shecaniah (v. 5), Joab (v. 9), and Shelomith (v. 10).

Another interesting thing noticed is the absence of Levites. In both this list and the one in chapter two, a distinction is made between the priests and Levites. Since all priests were Levites, the distinction appears to be those Levites who served the priests (They also seem to be known as the Nethinims.). When Zerubbabel made his journey, only seventy four of those Levites went with him. None volunteered to go with Ezra. Thus, Ezra was forced to send to Iddo to get some of these men to go back to Jerusalem with him. Like Winters, one cannot help but wonder why the Levites, who in the past were so quick to volunteer, were so reluctant now (Exodus 32:25-29; Numbers 25:6-13). In all, two hundred and fifty-eight went with Ezra after Iddo intervened.

Ezra 8:21-23 "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. 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. So we fasted and besought our GOD for this: and He was intreated of us.”

“Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our GOD, to seek of Him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask 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 that seek Him, for good; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him. So we fasted and besought our GOD for this: and He was entreated of us.” (ASV)

Fasting was a common practice among the Israelites and was used for both public and private occasions. Sometimes it expressed grief and at others a time of joy and even worship. Fasting is generally associated with a lack of food, but it can also indicate giving up other things as well. The journey before them was important and contained elements of danger. Thus, a fast was very appropriate where the people afflict themselves through a lack of food, but this would also be a time of reflection upon themselves and the GOD they served. Their own inabilities would be highlighted as they approached GOD in humility. At the same time, the abilities of GOD would be magnified.

Notice the reason Ezra gave for their fast. He had possibly refused military escort on the grounds that GOD was able to deliver them from all harm. Now, after further reflection, he was ashamed to go back to the king and ask for such. GOD’S deliverance of them through dangerous territory without a military escort would also be a sign to the king that this was indeed the will of GOD and would probably further incline him to help them if need be in the future.

It might also be noticed that there were children involved in this journey. Naturally, where children are involved, there are also mothers. It is suggested by some that this may refer to the idea of acknowledging they were a weak people who need GOD’S protection. But when looking at the original word here, Taph, it is seen to refer to children or dependents.

“It means children, especially little ones. Presumably, the term came from the brisk, tripping gait, or short steps, of little children”
(Zodhiates, CD).

Ezra's prayers were for safety, not only for themselves, but also regarding the goods they carried with them. It is always appropriate to ask for GOD'S blessing when one is about to engage in some religious endeavor. Prayers should also seek guidance in what is proposed with the request for wisdom that all things be done in accordance with His will.

The way would be filled with enemies, that is robbers, who would lie in wait to ambush the helpless. There is no doubt that word would have circulated through the grapevine regarding the great wealth they carried with them. This would entice those who prey upon others instead of working for their own support.

The note at the end of verse twenty-three was written after the journey had been completed. Ezra could look back and see that all his prayers for safety had been answered. It is truly an encouragement to the servant of GOD that, when looking back in his life, he sees the result of answered prayer.

Ezra 8:24-30 "Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our GOD, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered: I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents; Also twenty basons of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold. And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD GOD of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD. So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our GOD."

"Then I set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests, even Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them, and weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering for the house of our GOD, which the king, and his counsellors, and his princes, and all Israel there present, had offered: I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels a hundred talents; of gold a hundred talents; and twenty bowls of gold, of a thousand darics; and two vessels of fine bright brass, precious as gold. And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto Jehovah, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill-offering

unto Jehovah, the GOD of your fathers. Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chiefs of the priests and the Levites, and the princes of the fathers' houses of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of Jehovah. So the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our GOD.” (ASV)

At first glance, it might be thought that Sherebiah and Hashabiah were priests, but this was not the case. In verses eighteen and nineteen, they were shown to be Levites, but not of the priestly class of the Levites. They were the servants of the priests. The sense of the verse is that he separated twelve of the chief men of the priests, and then he separated twelve of the servant class of the Levites, with Sherebiah and Hashabiah being individually named from this class.

The twenty-four chosen men were given the tremendous responsibility of taking care of the gold, silver, et cetera, which had been given by the king and his subjects. A lesson can and should be learned from this incident which would safeguard anyone placed in a position of trust with regards to “money.” Ezra did not hoard all this to himself and refuse to let anyone know how much was there. He chose a number of men and placed these valuables in their care — again, not one man, but several. The more there are to watch over a treasury, the less likely it can be misused or appropriated for private use. It has long been this writer’s belief that congregations do a grave misservice to treasurers when they assign them solely the task of keeping the records and counting the money. To protect the good name of the treasurer, or prevent a temptation to sin, multiple people should be placed in charge of counting the money which is placed in the bank. This is just good — honest — business. Too many men have had their reputations ruined by false charges of mismanagement of church funds, and too many have ruined themselves by stealing from the treasury. The apostle Paul showed proper wisdom regarding this matter in First Corinthians 16:3-4.

“When I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.”

Of course the opposite of this was Judas, who held the bag and was greedy for its contents.

“This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein” (John 12:6).

The measurement or amount of a “talent” is not known with any certainty. Halley states that a talent of silver was between fifty and one hundred pounds, and a “talent” of gold was between sixty and one hundred twenty pounds in weight (Halley, p. 35). This shows that these men were entrusted with a vast sum of valuables (over fifty million dollars at today’s prices — 2016).

Verse twenty-eight is interesting because those chosen were pointed out as being chosen by the Lord. They were holy, set apart by Him for a special purpose. The funds which had been given by the king, et cetera, had been given to the Lord, i.e., for use in building His temple. Therefore they were holy and should be handled by those in charge of holy things. It should also be remembered that among those things the king gave Ezra were vessels from the original Temple (Ezra 7:19).

Ezra 8:31-32 “Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our GOD was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.”

“Then we departed from the river 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 the lie-in-wait by the way. And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.” (ASV)

Some have noted from chapter seven verse nine that they left Babylon on the first day of the twelfth month and now see the twelfth day as a contradiction. The simple and clear meaning is they left Babylon on the first day and went to the staging area at Ahava, from which they departed on the twelfth day.

The enemy is spoken of, as well as ambushers. The identity of the enemy was not mentioned, but it may very well have been some of the Samaritans who had been opposing these efforts from the beginning. But Ezra stated that GOD indeed delivered them from any who might have hindered or hurt them in any way.

They arrived safely in Jerusalem, where they took three days before officially reporting to the authorities there. This may have been to give them a time of rest from their long journey. If they traveled by way of the fertile crescent, their journey would have been approximately one thousand miles. Or the three days could have had something to do with the passing of a

Sabbath day during those three days. It is not known why they waited three days, but certainly either one of the thoughts expressed above could be a valid reason for waiting.

Ezra 8:33-35 “Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our GOD by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites; By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time. Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the GOD of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD.”

“And on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed in the house of our GOD into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, the Levite; the whole by number and by weight: and all the weight was written at that time. The children of the captivity, that were come out of exile, 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 Jehovah.” (ASV)

After three days of inactivity, Ezra proceeded to take care of business. The first thing they did was count out the treasure they had brought to Meremoth, who seemed to be in charge of it. It is interesting that all things were done with witnesses, which is again pointed out as being a very wise action — both then and now. This forever clears the participants of any charge of wrong doing.

Except for the seventy-seven lambs, the offerings in this passage are either twelve or multiples of twelve. The only significance this can have in this context is the representation of the twelve tribes of Israel. Here is another indication that members of all twelve tribes were gathered at the return. Indeed a remnant had returned from all the tribes. Ezekiel had prophesied of this time.

“I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they

defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be My people, and I will be their GOD” (Ezekiel 37:22-23).

“Despite the millennialists, a remnant from all twelve tribes did return (Ezra 2:70; 6:16-17; 1 Chron. 9:1-3; Luke 2:36; Acts 2:5, 9), as this verse implies” (Dodson, p. 121).

All the evidence points to his correctness in this assertion.

As for the one deviation of seventy-seven lambs, the only thing that can be said is that this is a multiple of the perfect number seven, which can signify completeness. If this were the intended significance, it is appropriate, because Ezra was completing the mission he had been given by GOD and which was confirmed by king Artaxerxes.

Ezra 8:36 “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.”

“And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's satraps, and to the governors beyond the River: and they furthered the people and the house of GOD.” (ASV)

A difference is made here between the lieutenants (satraps) and governors. The satraps seem to have had more authority than the governors, because they were listed first. The governors seem to have been in charge of smaller areas than the satraps, possibly with each satrap being in charge of several governors. It might also be that the satraps were military leaders with civil authority, more so than were the governors.

At any rate, Ezra delivered the king's commandments regarding their obligation to promote the work of the Jews.

“to raise, lift up (the face, the eyes, the voice, or the soul); to bear, carry, carry off, support; to wear; to take, take away; to accept; to be partial; to be elevated, extolled, exalted; to heighten; to help; to apply to; to raise oneself; to be proud, be haughty” (Zodhiates, CD).

Ezra's initial mission was complete. He delivered the goods needed for the Temple. Now he would do some much needed teaching so the people could be faithful to GOD.

Ezra Chapter Nine

Ezra 9:1-2 “Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.”

“Now when these things were done, the princes drew near unto me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the peoples of the lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.” (ASV)

“Now when these things were done” is a reference to the business of the preceding chapter. When this business was accomplished, then some of the leaders of the people came to Ezra with a monumental problem. The culprits were signified in general terms — the people of Israel, the priests and Levites. Obviously, not everyone was guilty of the sin which was about to be announced, but apparently enough were to warrant this generalization.

Verse one simply says that the people involved were guilty of practicing the abominations of the people of the land, who are specifically named here. It is interesting to notice that there were originally seven nations in this land about whom GOD warned them. Here only five of the original ones are named (Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Amorites), and three were added which were not listed before (Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians).

Verse two specifies the abomination which the people were guilty of practicing — intermarriage with the heathen nations.

“When the LORD thy GOD shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt

thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deuteronomy 7:2-3).

What many fail to recognize is that this was not a prohibition based on a difference in skin color or simply nationality. Rather, it dealt with the morals and religious actions of the people. This assertion can easily be seen when one of several examples in the Bible is viewed. Let us notice Ruth, who was a Moabite. Obviously, she was not born of the families of Israel, yet Boaz was not condemned for marrying her, but rather was blessed. The secret lies within Ruth, who is described as “a virtuous woman,” which fact was known by all the people of Bethlehem-Judah (Ruth 3:11). But why was this marriage not condemned based on Deuteronomy 7:2-3? It is because Ruth had denounced the gods of her people and accepted the GOD of Israel as her own. She did not have a morals problem, which was often associated with the worship of the pagan gods. The example of Rahab the harlot should also be considered (Joshua 2). Both of these foreign women were honored by GOD to be included in the lineage of His Son.

Obviously, the prohibition of Deuteronomy chapter seven dealt with more than simply race, but rather focused on their religious and moral practices. They were to be a holy nation, and a holy nation would keep itself separated from idolatry. Further, the practices of idolatry often involved immorality and other practices condemned by GOD. Again, the forbidden marriages were with those who were practicing the worship of pretended gods. As pointed out above, anyone who was willing to give up his false gods to worship the GOD of Heaven could be married by an Israelite and could even be included in the lineage of Him through Whom all nations were to be blessed (Genesis 26:4).

“Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly” (Deuteronomy 7:3-4, Emphasis mine, R.K.).

Another thing which might be considered is that they may have been divorcing their Israelite wives to marry these idolatrous women. Consider that Malachi prophesied at about this same time and condemned them for putting away their wives. Why would they put

away the wives of their youth (Malachi 2:14)? Could it be to marry one of these idolatrous women?

One should also notice who the chief culprits of forbidden marriages were. They were the very people who should have known better — the chief men of the people, including the priests and Levites. When people see their rulers doing things which are illegal, they often become convinced that these things are no longer wrong. Leaders must set the example for proper conduct for others to follow.

Ezra 9:3-4 “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. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the GOD of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.”

“And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my robe, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down confounded. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the GOD of Israel, because of the trespass of them of the captivity; and I sat confounded until the evening oblation.” (ASV)

Here the reaction of Ezra is seen when he was given this information (vv. 1-2). **Why should he react so strongly?** Because he knew that intermarriage with these people had been and would be the end for Israel. He knew their forefathers' marriages to the heathen had caused them to go into idolatry and knew the same thing would happen again. No doubt, at first, the practices of these people would seem weird and repulsive; but as time went on, familiarity would cause them to be accepted.

Ezra was so amazed and astonished at this news that he tore his garments and ripped the hair from his head and beard. **Why would he not be astonished?** The people had just suffered a long captivity because they had turned from GOD before, and now they were engaged in the very thing which began to lead them away in the past. In his astonishment, he sat down in a public place, possibly the Temple area, maybe the court of the Temple.

His actions drew a crowd of people who seemed to recognize that his condition was the result of something which was horribly wrong. It probably started with those who initially brought him this news. As time went by, the word would have been spread, and others would gather as well. Notice it was those who had fear at the word of GOD who assembled. These were those who

recognized the authority of GOD'S word, and that GOD meant what He said. From the later reaction of the people, there is little doubt this number included many who were guilty of this sin. As mentioned above, they had probably become so used to this situation that they thought nothing of it until it was clearly stated that their actions were wrong. **How could this be, but remember the great man of GOD, David?** He did not recognize his sin with Bathsheba until the prophet confronted him with it. Perhaps a passage from the New Testament can help in understanding what had happened to these people.

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of GOD, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Sin which is practiced often enough will indeed blind the mind to even the most obvious sin. In America today, look at the loss of ability to blush over the nudity seen all around, or at the immorality which surrounds GOD's people.

Ezra sat astonished until the evening sacrifice, by which time he had composed himself enough to approach GOD regarding this matter.

Ezra 9:5-7 "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, And said, O my GOD, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my GOD: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day."

"And at the evening oblation I arose up from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe rent; and I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto Jehovah my GOD; and I 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 guiltiness is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers we have been exceeding guilty 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 plunder, and to confusion of face, as it is this day." (ASV)

From these verses to the end of the chapter, the

prayer of Ezra is seen. The three verses listed here are a confession of their sin.

Ezra began his prayer by showing his great humility falling to his knees and spreading his hands in petition toward GOD. He was ashamed even to look toward GOD because of the sins in which Israel was involved. He stated that their iniquities were great, refusing to try to lessen them. Ezra showed that one should always be willing to simply call sin — SIN. In confessing sins, there should never be an attempt to cover them up, or make them appear less than they really are. Ezra understood that their iniquities would bring destruction to those who worked them (Proverbs 21:15).

Ezra said their **“iniquities are increased over our head,”** and the Psalmist said, **“For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me”** (Psalm 38:4). The burden of sins is indeed heavy, and as the writer of Proverbs showed, sins bind one up so as to prevent action (Proverbs 5:22). The only thing which can break these bonds, which can allow one to move forward in fruitfulness, is full confession of our sins coupled with the forgiveness of GOD.

Ezra further showed this was not something new for Israel. He stated that their fathers had been the same way. In his commentary, Winters gives us a capsule view of the history of Israel which should be noticed.

“From the time she had marched away from the Red Sea, until God had delivered her into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, Israel had proven to be an unfaithful wife: longing for the flesh pots of Egypt (Ex. 16:3), committing whoredoms with the daughters of Moab (Num. 25:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:8), clamoring to be like the nations about them (1 Sam. 8:19-20). Worshiping the queen of heaven (Jer. 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” (p. 53).

Hosea also spoke of the sinful nature of GOD’S people.

“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” [For “goodness” the NKJV uses “faithfulness.”] (Hosea 6:4).

Indeed, sin is a horrible taskmaster which leads to terrible results, and Ezra fully understood this. Thus, he petitioned GOD to continue His mercies toward them in the following verses.

Ezra 9:8-9 “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. 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.”

“And now for a little moment grace hath been showed from Jehovah our GOD, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our GOD may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are bondmen; yet our GOD hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended lovingkindness 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 ruins thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.” (ASV)

The grace, or mercy, of GOD had been extended to Israel, even though the people of Israel had shown themselves to be a rebellious people over and over. The moment spoken of referred to the time after the Jews were allowed to return from Babylonian captivity.

The “**remnant**” spoken of was composed of those who had already returned and those which had come with Ezra. GOD had promised that a remnant of His people would remain (Isaiah 10:20-22). This remnant was given a “**nail**,” i.e., something they could hang the promises of GOD upon (like a nail used to hold a coat, et cetera). Some believe this may signify a tent peg, which was driven into the ground to hold the dwelling place (tent) securely. This promise of a permanent place to worship and live was a light in their otherwise bleak world. A bleak world, because the walls were still in shambles, they had great poverty in spite of all the gifts the king had given, and they were surrounded by enemies who would destroy them if they could. This “light at the end of the tunnel” gave their spirits a lift.

Ezra recognized that without the mercy GOD had extended them, they would not have had mercy in the sight of the Persian kings, i.e., the kings would not have been favorable in granting them leave to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and Temple. Without His mercy, the Samaritans would have already destroyed them.

The wall spoken of here symbolizes a place of protection. The physical wall of Jerusalem was in shambles, so this could not be what is spoken of in this

passage. Rather, it speaks of the protection which the Persians kings extended because of the influence of GOD. Again, notice that Ezra understood that GOD'S providential hand was in all of this, so he gave praise to GOD for those blessings.

Ezra 9:10-12 “And now, O our GOD, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments, Which Thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.”

“And now, O our GOD, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken Thy commandments, which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land through the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, through their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their filthiness: now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their prosperity 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.” (ASV)

“What shall we say?” There was no excuse which could be offered for the sins of the people. GOD had given them every opportunity to serve Him faithfully and had even chastised them when they needed it; yet, as quickly as their punishment was over, they started turning back to their former sins. Thus, the only thing Ezra could say was “we have forsaken Thy commandments.”

Verses eleven and twelve are a compilation of a number of passages in GOD'S word. They deal with the evil people of the land and GOD'S instructions not to become too close to them. GOD does not desire for His people to have absolutely no contact with the evil people of this world, for then they could not be the influence to them which is needed to save them.

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle,

and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick;
and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
Let your light so shine before men, that they may
see your good works, and glorify your Father
which is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16).

Yet, one must not become too familiar with them. This is seen in the admonitions not to marry them, for their idolatry would permeate the nation like a slow-moving cancer which later gains momentum.

One of the interesting phrases of this passage deals with compromise. This phrase reads, “nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever.” GOD’S people should not seek peace by compromising their beliefs in any way. It is even better to have conflict than to give up our principles for peace which does not really exist. But notice the second part of this phrase regarding what was not to be sought by His people. From examples like Job and Abraham, one learns it is not wrong to have wealth. But when the wealth of the wicked is desired, i.e., to be like the wicked, then that wealth will doom one to failure. His wealth may be gained, but at what price?

“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matthew 16:26)?

“For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away” (Luke 9:25)?

GOD has always given man a choice, and such was true with the Israelites. If they were faithful to Him, then He would not only bless them with the best parts of the land, but would also transfer it to their children. But if they were unfaithful, then He would remove them from the land, which He had done with the Babylonian captivity.

Ezra 9:13-14 “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; 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?”

“And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great guilt, seeing that Thou our GOD hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such a remnant, shall we again break Thy

commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? wouldst not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape?" (ASV)

After viewing all the distress and punishment they had received, Ezra recognized it was far less than they deserved. Ezra was not going to complain about their condition, because he understood their punishment had come upon them to cause repentance. When tempted to complain because things are not going well, it would be good to stop and consider that one's blessings are far greater than he deserves.

"He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).

"Know therefore that GOD exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (Job 11:6).

Their former sins did not deserve the mercy GOD had exercised toward them in preserving the remnant and delivering them back to their homeland. Their sins did not deserve GOD'S influencing the kings of Persia to help them rebuild.

Considering that their punishment was less than they deserved, Ezra leaped to ask if they could continue to be spared at all if they went back to the same sins which caused them to be exiled in the first place. Of the great nation of Israel, only a small portion had been preserved. **What if that small portion continued in the sins of their forefathers?** Ezra reasoned that, if they did so, they would be annihilated. This portion of Ezra's prayer seems to be aimed at impressing the seriousness of their situation upon the people, in order to cause them to accept the remedy they needed to keep GOD'S goodwill.

Ezra 9:15 "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 trespasses: for we cannot stand before Thee because of this."

"O Jehovah, the GOD of Israel, Thou art righteous; for we are left a remnant that is escaped, as it is this day: behold, we are before Thee in our guiltiness; for none can stand before Thee because of this." (ASV)

GOD's people cannot hide their sins from GOD, so there is no reason to try to excuse sin before Him.

"For the word of GOD is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit,

and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart”

(Hebrews 4:12).

The secrets of one’s heart are before GOD’S all-seeing eyes (1 Corinthians 14:25). How can one stand before Him and make excuses for his sins?

Ezra recognized that whatever decision GOD made in any area was righteous (lawful, right). So he simply stated that they stood before GOD that day in their trespasses, and yet had no right to do so.

Ezra Chapter Ten

Ezra 10:1-3 “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. 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. 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. “

“Now while Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before the house of GOD, there was gathered together unto him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children; for the people wept very sore. And Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our GOD, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land: yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing. 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.” (ASV)

It can only be imagined how the process of the assembling of these people to Ezra took place. But it probably was along these lines: The princes told Ezra about the sin of the people, and they saw his reaction, which probably did not surprise them, because they would not have reported it unless they believed something must be done to rectify the situation. Then as Ezra expressed his grief, word spread, and people gathered to try to find out what had triggered his outpouring of grief. As the day passed, more people

would come as they heard about it, and even more so because the hour of prayer was approaching. This would all add up to the **“very great congregation”** which assembled around Ezra. It should also be pointed out that it was not just the men which assembled but entire families, as women and children are mentioned. Further, their lamentations were great, which indicates that as they learned what the problem was, they joined in sorrow over their sins.

Next, one of the men (Shechaniah), a possible leader or he had just become a leader, answered Ezra. This indicates Ezra had been talking to the people, at least the leaders, about their current distress. Shechaniah did not try to cover up the sin they were involved in, nor did he try to make excuses for what they had done. He understood they had sinned against GOD, and the problem needed to be dealt with, not covered up. So he simply said, **“We have trespassed against our GOD.”**

The **“strange wives”** were the **“foreigners”** (ASV; “pagans” – NKJV) of the land in which they dwelt. But in acknowledging their sin, he also made this wonderful statement, **“Now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.”** Before the people were brought to realize their sinful condition, they had no hope. They were simply inviting GOD’S wrath upon themselves. The first step in bringing hope to this situation was the recognition that they were sinning. No bad situation can have a remedy without first having a recognition that something wrong has been done. If one does not recognize his sin and how terrible the consequences of sin are, then he will not be inclined to do anything about correcting himself.

Shechaniah continued by saying that they needed to make a covenant with GOD to put away these strange wives and their children. The **“covenant”** spoken of here is not an agreement which is worked out between two individuals. Rather, what is seen here is a declaration of their intent to obey GOD’S will in this matter. Shechaniah knew what the law said should be done. Whether this was previous knowledge or whether he had just learned it from Ezra is a matter of guesswork. The important thing was that they knew what must be done.

Notice the standard for putting away these wives. It was not because they had gotten tired of them, and this would be a good excuse to get rid of them. Neither was their action to be based on their emotions. Rather, their actions were based on three compatible advisers: (1)

“according to the counsel of my Lord (Ezra, RK),” (2) those that tremble at the commandment of our GOD,” and (3) “according to the law.” Ezra was GOD’S servant and had been acting according to GOD’S instructions to him. Others who knew GOD’S commandments, like Ezra, wanted GOD’S will to be done in all matters.

One of the great lessons learned in all of this is that emotions are not allowed to guide one in his actions. That which governs action must always be GOD’S will, based on His laws. There is no doubt that emotions were running high, for they loved these mates and the children born in these marriages [*“Love does not turn a sinful arrangement into a righteous union”* (Winton, p. 36)]. But now a bitter pill must be swallowed, not because GOD was trying to be harsh, but because **they** had violated GOD’S laws. People often get themselves into terrible situations because they have not first consulted GOD’S word before becoming involved in some course of action, and such was the case here. If they wanted rest in this land, to be in a right relationship with GOD, then they were going to have to go back to doing things as GOD decreed.

“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).

A possibility might also be noted in these verses. Shechaniah was said to be the son of Jehiel. Later in this chapter, among those who are listed as having taken strange wives, the name Jehiel is mentioned as the son of Elam, just as it is in verse three (see verse twenty-six). It might very well be that Shechaniah’s father was one of those who was involved in a godless marriage to one of those foreign women. If so, then Shechaniah is a good example of what must be done when one’s relatives are involved in sin. He did not allow the fact that his relatives were involved in this sin keep him from opposing sin and standing for the truth of GOD’S word. *Why would someone stand against a relative who is involved in sin, and take whatever steps are necessary to remove them from such a situation?* There are three reasons: (1) Love for GOD and His will, (2) love for one’s own soul and its eternal well being, and (3) love for the eternal soul of the relative (friend, et cetera) who is being rebuked. No matter who the individual may be, or group of individuals, one must always stand on GOD’S side against all sin.

“Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that

hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief” (Proverbs 28:14).

“Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long” (Proverbs 23:17).

“Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear GOD, which fear before Him” (Ecclesiastes 8:12).

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear GOD, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Ezra 10:4-5 “Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.”

“Arise; for the matter belongeth unto thee, and we are with thee: be of good courage, and do it. Then arose Ezra, and made the chiefs of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they would do according to this word. So they sware.” (ASV)

Ezra spent a good amount of time in mourning the sins of his people and in prayer to GOD. These things are proper, but then there is the time for action. When men put off action which is needed, it allows time for the Devil and his agents to regroup, to put out excuses as to why they should not follow a given course of action. Shechaniah recognized it was time to act, and so he encouraged this great man of GOD by telling him “we also will be with thee.” When GOD’s people stand together on GOD’s word — all will be strengthened.

There was also the matter of authority regarding the proposed action. Shechaniah knew what was right and what should be done, but he was not in a position of authority to lead the way. This was not because he was not a priest, but because the king had given Ezra the authority to rule and execute judgment in all matters regarding the Jews (7:25-26).

Shechaniah encouraged Ezra to act with courage, and courage was needed in such an emotionally — charged situation. It always takes courage to stand on GOD’S side against any sin which is being advocated. The easy thing to do when confronted by those who

advocate sin is simply to step back and say and do nothing. It takes courage to stand for what is right.

“Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD” (Psalm 31:24).

Upon the advice of Shechaniah, Ezra arose and got the leaders and people to promise that they would do all the Lord required. This was in essence an oath of allegiance to GOD’S word. The highest allegiance one owes anyone is to put GOD first in his life. His will must absolutely be the first concern of anyone’s life. Unfortunately, too many never think about what GOD wants because they are selfishly looking for what they want. This is also often the case of those who profess to be Christians. Again, it must be emphasized that emotions cannot be allowed to rule one’s decisions. Decisions must be based on a **“thus saith the Lord,”** which is exactly what Shechaniah was advocating.

Ezra 10:6-8 “Then Ezra rose up from before the house of GOD, and went into the chamber of Johanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water: for he mourned because of the transgression of them that had been carried away. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.”

“Then Ezra rose up from before the house of GOD, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came thither, he did eat no bread, nor drink water; for he mourned because of the trespass of them of the captivity. And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; and that whosoever came not within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the assembly of the captivity.” (ASV)

Ezra arose from before the Temple and went into the **“chamber”** of Johanan. This seems to be one of those chambers which were found on the outside of the Temple and attached to it. These chambers were probably used for the storage of Temple treasures and as storerooms for the tithes given to the priests. He did not go to this chamber to refresh himself, but rather to continue his mourning through fasting for the people of

Israel and their sin.

As noticed earlier, Artaxerxes had given Ezra almost unlimited power to teach and enforce GOD'S laws on the inhabitants. In the list of powers he had (7:26) were both of the concepts mentioned here — “**banishment**” and “**confiscation of goods.**” Ezra used both of these as a powerful tool to force all of Israel to assemble in three days at the Temple. Of the two, the most powerful would probably be banishment, since this would remove one from the Temple and thus the worship of GOD.

This writer believes it was during the time of the Babylonian captivity when the synagogues came into existence. He realizes the Temple was being dealt with in this context, but he wants to notice the idea of separation which was associated with the Tabernacle and would exist with the Temple. In doing so, he defers to Winters, who wrote the following.

“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” (p. 60).

As can be seen, banishment would be an effective weapon of discipline which could be used to cause people to obey the laws of GOD. **Do we have something along these same lines to help us today?** In the church, the withdrawal of fellowship should accomplish the same thing. And like in the days of Ezra, it should only be used as a drastic step (last resort) to save the soul of the one upon whom it is imposed. It should be remembered that when man refuses to obey GOD, then he no longer has fellowship with GOD, and therefore should no longer have the blessings which come with that fellowship.

Ezra 10:9-12 “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. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto the LORD GOD of your fathers, and do His pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives. Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.”

“Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month: and all the people sat in the broad place before the house of GOD, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain. And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have trespassed, and have married foreign women, to increase the guilt of Israel. Now therefore make confession unto Jehovah, the GOD of your fathers, and do His pleasure; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women. Then all the assembly answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said concerning us, so must we do.” (ASV)

The men of Judah and Benjamin are mentioned here, and this has caused some to say that men of the other tribes were not included. This was all the men of Israel, no matter from what tribe they came. A possible solution to the objection raised by some is that they were all living at that time in the area which had formerly belonged to these tribes.

It is noteworthy that all the men came to Jerusalem in the prescribed time frame Ezra gave them. This shows their concern for doing what was necessary in order to avoid destruction. They assembled on the twentieth day of the ninth month, which corresponds to the month December on today's calendar. It is further noteworthy that they assembled in the open in the rain. **How many Christians today would assemble to worship GOD under similar circumstances?** Many times luke-warm Christians will skip assembling together if there is a little drizzle, or even if the temperature is a little cold or hot. Yet, Christians today do not have to assemble in the open as they did here, Christians today have air-conditioned and heated automobiles to drive to the heated and air-conditioned place of assembly from air-conditioned and heated houses. The actions of the Jews in this text showed just how serious they considered the situation and the command they were given to assemble to be. **Is it possible that many Christians today do not consider it very important to obey GOD'S commands to assemble?** Remember that the rain in the text is spoken of as a **“great rain.”**

“Why were they trembling?” There were two

reasons. (1) Because of the seriousness of the situation. (2) Because the rain would have been cold at that time of the year.

Ezra did not beat around the bush, avoiding the subject. He simply told them they had violated GOD'S law. He was specific in his charge, i.e., he did not simply say, "You have sinned," and leave them to try to figure out what they had done.

"This is a characteristic of all Bible preaching. Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 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)" (Winters, p. 61).

There are two important parts to verse eleven. First, they were to **"make confession,"** i.e., they were to acknowledge and confess their sins. Ezra had previously confessed the sin of the people, but personal confession must take place. No one can do for another individual what GOD commands him to do. Confession has always been a vital part of GOD'S demands on His people, for if one refuses to recognize his sins, how can he expect to do anything about them, i.e., correct one's life in order to be pleasing to GOD? The second important thing seen in this verse is the action which must accompany confession — **"separate yourselves."** It was not enough to say they had sinned and then continue as they were. As this text clearly shows, actions must be taken to correct the sins in which one is involved. This should be a lesson learned today by those who are in adulterous marriages. They must realize they cannot continue in a marriage which GOD says is adulterous just because they have been baptized after the fact. The Israelites realized they were in marriages of which GOD did not approve. They did not just repent and ask for forgiveness — they repented, asked for forgiveness, and then put away (divorced) those mates.

The instructions they were given must have been as devastating to them as they are seen by today's society. When someone is told that to please GOD he has to give up that illegal second, third or more mates he has, one is almost always met with harsh criticism for being too conservative. But the people in this text were more interested in pleasing GOD than they were in pleasing their own selfish feelings. They answered Ezra, **"As thou hast said, so must we do."** Remember

that Ezra was not issuing his opinion because Shechaniah spoke for the people and stated that their marriages were trespasses against GOD. They knew the law of GOD, and they knew they had violated it. They also understood the penalty for violating GOD's law. They knew it was serious to be involved in a marriage of which GOD did not approve.

Ezra 10:13-14 "But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our GOD for this matter be turned from us."

"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 have greatly transgressed in this matter. Let now our princes be appointed for all the assembly, and let all them that are in our cities that have married foreign women come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our GOD be turned from us, until this matter be despatched." (ASV)

In the last section of passages, the people heard the charge against them and the remedy for their sins. Then they proclaimed they were ready to accept what Ezra said.

In the coming passages, one might get the picture that they were trying to avoid the inevitable. Usually when excuses are presented, it is a delaying tactic, but this was not the case with these people. Their thoughts were logical in sequence, and well thought out. First, there were many people (Today people would declare "the majority rules" as an excuse to continue doing whatever objectionable thing they are doing.). Second, it was really raining hard (The weather was too bad to do anything.). This work could not be accomplished overnight because there were a lot of them who were guilty of this sin.

But notice that their reasoning was not a delay tactic, or an attempt to let the uproar die down, so they could continue in their sins. This was said because they offered logical reasons and a way to accomplish in an expeditious manner what Ezra had commanded. It would indeed take a while to investigate each case, and they asked for an arrangement which would set their rulers of each city in a position to decide these matters.

Remember that it might have been that some of these marriages were acceptable when one considers cases like Rahab and Ruth. “Strange” means “foreign,” and both Rahab and Ruth were accepted foreign women. They had come together and stood in the street during this heavy rain, but to continue to do so for days while these cases were investigated would be foolish and lead many to illness and possibly even death.

Why were they willing to submit to the commands of Ezra? Because they knew the wrath of GOD and knew they were doomed if they did not repent and change their actions.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living GOD” (Hebrews 10:31); “For our GOD is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29).

Ezra 10:15-17 “Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.”

“Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah stood up against this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them. And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain heads of fathers' houses, after their fathers' houses, and all of them by their names, were set apart; and they sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter. And they made an end with all the men that had married foreign women by the first day of the first month.” (ASV)

Verse fifteen is indeed a very difficult passage to define. The KJV says Jonathan and Jahaziah were “employed about this matter,” the ASV says, “stood up against this matter,” and the NKJV says “opposed this.” The general consensus is that they opposed something, but the question is what? Were they opposed to getting rid of foreign wives? Or were they opposed to the plan which had been put forth to take care of these matters? If they opposed putting away the strange wives, then the really amazing thing is that there were so few who opposed this out of about twenty thousand men. If they opposed the plan put forward, does it mean the plan to delay for a few days to organize, meaning they probably wanted it done right now? Or did they think there might have been a better

way to judge these matters?

Of the four found in verse fifteen, only one of the names is found in the list of those who had strange wives — Meshullam (v. 29). But then the question must be asked — is this the same Meshllam which is mentioned in verse fifteen? There is not enough information to be absolute in this matter. If it is the same person, then the likelihood exists that these four were friends.

Saying this, what is this author's OPINION in this matter? He would like to say that they only objected to the plan put forth to make the judgments about these matters. But, looking at human nature, he tends to believe that out of this many people, someone probably objected to getting rid of the strange wives, and these four represented those who objected. But again this author wishes to emphasize this is his OPINION.

Notice the time-line regarding this whole matter of strange wives. First, Ezra was told about this matter on the seventeenth day of the ninth month. One knows this because he gave them three days for all the men to come to Jerusalem, which was the twentieth day of the ninth month. By the first day of the tenth month, they began the process of determining who had taken strange wives, and they finished the whole process by the first day of the first month. The whole process took less than three and one half months. They did not drag their feet; they got busy doing GOD'S will, even though this process must have been very painful to all of Israel.

The question needs to be asked — Are Christians today as diligent as they were, especially when an unpleasant task has been assigned by GOD? Do Christians today drag their feet until nothing is done, thus allowing sin to grow in the midst of the church or the family?

Ezra 10:18-19 “And among the sons of the priests there were found that had taken strange wives: namely, of the sons of Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren; Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass.”

“And among the sons of the priests there were found that had married foreign women: namely, of the sons of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and his brethren, Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah. And they gave their hand that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their guilt.” (ASV)

These two verses give the names of the priests who

had taken strange wives. When looking back at chapter nine and verse one, those who reported this trespass to Ezra had told him some of the leaders, including priests, had committed this abomination. Here they were named. **What did these guilty priests do?** They promised to put away these wives and offered a ram as sacrifice for their trespass.

“Why did the author record all the names in this section? Perhaps he included this list for the same reason in included others. His fondness for lists, for giving the actual names of people involved in the events he was reporting, testifies to his concern to guarantee the historicity of the account. He did not speak in generalities, but included specifics. Rather than saying, ‘Many men repented,’ he identified them, assuring readers that events really occurred” (Roper, p. 175).

Ezra 10:20-44 “And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah. And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah. And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasa. Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah. And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth. And of the sons of Pahathmoab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau, And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei, And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah, Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah.

All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.”

“And of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. And of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah. And of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa. And of the Levites: Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. And of the singers: Eliashib. And of the porters: Shallum, and Telem, and Uri. And of Israel: Of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, and Izziah, and Malchijah, and Mijamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah. And of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Elijah. And of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza. And of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, Athlai. And of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, Jeremoth. And of the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, and Binnui, and Manasseh. And of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, Shemariah. Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, Shimei. Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, and Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu, and Bani, and Binnui, Shimei, and Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah, Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, Joseph. Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Iddo, and Joel, Benaiah. All these had taken foreign wives; and some of them had wives by whom they had children.” (ASV)

One now comes to the end of the book of Ezra and finds here a list of those who were guilty of taking strange wives. Among that number are found men from every possible group, from the priests all the way to the average citizen. This should serve as a warning that sin knows no boundaries as regarding the position one holds. Even among the people who ought to have known better than all others, the priests, sin was found. All had to repent of their sins, and all found forgiveness when they coupled action with their repentance. Thanksgiving should be expressed that GOD chose to name these men, because it clearly shows He is no respecter of persons. He held priest and common man alike accountable for their sins.

It should also be noted that some of the men had children with these forbidden wives. The children did not change the situation at all. It was still sin for these men to be married to these women, and the separation was demanded. **What happened to these women and their children?** It is this author's belief that they were treated humanely and cared for after they were put away. These people were obviously interested in doing

what was right in GOD'S sight, and GOD would never have allowed them to mistreat these women and their children without rebuking them.

Does the putting away of wives/husbands need to take place today in the church — even when children are involved? Having been a preacher for over forty-three years in the Lord's church, the writer would unequivocally say **YES**. This writer once knew a man (since deceased) who found himself to be in an adulterous marriage. As soon as he discovered this, he divorced his "wife." They had two young children together whom he loved very much. He did not abandon them to poverty, but financially provided for them and their mother, even paying for their education at whatever university they might choose to attend when the time came. He spent the rest of his life as a single man. Not because he thought it would be wrong for him, the innocent party, to remarry; but because he did not want to take a chance with his soul. Painful? Yes. But GOD will provide the strength one needs when that person is determined to obey Him. May GOD give those who find themselves in unscriptural marriages today the strength to obey GOD like those in Ezra's day had.