

**GOD'S MESSAGES
BIBLE
COMMENTARY
SERIES**

VOLUME 9

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,
and caused them to understand the reading.
(Nehemiah 8:8).

**COMMENTARY
ON
THE BOOKS
OF
EZRA, NEHEMIAH,
AND ESTHER**

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2003



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# **The Book Of Ezra**



# Introduction To Ezra

## **Date of Writing:**

I will avoid an extended discussion of the date of writing of this book. Some radical critics wish to place the date of writing as late as 330 BC. Your present commentator believes the date should be about one hundred years previous to that time, or about 425 B.C.

## **The Author:**

There is general agreement that Ezra the scribe was the author of the book. His name is not mentioned in the book, but he was a scribe, and a great spiritual leader of the Jew as they returned from Babylonian captivity. We know that he collected copies of the ancient writings in order that the Jews would have the scriptures which had been unavailable to them during much of the time of their captivity. It seems that Ezra was the most important character of the book, and that he was also the author of the major portion of it.

## **Nature of the Book:**

It seems that Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, plus perhaps 1 and 2 Chronicles, are very closely related in the historical records of the Jews. All deal with the problems existing during and shortly after the return of the Jews from captivity about 536 B.C. We are told of the decree of Cyrus, King of the Chaldeans. This is followed by

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details of the return and the rebuilding of the temple and the revival of respect for the law and the prophets. The seventy years of Babylonian captivity had been endured from 606 B.C. until 536 B.C.

There are two divisions in the book. The first division in chapters 1-6 tells of the return to Palestine. The second division informs us of the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the temple and the resumption of the worship of Jehovah.

Major Theme of the Book:

The key word in the book of Ezra is “revival.” The cycles of history relating to God’s remnant continue on and on. This book records one portion of one cycle. After being chastised for having neglected reverence for the God of Heaven, they were ready for another opportunity to renew their dedication to His Word. Many of them did not even return to Palestine when the permission was given by Cyrus to go back to their land.

Those who did return had many obstacles to overcome in renewing their obedience to Jehovah, as well as their respect for His guidance through the scriptures. Ezra and Nehemiah were key figures in this effort.

A Brief Outline of the Book:

1. The Jews are allowed to return (Ch. 1-2).
2. The temple is rebuilt under resistance (Ch. 3-6).
3. Ezra’s personal return to Jerusalem (Ch. 7-8).
4. The putting away of strange wives (Ch. 9-10).



Chapter 1

Ezra 1:1 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,

There are two prophecies of the return of the Jews from the seventy years of captivity. The first is given by Isaiah (See Isa. 44:28 and 45:1).

Isa 44:28 That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.

Isa 45:1 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;

Cyrus would act as God's shepherd to see that His sheep were returned to their pasture in Palestine.

What actually happened when God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus? We are not told the details. There are numerous ways God can cause men's minds to be turned one way or another. At times He has used miraculous means. At other times His providential guidance works in the background.

The Medo-Persian Empire had replaced the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar had been succeeded by Cyrus. Jehovah had foreseen these changes long before this. The prophet Jeremiah had made a clear prediction

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that precisely what was spoken of in this verse would come to pass (See Jer. 33:6-14).

*Jer 33:6 Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.*

*Jer 33:7 And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first.*

*Jer 33:8 And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.*

*Jer 33:9 And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.*

*Jer 33:10 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,*

*Jer 33:11 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.*

*Jer 33:12 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.*

*Jer 33:13 In the cities of the mountains, in the cities*

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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.

Jer 33:14 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.

Ezra 1:2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Cyrus recognized that the God of the Jews had favored him with victory over a vast multitude of people. This king was known for his willingness to allow those people who had been taken captive to return to their homelands and resume their worship. The Jews were not alone in being granted this freedom.

Cyrus was convinced that the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah were a clear proof that the God of the Jews had expressed His will. The Jews were to be allowed to return to Palestine and rebuild their temple at Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Not all of the Jews were ready to go back. Some had married foreign wives. Some had gained land and other possessions. They had become such a part of the land that they had no desire to leave and go home.

However, those who did wish to return were given Cyrus' permission to do that. The result was that only about fifty-two thousand of them took advantage of Cyrus' decree.

Ezra 1:4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

Cyrus even went so far as to encourage the Jews who remained in the land where they had been settled. If they chose not to return to Palestine, they should feel a need to help those who did return with silver, gold, livestock and supplies. They would need sacrifices to offer when they arrived.

Ezra 1:5 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.

Ezra 1:6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

Now it is the spirit of the Jews to look with favor upon the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem. The quantity of goods and livestock was very impressive. We allow our memories to go back through time to the departure of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Pharaoh and his people were willing to part with many valuables to get rid of



the Jews and the plagues which had come because of them. Now, there are no plagues to avoid, but there is a prophecy from the mouth of Jehovah. It pleased Cyrus to honor that prediction.

Ezra 1:7 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;

When Nebuchadnezzar had captivated the people, he ransacked the temple and removed much treasure. Cyrus understood the source of such valuables that had found their way to his treasury. He gave the treasures back to their owners.

Ezra 1:8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

A count was kept of the various items which were returned to the Jews. The treasurer of king Cyrus listed these many items when he turned them over to Sheshbazzar, an important man of the Jews.

Ezra 1:9 And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

Ezra 1:10 Thirty basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand.

Ezra 1:11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these

did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

Let us do a little addition.

30	chargers of gold
1,000	chargers of silver
29	knives
30	basins of gold
410	other silver vessels
<u>1,000</u>	other vessels
2,499	<u>Total number</u>

Something does not add up! Verses 9 and 10 do not total 5,400, as stated in verse 11. Critics of the Bible love to find such differences as these. After having examined the Bible for over sixty years, your present writer has learned to be extremely cautious in criticizing the honesty and integrity of the material. All too often he has found satisfactory explanations ten or twenty years later.

The reader may be interested in an extra Biblical account which is found in the book of 1 Esdras. Adam Clarke presents a list of items given in that ancient book. That list gives a total of 5,469 items. Whether the actual count was 2,499 or 5,400, or 5,469, the obvious conclusion is that the value of the items was enormous. Whatever the case, let us satisfy ourselves with the fact that God was working to make it convenient for the chosen people to find their way back to Jerusalem where the temple could be rebuilt and the worship resumed.



Chapter 2

This chapter deals with the listing of the various groups of Israelites who returned to Palestine under the leadership of Zerubbabel. It does not lend itself to verse by verse commentary. Consequently, the material will be dealt with in several larger portions.

The chapter is valuable in that it points out the continued pride of Israel in the promise to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth were to be blessed. The seventy years of Babylonian captivity had not erased this people from existence.

Ezra 2:1 Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city;

There are two thoughts concerning the meaning of the word “province” in this verse. Some believe it refers to the province of Babylon. Others contend that it refers to Judah as being a province under the control of the Persians.

The word “up” is confusing to present day students of the Bible. Up and down are words which are associated with north and south by many moderns. Up and down, as used in the Scriptures are literal. Jerusalem was at a higher elevation than the land of their seventy year captivity.

Some of those who had been carried away into captivity no doubt were still alive at this time. At any rate, those who returned attempted to find their way back to the cities from which they had been taken.

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**Ezra 2:2 Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:**

This is a list of prominent males from whom a number of descendants had arisen. Among the list we find two common names. They are Mordecai and Nehemiah. Commentators are divided as to whether these are the two men who are found in the records of the book of Esther and Nehemiah. It is possible, but not probable. The Jeshua listed here is not the Joshua who succeeded Moses. The name is sometimes used as Joshua, but these are two different men, not one.

**Ezra 2:3 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two.**

The word “children”, as used here, has reference to the descendants of fathers in Israel. However, it can also refer to those who lived in a given village or city. Often a city or village was named for a person. This makes the meaning doubly difficult. The following list includes both names of ancestors and names of cities.

**Ezra 2:4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two.**

**Ezra 2:5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five.**

**Ezra 2:6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve.**

**Ezra 2:7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.**

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Ezra 2:8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five.

Ezra 2:9 The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore.

Ezra 2:10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two.

Ezra 2:11 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three.

Ezra 2:12 The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two.

Ezra 2:13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six.

Ezra 2:14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six.

Ezra 2:15 The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four.

Ezra 2:16 The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight.

Ezra 2:17 The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three.

Ezra 2:18 The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve.

Ezra 2:19 The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three.

Ezra 2:20 The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.

Ezra 2:21 The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three.

Ezra 2:22 The men of Netophah, fifty and six.

Ezra 2:23 The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight.

Ezra 2:24 The children of Azmaveth, forty and two.

Ezra 2:25 The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three.

Ezra 2:26 The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one.

Ezra 2:27 The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two.

Ezra 2:28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three.

Ezra 2:29 The children of Nebo, fifty and two.

Ezra 2:30 The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six.

Ezra 2:31 The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

Ezra 2:32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.

Ezra 2:33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five.

Ezra 2:34 The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five.

Ezra 2:35 The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

In the next four verses we have a numbering of the priests who were descendants of Aaron. Of these priests there were four branches; those from Jedaiah, those from Immer, those from Pashur and those from Harim.

Ezra 2:36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.

Ezra 2:37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.

Ezra 2:38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.

Ezra 2:39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.



The priests were but one division of the Levites. The Levites included all of the descendants of Levi, whereas the priests were restricted to the descendants of Aaron. Many of the Levites tended to tasks of lesser importance than did the priests.

Ezra 2:40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four

Ezra 2:41 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight.

The singers were either those who sang at worship services, or were used in entertainment of the more wealthy.

Ezra 2:42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all an hundred thirty and nine.

The porters performed such duties as gatekeepers and janitors.

Ezra 2:43 The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth,

From verse forty-three through verse fifty-four we have a list of the nethinims who returned. The word “Nethinim” gives some grasp of their duties. It means “given as helpers.” The large number of them also indicates a lesser rank.

Ezra 2:44 The children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon,

Ezra 2:45 The children of Lebanah, the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub,

Ezra 2:46 The children of Hagab, the children of Shalmai, the children of Hanan,

Ezra 2:47 The children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah,

Ezra 2:48 The children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam,

Ezra 2:49 The children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai,

Ezra 2:50 The children of Asnah, the children of Mehunim, the children of Nephusim,

Ezra 2:51 The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur,

Ezra 2:52 The children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha,

Ezra 2:53 The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Thamah,

Ezra 2:54 The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

The following list of the children of Solomon's servants may refer to the descendants of slaves who served in the time of the wise man.

Ezra 2:55 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Peruda,

Ezra 2:56 The children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel,

Ezra 2:57 The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Ami.

Ezra 2:58 All the Nethinims, and the children

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**of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.**

The reader will notice that we have two groups listed here; the Nethinims and the children of Solomon's servants. This may have to do with Nethinim being Israelites and the sons of Solomon's servants being non-Israelites.

**Ezra 2:59 And these were they which went up from Telmelah, Telharsa, Cherub, Addan, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel:**

Whereas the children of Solomon's servants were not Israelites, there were a group who claimed to be Israelites, but who were not able to prove their lineage.

**Ezra 2:60 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred fifty and two.**

**Ezra 2:61 And of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name:**

**Ezra 2:62 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.**

**Ezra 2:63 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.**

Those who could not demonstrate their lineage were told by the Tirshatha, or governor that they could not participate in priestly duties until the Urim and Thummim were available to determine the Divine will and either support or deny their claims. At this time the Urim and Thummim had been lost to the Israelites.

**Ezra 2:64 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,**

This is not the only record of the total number returning from the captivity. There is another list in the book of Nehemiah, and yet another in the extra canonical book of I Esdras. Although the total in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah is the same, at forty-two thousand three hundred sixty, as above, the number is arrived at differently.

The number who returned from the captivity is reduced from the number captured by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon. This might well be expected. God spoke of a remnant who would return. We can understand that the number who chose not to return could have been sizable.

**Ezra 2:65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.**

**Ezra 2:66 Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five;**

**Ezra 2:67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.**

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Even the livestock were numbered. The value of the property and money which accompanied the returnees was sufficient to establish them long enough to maintain themselves after they had settled. Cyrus had been gracious in his cooperation with what he understood as the will of Israel's God.

Ezra 2:68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the LORD which is at Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

Ezra 2:69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

God had supplied the needs of His people. It was now time for the leaders of the people to show their gratitude by offering freely toward the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. They gave according to their ability.

Jehovah expects those of the present day to do the same. Both property and talents are to be devoted to the progress of the church of Jesus Christ. If one has been blessed with much, that person is expected to give much. We will never give to God as much as He has given to us. In the judgment, the faithful will be rewarded with infinitely more than they have offered the Lord.

Ezra 2:70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

We have now one summary verse listing the different groups who are listed and numbered in the entire chapter.

Chapter 3

After having been allowed to return to their precious land of Canaan, the Jews were ready to begin reconstruction of the altar of the Lord and the temple. Cyrus had generously given the approval to return, and had also provided a limited amount of money and valuables which would allow them to begin the work.

Ezra 3:1 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.

The seventh month on the Jewish calendar was the month of Tisri. It was a particularly important month in that the major feasts of the Jews were celebrated during that month. This was an appropriate time for the work of reorganization to begin.

What a tremendous statement we find in this verse. They gathered themselves together as one man. If only the people who are bitterly divided in this twenty-first century could see their way to the same, we would live in a different society. We have a new Jerusalem today. Let us do everything possible to follow the example set by these Jews as they came together in unity. The temple of God today is the Church of Jesus Christ. The need for spiritual unity is urgent!

Ezra 3:2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

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Jeshua is an alternate spelling of the name Joshua. As pointed out previously, this is not the same individual as the Joshua who succeeded Moses. Jeshua took the lead in bringing about the first steps of rebuilding. The altar was needed immediately for the sacrifices which would be offered to Jehovah on a regular basis. There were both free will offerings and required offerings to be presented to the Almighty.

**Ezra 3:3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.**

The word translated as “bases” in this verse can also be translated as “spot.” This leads a number of students of the Bible to see here an effort to place the new altar on the same spot as the older altar of burnt offering had been built.

The Jews were fearful that the Samaritans and others who dwelt in the land would attack them and make it unsafe to settle permanently. To assure that any such attacks would be unsuccessful, they hurried to finish the construction of the altar in order that they could be pleasing to God and secure His care and protection.

**Ezra 3:4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;**

The twenty-ninth chapter of the book of Numbers seems to be referred to here when it is said, “as it is written.” That chapter spells out in detail the various feasts and offerings.

**Ezra 3:5 And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.**

The fire on the altar was to burn without ceasing. It would have been a time of great anticipation to look forward to the time the fire of the altar would again begin to burn. There is great satisfaction in knowing one has complied with the will of the God who created us. These people were doing their very best to ready themselves for offering that which God had commanded. This had not been possible while they were in the land of the Babylonians and Persians.

**Ezra 3:6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid.**

Though the altar of burnt offering was in operation from the first day of the month of Tisri, the temple of God still lay in ruins. As long as that remained true there could only be partial joy. This would be a monstrous task for the smaller number of people who had returned. Solomon had several times as many workers available when he caused the construction of the original temple.

**Ezra 3:7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.**



Both workers and materials had to be secured. First, stone masons were hired to set the foundation. Timber would be needed. Solomon had brought the cedar in from the ports of Tyre and Sidon. The great cedar trees of Lebanon were superior to other lumber which could be found near the city of Jerusalem.

The olives, the food and the drink raised near Jerusalem area were sent in exchange for labor and timber. Though the Jews were still under the rule of Cyrus, they had received a large amount of freedom and financial support from the King of Persia.

**Ezra 3:8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.**

It had taken some time for the Jews to reach the point that they could think about the building of the temple. They first had to build homes for themselves to protect from weather and wild beasts. At first this was justified. Later the prophet Haggai took them to task for building their own ceiled houses and neglecting to build the house of God (See Haggai 1:4-9).

*Hag 1:4 Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?*

*Hag 1:5 Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.*

*Hag 1:6 Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye*

*eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.*

*Hag 1:7 Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways.*

*Hag 1:8 Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.*

*Hag 1:9 Ye looked for much, and, lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house.*

Normally the Levites would not have been called into service until they reached the age of thirty. Because of the urgency of the situation, those above the age of twenty were recruited.

**Ezra 3:9 Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.**

The work was begun, under the supervision of Jeshua.

**Ezra 3:10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.**

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This verse does not tell us the foundation of the temple was finished. There would be a time of interruption ahead. We will be told later that the foundation of the temple was laid. It seems that at that time the foundation was completed.

As the work progressed, the priests were arrayed in their prestigious garments and played on trumpets. The branch of the Levites who were descendants of Asaph were trained musicians. They sang and used cymbals to carry the beat of the music, as King David had outlined in the days gone by.

Ezra 3:11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

The singing here appears to have been what is called antiphonal. One group would sing, and another group would answer the first. Singing in parts sometimes follow such a pattern in our present day worship. Praise and gratitude were expressed to Jehovah for His continuing concern for His people. Joy abounded.

Ezra 3:12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

The joy was not unanimous. While the younger men shouted out their joy and praise to God, the elders

among the priests, Levites and others wept loudly. The comparison between the majesty of the former temple which had been demolished, and the one which was now under construction was too much to bear. The joy of the young men and the grief of the older ones was mixed.

Ezra 3:13 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.

These Jews were an emotional people. The shouts of joy filled the air. At the same time, the lamenting of those who had seen the first temple matched the volume of those who were shouting in joy. When the expressions of joy and weeping were combined, it was possible to hear the sounds at a great distance.



Chapter 4

This time we read of the opposition of the Samaritans and others who had been living in Canaan while the Jews who had been captivated for some seventy years were gone. We find that their efforts to thwart the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem were successful in that the rebuilding was halted for a period of several years.

Ezra 4:1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the LORD God of Israel;

Zerubbabel had led the people of Israel back to Canaan under the decree of Cyrus. There had been both rejoicing and weeping as the work proceeded and the new temple was compared with the glory of the old one. All of this was not done in a closet. The Samaritans and others who had been imported to keep the land free of wild beasts and wilderness from taking over resented what was being done.

The Jews who returned from captivity were mostly from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The other ten tribes had intermarried with the idolatrous nations around them. They recognized their background as being Jewish, but were unable to trace their genealogies separate and apart from the Gentiles.

Ezra 4:2 Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.

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The returning Jews had been careful to keep themselves separate. This had built up jealousy between themselves and the people of the land. The result was that the Samaritans, etc., came to Zerubbabel and the other leaders of the Jews and spoke of desiring to work along with them in the reconstruction.

They presented themselves as being zealous to join in the work that they too might sacrifice to Jehovah. They contended that they had been offering sacrifices to Him throughout the days since they had been planted in the land.

It is extremely doubtful that they were sincere in their request to help. If they were sincere, the answer to their request resulted in a sharp change of attitude in the days to follow.

**Ezra 4:3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.**

Zerubbabel and the other leaders of the Jews made it crystal clear that the Samaritans had no business joining in with them. Cyrus decree had been aimed toward the Jews alone. The house of God was to be built by those with pure Jewish ancestry.

Christians of these later centuries could well take a lesson from the events of that day. There are those who have failed to remain true to the Word of God who would like to join in fellowship with those who have been faithful. Certainly Christians should welcome the return of those who have departed from the faith when it has become clear that those departed ones have truly repented of their misdeeds. But, walking with the unfaithful is spiritual suicide. Zerubbabel was aware of that.





**Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,**

If the people of the land had been sincere in their desire to worship Jehovah in spirit and in truth, they would have set out to prove their loyalty. Instead, they were angry and set out to do everything possible to hinder the building process.

**Ezra 4:5 And hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.**

Today we would call these hired counsellors lawyers. They were rewarded for presenting a given position to the Persian ruler. It is not impossible that some of these counsellors were bribed to infiltrate the headquarters of the Persian government and work from the inside.

These efforts to hinder the rebuilding continued through the end of Cyrus reign; then through that of Cambyses, Smerdis, and on to the second year of the reign of Darius.

**Ezra 4:6 And in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, wrote they unto him an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.**

Ahasuerus was the ruler in the time of Esther. Let us take note right here that some of these rulers were known by as many as three different names. They were known to the Hebrews by one name, to the Persians by another, and to the Greeks by yet a third. If the student

of the Bible becomes confused, he need not question his sanity.

The major point is to realize the long lasting antagonism between the Samaritans and the Jews. God intended for His people to dwell in the land of Canaan and prepare the way for the coming of His Only Begotten Son. The resistance of the people of the land would not prevent that from taking place.

**Ezra 4:7 And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.**

Bishlam, Mithredath and Tabeel were leaders of the opponents of the Jews. They wrote to the Persian King, Artaxerxes, in the language of Assyria. This was a language understood by some in various nations of that part of the world at that time.

**Ezra 4:8 Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this sort:**

Artaxerxes would have found it difficult to ignore the hatred of the inhabitants of the land of Canaan toward the work of the Jews. The word “against” is a key word. If it was possible to fight against the Jews by bribery and infiltration they would do that. If it was possible to gain an advantage by writing letters of condemnation, that would be done.

**Ezra 4:9 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,**

A number of the verses from this point on are translated into present day languages from the Aramaic in which this letter was first written. This is strong evidence that the one who recorded this material was not making up fiction. One would hardly use another language, as is done here, without a good reason.

It seems that the Samaritans were not the only people who despised the Jews. Here we have nine different groups joining in with the Samaritans in attempting to block the reconstruction.

**Ezra 4:10 And the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Asnapper brought over, and set in the cities of Samaria, and the rest that are on this side the river, and at such a time.**

The nine nations above were joined by those from the “rest of the nations.” Asnapper is thought to have been Ashurbanipal. The writers of this letter were making certain that Artaxerxes knew they were in favor of the actions which had been taken to populate the land of Canaan with this host of people.

“This side the river” refers to the land on the west of the Euphrates. At one time God had promised Israel the land from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt.

“At such a time” seems to have been a phrase of courtesy, perhaps somewhat like “See you soon.”

**Ezra 4:11 This is the copy of the letter that they sent unto him, even unto Artaxerxes the king; Thy**

**servants the men on this side the river, and at such a time.**

We are now given the contents of the letter which was sent to King Artaxerxes. Those writing the letter were making certain the King knew they were on his side, and were interested in being faithful servants. They were artists in deception. It would have been more accurate for them to have described themselves as servants of Satan, the great Accuser, than servants of Artaxerxes.

**Ezra 4:12 Be it known unto the king, that the Jews which came up from thee to us are come unto Jerusalem, building the rebellious and the bad city, and have set up the walls thereof, and joined the foundations.**

They pictured themselves as protectors of the interests of the King. It was needful that he be warned of a serious danger in his domain. The Jews who had been given permission to return to the land of Canaan had arrived in the city of Jerusalem. The King needed to realize just how dangerous this was. This city of Jerusalem had been extremely independent and rebellious in the past. Now these Jews were set on building back the walls of the city. They had already set the foundations of the wall in place.

The reader should recognize that this is talking about the walls of the city at this time, and not the walls of the temple of the Lord. It would not have been as serious to the King for the walls of the temple to be erected as it would be for the entire city to be fortified by rebuilding it's walls.

**Ezra 4:13 Be it known now unto the king, that, if this city be builded, and the walls set up again,**  
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then will they not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and so thou shalt endamage the revenue of the kings.

Taxes and tribute were very important to rulers. They provided funds for governmental operations. They also were evidence of the control of the territory paying the taxes. The people of the land were planting seed in the mind of the King. If the city of Jerusalem became a fortified city, it was entirely possible that they would refuse to pay tribute and there would be no way to enforce the collection.

Again the reader is reminded that this is speaking of the walls of the city and not the walls of the temple.

Ezra 4:14 Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we sent and certified the king;

The enemies of the Jews piled compliments on the King, high and deep. After all, they declared they had many benefits which came to them as a result of those taxes which were collected. But, that was not all. The King would be brought to a state of shame and dishonor among his subjects if the city of Jerusalem proved able to defy him.

There claim was that the only reason they had written this letter and certified that these things were true was to see that all went well in the government of the land.

Ezra 4:15 That search may be made in the book of the records of thy fathers: so shalt thou find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto kings and provinces, and that they have moved sedition

within the same of old time: for which cause was this city destroyed.

If the King had any doubts about the truth of their criticism of the Jews, it would be well to check the records. When that was done, he would find Jerusalem to be a difficult city to govern. They contended that it was because of Jerusalem's traitorous attitudes that it had been destroyed in the past.

This was not the truth. The reason for Jerusalem's destruction was that the Jews had failed to be true to Jehovah. He had punished them by allowing them to be taken into Babylonian captivity.

Ezra 4:16 We certify the king that, if this city be builded again, and the walls thereof set up, by this means thou shalt have no portion on this side the river.

They assured the King that once the walls of Jerusalem were built back, he would find he had no control over the land west of the Euphrates.

This was enough to open the eyes of Artaxerxes wide. He decided action must be taken immediately.

Ezra 4:17 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.

Ezra 4:18 The letter which ye sent unto us hath been plainly read before me.

Artaxerxes returned an answer to the letter which the people of the land had sent to him. It was intended
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for all of those on the west of the Euphrates. He had read their letter and was much concerned. He wished them to know he was in sympathy with those who had sent it. He was agreed with them and wished them well.

**Ezra 4:19 And I commanded, and search hath been made, and it is found that this city of old time hath made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made therein.**

The rulers of empires of that day kept careful records of the events taking place under their rule. Artaxerxes had investigated and found that the city of Jerusalem had been so powerful in past days that it had defied authorities who tried to rule over it.

Of course the King was reading the records from the biased point of view of those who had tried to oppress the subjects of the real King of heaven. God's people were determined to serve Him, and not the pagan and idolatrous rulers of the day.

**Ezra 4:20 There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, which have ruled over all countries beyond the river; and toll, tribute, and custom, was paid unto them.**

Artaxerxes realized that such as Solomon had tremendous power over not only the land bordering the Mediterranean, but over much larger territories. That which they had warned was true. He must be careful not to allow the Jews to establish themselves in the land, or he might find it impossible to keep them under subjection.

**Ezra 4:21 Give ye now commandment to cause these men to cease, and that this city be not**

**buildied, until another commandment shall be given from me.**

Therefore, the Jews were commanded to halt their rebuilding efforts. It might be that later they could be allowed to continue. In the meantime all construction must come to a halt. The King would let them know if there was to be any change in the plans.

**Ezra 4:22 Take heed now that ye fail not to do this: why should damage grow to the hurt of the kings?**

Rehum, Shimshai and those who had collaborated with them had done their job well. The King was completely persuaded to prevent the rebuilding of the walls of the city of Jerusalem. They must not fail to intervene in the Jew's project. Since they were so concerned about the welfare of the empire, they should keep such damage from taking place.

**Ezra 4:23 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.**

It did not take these jealous enemies of the Jews long to put the desires of Artaxerxes into action. They were probably on the way out of the door by the time the last line was read. They hastened to Jerusalem and used force to see all work stopped.

Jehovah must have had some reason for allowing this force to succeed. The walls of Jericho came tumbling down when He desired His people to be victorious. If the



walls of Jericho could be brought down, certainly the wall of Jerusalem could have been built up if it had been in accordance with His plans. There is no force and power sufficient to defeat God's faithful. Pharaoh found that to be true.

**Ezra 4:24 Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.**

This last verse of the chapter leads the reader to think of the walls of the temple as the walls which were discussed from verses six through twenty-three. That is not the case. This last verse is a flashback. If the city walls were not built back, neither would it be possible to finish the work on the temple of God.

There would be no more accomplished in the rebuilding of the temple until the second year of Darius. There were some seventy-four years which passed from the decree of Cyrus until the second year of Darius. This extended from 520 B.C. to 446 B.C. Sometimes the service of the True Lord requires tremendous patience!

## *Chapter 5*

The work on the constructing of the temple in Jerusalem had barely begun when a combination of pressure from the people of the land and discouragement on the part of the Jews brought it to a halt for a number of years. In this chapter we read of a rejuvenation of that work.

**Ezra 5:1 Then the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied unto the Jews that were in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of the God of Israel, even unto them.**

The books of the Old Testament are not arranged in chronological order. Poetry is concentrated in one block. The law is found in the first five books, etc. If they were placed in order, we would find the books of Haggai and Zechariah side by side with this present book of Ezra.

Haggai and Zechariah performed a valuable service in reminding the Jews the rebuilding of the temple of the Lord must not be neglected. The work must be resumed and brought to a finish. Haggai was a more down to earth prophet. He dealt with the needs of the present. Zechariah was more visionary, looking ahead to greater things which lay ahead when the temple was completed.

It would be profitable for the reader to turn to both of these books and look them over in connection with this book of Ezra. It was not long after these two prophets began urging Israel to resume the building of the temple before that effort was begun.

**Ezra 5:2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem:**

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and with them were the prophets of God helping them.

Zerubbabel had been appointed by Cyrus as governor of the Jews in their return to the land after the Babylonian captivity. He was active in the social organization of the people. Jeshua was the High Priest and was more involved in the religious aspects. These two men, along with Haggai and Zechariah provided the leadership which was sorely needed in the return to Canaan. Jeshua was actually the grandson of Jozadak.

There is reason to believe Zerubabbel is referred to as Sheshbazzar in the sixteenth verse of this chapter. Both Zerubabbel and Sheshbazzar are said to have laid the foundations of the temple. This is not positive proof, but does suggest the two were identical.

Ezra 5:3 At the same time came to them Tatnai, governor on this side the river, and Shetharboznai and their companions, and said thus unto them, Who hath commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?

It did not take long for Tatnai, who was the governor appointed by Darius of the Persians to hear of the rebuilding. We can assume that the Samaritans, who had been told they could not help in the rebuilding, hastened to send the word of what was happening to Tatnai.

The governor then responded by taking a delegation to the builders and investigating. Tatnai and his companions wanted to know who had given them the authority to do the building. There may be a suggestion in this verse that not only the temple, but the walls of the city were a part of the project. Of course, it could have been only the walls of the temple which are in view.

Ezra 5:4 Then said we unto them after this manner, What are the names of the men that make this building?

Suddenly the grammar changes. The word “we” would seem to indicate the Jews were asking the question. Yet it appears that the question is being asked by Tatnai and his delegation. The present commentator is going to assume, along with most others, that the question is a companion question with the one in the last verse. First, the Jews were to tell Tatnai who had given the permission to build. Second, he wished to know the names of those who were taking lead in the building.

His questions did not necessarily show a spirit of malice. As governor of the land, he had a right to be informed as to major activities which might affect the portion of the land under his supervision.

Ezra 5:5 But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.

This was a far different situation than had existed when the Jews were taken from the land and sent to Babylon. At that time God was angry with them and turned his face away. Now His eye was toward them and they received His support.

It is always well for men to have the eye of the Lord upon them in a favorable way. All things work together for good to them that love the Lord. It is just the opposite when the wrath of God has fallen.

Tatnai was not inclined to issue a command for the work to cease until he had conferred with Darius, the ruler

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of the empire. Thus the work continued. In the meantime, Tatnai prepared a letter to Darius in order that he might not act in opposition to the King's desires.

**Ezra 5:6 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:**

**Ezra 5:7 They sent a letter unto him, wherein was written thus; Unto Darius the king, all peace.**

We are given the opportunity to review the contents of the letter which Tatnai sent to Darius. The use of the words "all peace" are similar to signatures of "Respectfully yours" of present times.

**Ezra 5:8 Be it known unto the king, that we went into the province of Judea, to the house of the great God, which is builded with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands.**

Tatnai was governor over several provinces. Judea, where the temple was being rebuilt was but one of several. He informed Darius that he had personally visited the area of Jerusalem and had inspected the work which was going on there. He had found a surprising amount of progress.

He spoke of "the great God." This does not necessarily mean he understood Jehovah to be the Only True and Living God. He may have only thought of the Jews attitude toward the great God in which they believed.

At any rate, they were building a very impressive temple. It had walls which combined immense stones with wooden beams. The literal meaning of the word

“great stones” is “rolling stones.” The idea is that these stones were so large they required inclines to allow them to be rolled to the position where they would be placed. Normally, levers would be used to move them. Do not assume these were just boulders a foot or two across. Some of the stones used in buildings such as this measured many feet in height, thickness and length.

Tatnai informed Darius that if the Jews were allowed to continue as they were, the task of building would be completed and a decision must be made as to allowing them to finish it.

**Ezra 5:9 Then asked we those elders, and said unto them thus, Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up these walls?**

**Ezra 5:10 We asked their names also, to certify thee, that we might write the names of the men that were the chief of them.**

We are still considering Tatnai’s letter to Darius. He informed Darius that they had asked the Jews who gave them the authority or the permission to do the building. The Jews were also asked to reveal the names of those who were taking the lead in the project.

**Ezra 5:11 And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up.**

The Jews had declared the temple they were rebuilding was one which had been first constructed long before in the times of one of the great Kings of Israel (Solomon). The inference was that this present building was not a threat to either Tatnai or Darius.



**Ezra 5:12 But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.**

The reason it needed rebuilding was that God had become angry with His people and had allowed them to be taken into captivity by the King of Babylon.

The reader will note that Babylon had been replaced by the Persians and that the two men, Tatnai and Darius were Persians.

**Ezra 5:13 But in the first year of Cyrus the king of Babylon the same king Cyrus made a decree to build this house of God.**

After those seventy years of captivity, Cyrus had come into power and he had a quite different attitude toward the captives. He was the one who had given the authority to go back to the land of Canaan and rebuild the temple of God.

**Ezra 5:14 And the vessels also of gold and silver of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought them into the temple of Babylon, those did Cyrus the king take out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered unto one, whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;**

**Ezra 5:15 And said unto him, Take these vessels, go, carry them into the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be builded in his place.**

Cyrus was so concerned over having the vessels of gold and silver which had been in the previous temple, that he ordered those items to be returned to the Jews and taken back to be placed in the house which they were to build in place of the one which had been destroyed. Cyrus had given Sheshbazzar the oversight of the moving of the Jews and also the precious treasures back to their place in Jerusalem.

**Ezra 5:16 Then came the same Sheshbazzar, and laid the foundation of the house of God which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now hath it been in building, and yet it is not finished.**

Compare Ezra 3:2 with this verse.

*Ezra 5:2 Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them.*

**Ezra 5:17 Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let there be search made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem, and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.**

Your present commentator believes Tatnai was quite sincere in wishing to know if the Jews were telling the truth about Cyrus having granted them a decree to build the temple back. The law of the Medes and the Persians was not to be changed. If Cyrus had made such a decree, that decree should be honored and the Jews should be allowed to complete the rebuilding of God's house. Tatnai

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wished to determine what he needed to do to please Darius and to honor the decree, if such a pronouncement had been made by Cyrus, that decree must be honored.

Chapter 6

A report that the Jews were rebuilding the temple had been sent to Tatnai who was governor of the land west of the Euphrates. The Samaritans apparently expected that Tatnai would quickly call a halt to the building. He did not do that. He sent to Darius the King and requested that Darius check and see if the Jews claim that Cyrus had given permission to rebuild was actually true.

Ezra 6:1 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.

If Cyrus had made a decree permitting the building, the law of the Medes and the Persians was so rigid that the decree could not be reversed. Before responding to the request of Tatnai, Darius needed to know whether such a decree from Cyrus had been given. He began an investigation of the records of the empire. The treasure house of the empire contained the records of past history of such past history.

Ezra 6:2 And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

No such decree was found in the city of Babylon, but after a more thorough search, the decree was found in Achmetha, which was a summer palace for the rulers. It is a credit to Darius that he did not cease the search when the city of Babylon had been covered. He had enough respect for the law of the land that he followed it. Some rulers would have placed their own independence higher than the law.

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It is not at all impossible that the providence of God played a part in the finding of the decree.

**Ezra 6:3 In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits;**

It was found that during the first year of Cyrus reign, he made just such a decree as the Jews in Jerusalem had claimed. He had not only given permission for building. He had even added some directions for being certain the building was well constructed.

He had said the foundations were to be strong and solid. The building itself was to be sixty cubits in height and sixty cubits in breadth. Since a cubit is considered to be eighteen inches, we have a building ninety feet in height and also ninety feet in breadth. This would be an impressive building, but was not as large as the first temple built by King Solomon. Also, it should be noted that the depth of the second temple is not given; only the height and breadth.

**Ezra 6:4 With three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house:**

The decree of Cyrus had called for those great stones which had to be rolled into place because of their size. It is uncertain what part the row of new timber played. Perhaps it was placed around the top of the foundation stones.

The Jews were not to be required to bear the expense of the building. The expenses were to be provided from the treasures of the King. This was not purely a matter of generosity. When the Jews had been taken into Babylonian captivity, much treasure and riches had been taken from the first temple before it was destroyed. It was only right that it be restored.

**Ezra 6:5 And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem, and brought unto 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.**

Wherever such items as the golden candlesticks had been found in the first temple, they were to be put back into the second. Tatnai should have been firmly convinced as to what Darius expected of him with respect to his treatment of the Jews in their rebuilding efforts.

**Ezra 6:6 Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shetharboznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence:**

Darius made it clear and plain that Tatnai and his companions were to keep hands off! They were not to interfere in any way with the erection of the new temple.

**Ezra 6:7 Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place.**

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Ezra 6:8 Moreover I make a decree what ye shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given unto these men, that they be not hindered.

Not only was Tatnai to avoid interfering with the work. Darius went on to say that he should provide aid in the way of materials and tax money. Tatnai was responsible for collecting tribute from the citizens of the empire on the west side of the Euphrates River. He was to take a part of this tribute and use it to pay the expenses of those who were doing the building.

This decision must have been a sharp shock to the Samaritans who had reported the danger of what the Jews were doing. Their plan had not only failed. It had been turned to the benefit of the Jews rather than to their harm.

Ezra 6:9 And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail:

Darius even went so far as to order animals and materials such as spices and grain, to be provided the Jews to fill any needs they had for their offerings.

Ezra 6:10 That they may offer sacrifices of sweet savours unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

This verse does not prove Darius to have been a believer in Jehovah as the one and only Creator and

Sustainer of the earth and heavens. It is likely that Darius was a polytheist, believing in many gods. By favoring the Jews in worshipping Jehovah, Darius probably hoped to stay in favor with their God, just as he would have done for the false gods who were worshipped by people other than the Jews.

Darius asked that the Jews pray for himself and his family. This is quite in line with new testament commands that Christians pray for those who have the rule over them. (See 1 Tim. 2:1-2.)

1Ti 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

1Ti 2:2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

Christians must be very cautious about becoming hungry for political power and joining in dubious political schemes, but they are commanded by God Himself to pray that the civil leaders make decisions which promote the will of God on earth.

Ezra 6:11 Also I have made a decree, that whosoever shall alter this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

Darius had added his own decree to that of Cyrus. If any man attempted to hinder the building of this second temple, that man's own house was to be destroyed. Wood from his own house was to be used to hang him up where he could teach others not to do the same. That man's house was to become a garbage dump.

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There are several suggestions as to the meaning of hanging the man. One is that timber from his own house be erected in the ground and sharpened on the upper end. The person was then to be speared through and suspended by the sharpened end. A second suggestion is that the person was to be “lifted up” by hanging. None of the suggestions are very pretty.

**Ezra 6:12 And the God that hath caused his name to dwell there destroy all kings and people, that shall put to their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed.**

Darius called for the God of the Jews to destroy any king who determined to destroy the temple in Jerusalem. He added that he expected his instructions to be carried out without delay. God’s house was to be finished.

**Ezra 6:13 Then Tatnai, governor on this side the river, Shetharboznai, and their companions, according to that which Darius the king had sent, so they did speedily.**

Some commentators picture Tatnai as wishing he could rid himself of the influence of the Jews in the territory which he supervised. I do not see that. I view both Tatnai and Darius as men who desired to respect the law and treat the Jews with fairness.

When Tatnai received the decree from Darius, he did not hesitate to carry it out with haste. When civil rulers respect the King of kings, it is best for all concerned.

**Ezra 6:14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of**

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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.

For many years the Jews had neglected to rebuild. The foundation of the new temple had been barely begun when pressure from the Samaritans had combined with their own willingness to compromise with non-believers and intermarry with them had brought things to a grinding halt.

The preaching of Haggai and Zechariah awakened the Jews to action. When they began to fulfill the will of Jehovah, He caused the work to prosper. Under three rulers of the Persians, God's people lived in relative peace. These three were Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes came along later than the other two, but was supportive just as they were.

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.

It required between four and five years to complete this second temple. One wonders if even Darius did not have a sense of pride when the work was completed.

Ezra 6:16 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.

Certainly the Jews rejoiced. They dedicated the building with the greatest of joy. Four groups are
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mentioned as entering into the happy celebration. The priests rejoiced in that they could resume their appointed duties as they had in days gone by. The Levites were responsible for much of the manual labor. They too could feel the satisfaction of serving Jehovah according to His assignments. The large class of Israel in general were able to look toward the temple as a center of worship for the nation.

The children of the captivity have been explained as those who had remained in the land after others had been taken to Babylon. These would have been overjoyed to be rejoined by those who had been long removed from them.

**Ezra 6:17 And offered at the dedication of this house of God an hundred bullocks, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve he goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel.**

A tremendous dedication service was held to praise and thank God for His care, and to ask Him for further grace and mercy. The sacrifices included:

100 bullocks

200 rams

400 lambs

12 he goats (one for each of the twelve tribes.)

It is of interest that there is no mention of ten lost tribes. There were twelve he goats sacrificed, not two.

Also we should remember that Solomon offered many times this number of animals at the dedication of the first temple. (See I Kings 8:63.)

*1Ki 8:63 And Solomon offered a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, two and twenty*

*thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the LORD.*

**Ezra 6:18 And they set the priests in their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses.**

The routine work of the tabernacle was to begin. Priests and Levites were assigned their individual duties. The law, as recorded in the books written by Moses was the guideline for teaching and practice.

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

The first major feast was observed on the fourteenth day of first month. This was the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was accompanied by the Passover.

**Ezra 6:20 For the priests and the Levites were purified together, all of them were pure, and killed the passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.**

First the priests and Levites had to be cleansed in order that they might properly offer the sacrifices for both themselves and for all the congregation of Israel.

**Ezra 6:21 And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,**

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We have here both the Israelites who had returned from Babylon, and those who had remained in the land and kept themselves from the idolatrous and immoral practices of the invaders. It had been about fifteen years since those who came with Zerubbabel had returned. A number of those who had stayed in the land of Canaan while the rest were gone left the company of the Samaritans and united themselves with the returnees.

Ezra 6:22 And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Let us be extremely careful about just how God works in turning men's hearts. Such turning is not separate from their will. God's part is in seeing that the opportunities are presented for making righteous decisions. Then men either make use of these conditions to serve Him, or they fight against these opportunities and walk straight through the doors to eternal punishment.

Fortunately, Darius made the decision to support the will of God. We anticipate that God will remember his deeds when the final judgment takes place.

Darius is called the King of Assyria because Assyria became a part of the Medo-Persian empire, not because it was still a separate domain.

Chapter 7

Ezra the scribe had brought the reader up to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem after Darius led a delegation of the Jews back from Babylon. He had not personally entered the picture. We now see a change. Ezra will be a central figure in these last chapters of the book.

Ezra 7:1 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,

We are not told in so many words, just how many years it was from the events of the conclusion of chapter six until the beginning of chapter seven. There are two different Artaxerxes who ruled the Persians. Artaxerxes I and Artaxerxes II. The Artaxerxes mentioned in this chapter was the first of the two, there were fifty eight years which had passed. If the Artaxerxes above was the second, some one hundred seventeen years are passed in relative silence.

We hasten to add, however, that the events of the book of Esther are probably a break in that silence. The books of the Bible are not always placed in chronological order.

Ezra 7:2 The son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,

Ezra 7:3 The son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,

Ezra 7:4 The son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,

Ezra 7:5 The son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas,



the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest:

There is a difference in the number of names listed in this place and the number found in I Chronicles 6. The two records are identical until we reach the name of Meraioth. Then several names are absent in the Ezra record which are found in the one in I Chronicles.

The reason for the shorter list in Ezra is probably that Ezra was primarily interested in showing the ancestral line of Ezra from Aaron to the time of the history recorded here.

Ezra 7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given: and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.

Babylon was located on the banks of the Euphrates River. This was lowland. His goal was Jerusalem. Thus he is said to go “up” from Babylon. Jerusalem lies at a higher elevation. The term does not refer to north and south.

Ezra has not been given the credit due to him for his part in the plan of Jehovah. In some way, this man had worked his way up to a very prestigious position in the Persian government. Artaxerxes was very much interested in the promotion of peace in the empire. One way to do this was to pay honor to the gods whom the people of various parts of the empire worshipped. Jehovah was the one and only God of the Hebrews. Artaxerxes knew very well that a man who was a fine administrator, and also a student of the law of Moses, could help to

establish law and order in the land beyond the River where the Hebrews were concentrated.

A ready scribe was one who copied the law, and did it in a quick and accurate way. Ezra made a request to Artaxerxes that he be allowed to oversee the administration of the law of Moses among his fellow Hebrews.

We are informed that the King granted Ezra's request because "The hand of the Lord was upon him." Jehovah has a finger. He has a powerful hand. He has a mighty outstretched arm. It seems that He had seen fit to offer His providential aid to Ezra, whose efforts were in harmony with the divine plan.

Ezra 7:7 And there went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, and the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinims, unto Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.

The Hebrews who had been taken to Babylon had apparently been allowed to have some degree of organized worship of Jehovah while in captivity. These Levites, singers, porters and Nethinim were those who performed duties in connection with such worship.

Ezra 7:8 And he came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.

Ezra 7:9 For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.



If Ezra and his group had marched in a direct line from Babylon to Canaan, the distance would have been a little over five hundred miles. They probably could have made the journey in less than the four months indicated in verse nine. This would have meant crossing desert country in mid-summer. The route taken could have been much longer in an effort to avoid the extreme heat.

Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

God's hand was with Ezra because of Ezra's attitude of heart and his conduct of life. One of the strongest lessons of the entire Bible is found in this verse. Ezra is commended for three characteristics:

1. He studied the law of the Lord.
2. He lived his life in accordance with that law.
3. He taught others so they could obey.

This is the pattern that every worshipper of Jehovah should set out to follow. Jesus Christ is a prime example of this same pattern in New Testament times. We are told the following in the first verse of the first chapter of the book of Acts.

Act 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.

The very Son of God grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. He then lived out that wisdom in His life. This was followed by teaching the wisdom to others that they might follow in His steps.

Ezra 7:11 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.

Ezra has presented to readers of the Word of God, the letter of authorization which he received from the King of the Persians. The translators of the Old Testament found it necessary to translate this letter from the Aramaic language. Ezra did not transfer it over into Hebrew. He wished to present it as it came to him.

Ezra 7:12 Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time.

The letter was sent from Artaxerxes to Ezra. Artaxerxes referred to himself as “king of kings.” This was because he ruled over others who could be called kings. There is only one true “King of kings.” That is Jehovah, King of the universe.

Ezra 7:13 I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee.

Artaxerxes did not wish to force the Jews to return to Palestine. If they chose to remain in the area of Babylon, they could do so. He did wish to make it possible for them to return if they wished.

This means that any statements previous to this, indicating that Israel returned, must have meant a



partial return. It also means that no doubt certain Jews who had become established in Babylon chose to remain there.

Ezra 7:14 Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand;

This verse is one of the reasons why it is thought that the events of the book of Ezra took place after those of the book of Esther. These seven counselors had been appointed in the time of Esther.

Ezra was charged to make inquiry concerning Judah and Jerusalem to see how well the people who were already there were keeping the law of Jehovah. He was to take the copy of the law which he held in his hands and compare the people's actions with the commandments of the law.

Ezra 7:15 And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem,

Artaxerxes and his cabinet had decided on a generous amount of gold and silver which would be made available to Ezra and his returnees. When we consider how some of this gold and silver became a part of the Persian treasury, we realize the King was only giving back that which had been removed from the temple in Jerusalem years back. Is it possible that Artaxerxes could have developed a guilty conscience and wanted to make things right with the God of the Hebrews?

Ezra 7:16 And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem:

Not only could they take that which the King and his counsellors were offering them. They were given permission to ask any of the Jews for a freewill contribution to aid in the setting up of the sacrificial services in the temple at Jerusalem.

Verse twenty-three will make it clear that the Persians understood the God of the temple in Jerusalem to be the God of heaven.

Ezra 7:17 That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem.

The silver and gold which was being provided would make it possible to hasten the purchasing of all of the livestock and other materials necessary for the worship ceremonies.

Ezra 7:18 And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God.

Ezra was expected to know the law well enough that he could direct the affairs required to organize the activities according to the will of Jehovah. Any gold or silver which was left over after the sacrifices were set up could be used as Ezra knew would please God.

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**Ezra 7:19 The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem.**

Artaxerxes specified that the needs of the temple were to be met first of all. Ezra must take the responsibility for seeing they were used for the purpose intended.

**Ezra 7:20 And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king's treasure house.**

Artaxerxes was being extremely generous. If what he had already given to them was not sufficient for the purpose, Ezra was to feel free to draw from the treasury of the empire.

**Ezra 7:21 And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily,**

Those who collected tribute in the land beyond the Euphrates were expected to pay from each of their treasuries until the need was satisfied.

**Ezra 7:22 Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much.**

There was a limit placed upon the value of the gifts.

One hundred talents of silver. (\$100.000.)  
One hundred measures of wheat. (625 bushels)  
One hundred baths of wine. (580 gallons)  
One hundred baths of oil. (580 gallons)  
Salt without limit.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary estimates the entire value of the silver, gold and precious vessels at about three million dollars as of the date of that commentary.

**Ezra 7:23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?**

Ezra was to be trusted completely. Whatever he said God required was to be provided. Artaxerxes did not wish to take any chances that Jehovah would vent His wrath upon his empire.

It is tempting to wonder if the King had been having some nightmares over what could take place if the request of Ezra was not met.

**Ezra 7:24 Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.**

The officials who were to maintain the worship services of the temple were to be excused from paying taxes of any type. This arrangement has been adopted by many nations from that time onward. To provide for God's servants was to prove respect for the Master of those servants.



**Ezra 7:25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.**

Ezra was to see that courts were set up having the authority to enforce the law of Jehovah as pleasing to Him.

In the event that Ezra found those who did not know the law of Jehovah, they were to be taught in order that none would have the excuse of ignorance. Everyone was to know the law. Everyone was to keep the law.

**Ezra 7:26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.**

What sort of punishment could be passed out to those who refused to obey the laws of God? There were four classes:

1. The death penalty could be enforced.
2. The lawbreaker could be banished from association with others and left to wander.
3. Fines and property could be taken.
4. The individual could be sentenced to prison.

The reader will note that these punishments were to be dealt with speedily. The crime and the punishment were to be connected closely in time in order that others might be deterred from doing the same. It is a tragedy that a criminal in some nations in these latter days may

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escape punishment for ten years or more before the court trials run their course. That does not deter crime!

Ezra 7:27 Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem:

There are contrasting truths embedded in this verse. It is good to honor God with an attractive place of worship. On the other hand, it has been noted that in some instances vast riches have been expended to build great cathedrals while thousands of poor souls were starving within sight of those extravaganzas.

Yes, let us see that attractive buildings are made available for worship services, but not at the expense of the poor and hungry.

In a very real sense, the bodies of men and women are the most important temples for God. These bodies and minds of His people are to be clean and pure, both inside and outside. The church is the bride of Christ. She must be spiritually radiant.

Ezra 7:28 And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

Ezra felt the need to express his gratitude to Artaxerxes and his high officials. He knew all this was only possible through the strengthening hand of Jehovah. He began to appoint capable men who would help him in organizing the journey from Babylon to Canaan.

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A good life can be enormously effective when it is dedicated to learning, living and teaching the laws of the Lord. The case of Ezra is positive proof. Many of the present readers will have known of persons who were made instruments in the mighty hand of the God of heaven. What a pleasant experience it is to be acquainted with such persons. What a pleasant experience it is to BE such a person!

## *Chapter 8*

Artaxerxes, the King of the Persians had granted permission to Ezra that he might lead a delegation of the Jews back to Palestine that they might reestablish the worship of Jehovah. The center of this worship was to be the temple of God in the city of Jerusalem.

**Ezra 8:1 These are now the chief of their fathers, and this is the genealogy of them that went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king.**

It was important that the leaders of this returning group might be able to trace their ancestry back to Jewish roots. Ezra presents such evidence to us in this chapter.

We must constantly keep in mind that these extended lists of names which are difficult for us to pronounce are evidence of the truth of the Word of God. Such lists of names would not have been invented by false teachers. There would be no quicker way to lose the attention of a reader than to present such a list. These names are genuine!

**Ezra 8:2 Of the sons of Phinehas; Gershom: of the sons of Ithamar; Daniel: of the sons of David; Hattush.**

**Ezra 8:3 Of the sons of Shechaniah, of the sons of Pharosh; Zechariah: and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males an hundred and fifty.**

Regularly, throughout the list, we find the number of male descendants of the father or leader who is listed.

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These can be added to obtain the sum total of the males who returned under the leadership of Ezra.

Ezra 8:4 Of the sons of Pahathmoab; Elihoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males.

Ezra 8:5 Of the sons of Shechaniah; the son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males.

Ezra 8:6 Of the sons also of Adin; Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males.

Ezra 8:7 And of the sons of Elam; Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males.

Ezra 8:8 And of the sons of Shephathiah; Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him fourscore males.

Ezra 8:9 Of the sons of Joab; Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred and eighteen males.

Ezra 8:10 And of the sons of Shelomith; the son of Josiphiah, and with him an hundred and threescore males.

Ezra 8:11 And of the sons of Bebai; Zechariah the son of Bebai, and with him twenty and eight males.

Ezra 8:12 And of the sons of Azgad; Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him an hundred and ten males.

Ezra 8:13 And of the last sons of Adonikam, whose names are these, Eliphelet, Jeiel, and Shemaiah, and with them threescore males.

Ezra 8:14 Of the sons also of Bigvai; Uthai, and Zabbud, and with them seventy males.

The total number of males in the group was slightly under fifteen hundred. When women and children are

added, we can estimate at least five thousand in the entire congregation. Some have gone so far as to suggest families of five. This would raise the total number to nearly nine thousand.

Ezra 8:15 And I gathered them together to the river that runneth to Ahava; and there abode we in tents three days: and I viewed the people, and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

The group was assembled at the river of Ahava. There have been several guesses as to the location of this river, but it is admitted that the site is not positively known. It may have been a smaller stream flowing into the Euphrates.

Ezra used the three days at Ahava to assess the situation. He found that there were priests, but there were no Levites who were not priests. He realized that the priests needed assistants.

Ezra 8:16 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 under-standing.

In order to solve the problems related to the shortage of Levites, Ezra enlisted a number of the respected men of the congregation to consult with him.

Ezra 8:17 And I sent them with commandment unto Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia, and I told them what they should say unto Iddo, and to his brethren the Nethinims, at the place Casiphia,



that they should bring unto us ministers for the house of our God.

Ezra then sent these trusted men to a center called Casiphia where a person called Iddo supervised the Nethinims who were descendants of the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites had entered into an agreement with Israel that they would become “hewers of wood” and “drawers of water” if they were allowed to join them.

Ezra told those he sent to Iddo just what they should say to Iddo regarding the need for assistants to the priests.

Ezra 8:18 And by the good hand of our God upon us they brought us a man of under-standing, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brethren, eighteen;

The results of Ezra’s request were satisfying. The providential hand of God saw to it that eighteen of the Levites volunteered from the family of Mahli.

Ezra 8:19 And Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brethren and their sons, twenty;

In addition, there were twenty more Levites who were descendants of Merari.

Ezra 8:20 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.

Although the Nethinims were not Priests nor Levites, they could be useful in assisting these two groups. Thus, Ezra was able to arrange for a suitable number of servants in the temple when the worship was continued in Jerusalem.

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Biblical fasting was a means of depriving one's self of physical needs temporarily in order to concentrate upon spiritual concerns. This has fallen by the wayside, but in the days of the Saviour He was still encouraging fasting and prayer.

The congregation prayed to God that they might find the best way to Jerusalem. This was important for all, including their families and their possessions.

Ezra 8:22 For I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

Why was Ezra ashamed to ask Artaxerxes for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect them against thieves and robbers while they made the journey? Certainly it was because Ezra had made it plain to Artaxerxes that Jehovah was the God of heaven, and that He would protect them at all times. Jehovah would extend his mighty hand to protect them as long as they sought

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to please Him. He would also fight against those who opposed His will. If Jehovah would help, why would Ezra need a band of soldiers?

Some point out that when Nehemiah made a similar journey, he was quite willing to accept a protective band.

**Ezra 8:23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.**

God heard their prayers and was pleased to answer “Yes.”

**Ezra 8:24 Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them,**

**Ezra 8:25 And weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering of the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered:**

Even though God had been asked to protect them from the outside, efforts needed to be taken to insure honesty from the inside. Ezra chose twelve of the chief priests to watch over the gold, silver and other valuables which they had been allowed to take with them. To be careless in the handling of these riches would be an insult to the King and his counsellors, as well as to the Jews who had remained in Babylon, but had made contributions to those who chose to return to Palestine.

**Ezra 8:26 I even weighed unto their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels an hundred talents, and of gold an hundred talents;**

It is extremely difficult to place an exact value on that which Ezra weighed out. The weight of a talent is not always the same. Whatever the true value was, Ezra knew that value, and those who received the supervision knew what it was. They were to see that all of it arrived safely at the end of the journey.

**Ezra 8:27 Also twenty basins of gold, of a thousand drams; and two vessels of fine copper, precious as gold.**

Estimates of the value of the entire treasure are set as high as three hundred million dollars. This may seem high until we remember that Persian monarchs were enormously wealthy.

**Ezra 8:28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto the LORD; the vessels are holy also; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering unto the LORD God of your fathers.**

Both the people and the riches over which they watched were dedicated to the Lord. It was therefore very important that the people act honestly, and the riches be protected as possessions of Jehovah.

**Ezra 8:29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.**

An inventory had been made as the gold, silver and precious vessels were placed in their hands. A similar



inventory would be made when they reached Jerusalem. They were to see that the two inventories were the same.

**Ezra 8:30 So took the priests and the Levites the weight of the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.**

**Ezra 8:31 Then we departed from the river of Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and of such as lay in wait by the way.**

And so the congregation set out from the site at the river Ahava to join those who had returned earlier under Darius, etc. God was their protector and no enemies attempted to injure them or to steal from them as they progressed.

**Ezra 8:32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.**

This was not a quick trip. The direct route would have been through the desert. Instead, the congregation traveled an extra four hundred miles around the fertile crescent to avoid the unbearable heat.

After arriving in Jerusalem much later they rested for three days before taking further action.

**Ezra 8:33 Now on the fourth day was the silver and the gold and the vessels weighed in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, Levites;**

On the fourth day after arrival, and the first day after the rest, the inventory was taken. The silver, gold and other treasure was placed in the hands of the priests in the temple at Jerusalem.

**Ezra 8:34 By number and by weight of every one: and all the weight was written at that time.**

All was apparently present and accounted for. God had been faithful to answer their prayer for protection. Both their bodies and the valuables had escaped harm.

**Ezra 8:35 Also the children of those that had been carried away, which were come out of the captivity, offered burnt offerings unto the God of Israel, twelve bullocks for all Israel, ninety and six rams, seventy and seven lambs, twelve he goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering unto the LORD.**

An offering of thanks for God's grace and mercy was offered by the returnees, perhaps joined by those who had arrived years before them under the leadership of Darius.

Sin offerings and burnt offerings were presented to the Lord. There was much reason to rejoice after having passed through some seventy years of captivity in the land of Babylon.

It has been called to our attention that most of the numbers mentioned in the verse just above are multiples of twelve. The ones who had returned did not see themselves as being minus ten lost tribes. They still saw themselves as the twelve tribes of Israel.

**Ezra 8:36 And they delivered the king's commissions unto the king's lieutenants, and to the**

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governors on this side the river: and they furthered the people, and the house of God.

They were pleased to deliver the decree of Artaxerxes into the hands of the governors and officials who served under him. This would insure that the services of the temple would be continued, and that the Jews themselves would be treated with respect by the other people of the land.

Chapter 9

In this chapter Ezra received a very disturbing report. In spite of the fact that God had arranged for the remnant to return to Palestine after having been bound captive in a strange land for many years, His people had betrayed Him and sinned grievously. Something had to be done, and done quickly. Ezra took the lead in an attempt to reverse the ingratitude toward the God of Heaven.

Ezra 9:1 Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.

“When these things were done” is a way of saying Ezra and his companions had settled in the area of Jerusalem and Judea. It was a time for analysis of the condition of both the newcomers and of those who had returned previously under the leadership of Zerubbabel.

Some of those in authoritative offices reported to Ezra that numbers of the people had failed to honor Jehovah’s command to remain separated from the non-Israelites in the land of Canaan. Even the priests and the Levites had entered into fellowship with the peoples whom Jehovah had specifically forbidden throughout the years.

As an example of the sharpness of those commands, let us notice God’s words, as given in the seventh chapter of Deuteronomy.



Deu 7:1 When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;

Deu 7:2 And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them:

Deu 7:3 Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

There are slight differences in the lists given above, but the message is clear. Israel was to be a separate people through which God would bring a blessing upon the earth. This was not a case of racial discrimination. It was God's way of insuring the continuation of His will that through the seed of Abraham, all nations might someday be blessed.

Ezra 9:2 For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass.

The people had done precisely what the Lord had warned them not to do. They had intermarried with the Gentile nations. In particular, the Israelite men had chosen Gentile brides.

If you think this is of very little importance because the Israelite men might just as well influence their Gentile wives toward Jehovah as the Gentile wives could

influence the Israelite husbands toward idolatry, you have made a serious mistake.

It is the women who nurse babies and teach children to read. Through their influence on these immature youngsters, women have the opportunity to mold religious thought and actions. God knew very well how much danger lay ahead for those who had ignored His command to avoid intermarriage. And Ezra was appalled by the report.

Ezra 9:3 And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished.

The “garment” was inner clothing. The mantle was a cloak which was thrown over the upper body. When a man of God became extremely emotional, he would at times tear these garments to demonstrate the depth of his feelings.

At times the head was shaved for a similar purpose. At other times the beard and the hair of the head were pulled out by the roots. This would cause excruciating pain and cause those who saw these actions to realize the degree of agony which was felt.

Ezra sat down in complete astonishment that God’s people would act as the report revealed they had. We might ask the present reader what his or her own reaction would have been to the news Ezra had received. Would the reader have flown into a rage and pronounced a curse upon the evildoers? Would he have called for all of them to assemble in order to shame them before one another? It is not always easy to find the best possible answer to the kind of problem Ezra faced.

Ezra 9:4 Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel,
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**because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice.**

Ezra's reaction caused an assembly, but it was an assembly of those who feared God's word rather than of those who had sinned. These were the ones who understood the danger in which men place themselves when they disregard the guidance of the One who can see from the beginning to the end. Ezra sat with his God fearing companions until late in the day when the evening sacrifice was to be offered.

**Ezra 9:5 And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God,**

The fact that Ezra arose from his heaviness did not mean he had overcome his depression from the report. He again tore his clothing through a sense of grief and shame. Then he fell to his knees and lifted up his hands in an appeal for God to hear his prayer.

One can pray in any position. Sometimes it could be flat on one's back in a sick bed. It might also be running in fear of a vicious dog. Sincere bowing down and reaching toward heaven is not to be mocked at. On the contrary, any person who does either of these as a demonstration intended to catch the attention of his fellow men can do more damage than good. Kneeling down and lifting the hands toward the heavens was Ezra's way of showing humility and opening his heart to his Maker.

We are told that at the time of the judgment, every tongue shall confess and every knee shall bow before the Christ.

**Ezra 9:6 And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.**

Ezra began his prayer. He did not plead his own innocence. He also had sins. As he looked at the horror of the disobedience Israel as a whole had shown toward the Lord, Ezra was filled with remorse for the entire nation.

They were drowning in sin. The trespasses had not only gone over their heads. They had piled up until they reached the high heaven before the throne of the Almighty.

**Ezra 9:7 Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day.**

This mountain of sin was not just accumulated in a day or a week. It reached back for generations. It had resulted in the punishment of the people in general, and also even the kings and priests had shared in the punishment.

They had been taken into other lands. They had been killed in battle. They had seen their possessions stolen. They had found themselves in utter confusion. Yet they were the ones through whom God had chosen to offer His guidance to all nations.

**Ezra 9:8 And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a**

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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.

In comparison with the long years of humiliation, they were now returned to the land of Canaan. God had not annihilated them in spite of their sinfulness and arrogance toward Him. He had even allowed them to drive a nail in the land through the building of the temple. They had the opportunity to look forward in hope. They had been as good as dead. Now they had the chance to come alive again in their homeland.

Ezra 9:9 For we were bondmen; yet our God hath not forsaken us in our bondage, but hath extended mercy unto us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, and to repair the desolations thereof, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

In the midst of the darkness of their bondage, God had influenced Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes to allow the return. The Jews had even been permitted to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

The wall spoken of in this verse is not the type of wall which surrounded the city of Jericho, nor that which at times protected the entire city of Jerusalem. The wall mentioned here was more like the hedges which protected the vineyards of the land. However; the point is made that God had remembered Israel and had given them another chance to glorify Him.

Ezra 9:10 And now, O our God, what shall we say after this? for we have forsaken thy commandments,

It was almost impossible to come before Jehovah and plead for forgiveness after such insolent disobedience. Ezra included himself in the sinful behavior. He used the words “us” and “we.”

Ezra 9:11 Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness.

Automobile mechanics and others who labor in certain fields where dust and grime are present can certify that it is very difficult to work in such surroundings without becoming physically unclean. This, however, is filth which can be washed off at the end of the day with soap and water.

The filth the prophets of God were warning against was spiritual filth. The abominations were the idols and the sexually oriented worship services associated with those false gods. The land of Canaan had been polluted by Satan’s servants. Israel had been properly warned against forming any partnerships with persons who practiced such unholiness.

Ezra 9:12 Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever.

In verse two of this chapter the warning had been against taking the daughters of the land as wives. This



time the opposite is also forbidden. There were to be NO inter-marriages with the people of the land.

Seeking the peace or the wealth of these gentiles was making attempts to promote their welfare through business and social associations. God intended for His people to “Be ye separate!”

The New Testament has a similar warning when Christians are told not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Ezra 9:13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this;

God’s warnings had been ignored. As a result His people had become contaminated with the sins of those who practiced immorality and worshipped idols. To cleanse the nation, God allowed them to be taken into captivity. We are told that after they came back from that sad experience, they never again have fallen into idolatry. The Jews have had an attraction for financial gain, but they have avoided bowing down before false gods.

Ezra 9:14 Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that there should be no remnant nor escaping?

Ezra speaks to God. How could His people ever think of repeating the sins of the past? They should realize that to do this would place them in danger of being cast off forever and everlastingly separated from the love and mercy of Jehovah.

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.

Ezra pleads with God. Israel has been guilty of trying to connect the Holy God with unholy thoughts, words and actions. The only remedy left was to confess that they had no right to appear before His throne of grace to ask forgiveness.

Perhaps in spite of Israel's wicked sinfulness, God would yet once more hear an humble cry of penitent hearts. That is all Israel could hope for. It was not justice which they required. It was grace and mercy.



Chapter 10

Ezra had returned to Canaan with Artaxerxes authority to teach the law to those who were in that land. This teaching had been sadly neglected and the results of that neglect could be seen immediately.

Ezra was astonished by what he saw. It would be necessary to take quick action and correct action. It would be all too easy to create rebellion in the minds of those who had ignored the word of God. He could have taken the way of force. He could have taken the way of example. Ezra chose to do the latter. He humbled himself in the confession that his people, including himself, had sinned greatly. He was sincere in his sorrow. The only hope Israel had was to confess and put away the sin.

Ezra 10:1 Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

The fact that the text speaks of Ezra in the third person, talking about Ezra rather than using the pronoun “I” is not proof that someone other than Ezra was the author of the present book. Jesus Christ used the same method when he said, “The Son of Man saith.”

The weeping and gnashing of teeth was not indicative of an intense feeling then among the Jews, as it would be today among modern nations. Still, those who saw Ezra weeping and humbling himself before the temple were made to realize the importance of his message. Many of them were persuaded he was right, and joined him in the shedding of tears.

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We are not talking here about hypocritical and showy emotionalism. It was clear that Ezra was cut to the heart by the sins which the people had committed against the will of the Lord.

**Ezra 10:2 And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said unto Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land: yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing.**

Shechaniah was a spokesman for the people who realized the seriousness of the disregard for God's commandments. God had commanded that they not intermarry with the people of the land. In defiance of that command, a number of Israelite men had married women who were not of Israel, and had produced children through these women.

Shechaniah added that all hope was not lost. There was still a way of redemption. The trespass must be cancelled out.

**Ezra 10:3 Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.**

Ezra did not originate this suggestion. He allowed Shechaniah, who was an influential person among the Israelites, to place it before the people. This would make it slightly more acceptable to the guilty than it would have been if he had commanded it in the name of Artaxerxes.

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Shechaniah's answer was that not only the wives who had been taken unlawfully, but the children they had born were to be put away.

Ezra 10:4 Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.

Ezra was promised that if he would arise and take the lead in bringing about the drastic change, Shechaniah and the people would support him. This causes us to wonder just what percentage of the Israelite men had fallen into this disobedience. We will find the answer to that in the last part of this present chapter.

Ezra 10:5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they should do according to this word. And they sware.

The same three groups which are mentioned several other times in this book are listed this time. They were the:

1. Chief priests.
2. Levites.
3. All Israel.

The sin had infected all three of these levels of the society. Even the priests had been guilty.

Ezra persuaded the great majority of the people to follow the suggestion of Shechaniah. They promised before the God of heaven that they would put away both the women and the children who were born to them.

Ezra 10:6 Then Ezra rose up from before the house of God, and went into the chamber of

Johanah 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.

When one is in deep sorrow, food and water become far less important. Ezra now changed his behavior. He left the place outside the temple and retired to a chamber on the inside where he continued to fast and mourn over the sinful conditions.

It is probable that many of those who were guilty had been among the first to return at the time Cyrus made his decree and Zerubbabel lead many thousands back to Canaan.

Ezra 10:7 And they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem;

A message was sent out from Jerusalem that all of those who had returned from captivity were to gather in that city. Very serious business was ahead. No one was to evade it.

Ezra 10:8 And that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

The people were given three days in which to make the journey. The princes and elders set up strict regulations. If anyone failed to heed the call to gather, that man would lose his property and would be considered an outsider.

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There would be no help in time of need. There would be no more social interaction between such men and the rest of the Jews.

**Ezra 10:9 Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together unto Jerusalem within three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month; and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, trembling because of this matter, and for the great rain.**

It was not such a great distance from the farthest reaches of Canaan that the trip could not be made in three days. Nevertheless, there was a serious problem. In addition to the trembling in fear before the Lord against whom they had sinned, the time of year was both cold and rainy. They trembled for two reasons.

**Ezra 10:10 And Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel.**

Ezra minced no words. *You have sinned*. The sin is in taking wives from among the strangers. This was in contrast to some of the present day preaching. In order not to offend the guilty, preachers all too often speak in extremely general terms. "Sin is bad. Don't do it."

**Ezra 10:11 Now therefore make confession unto the LORD God of your fathers, and do his pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives.**

Ezra urged the men to realize they had been displeasing to the Lord who had commanded that intermarriage with the rest of the nations was forbidden. The only way they could change that displeasure to pleasure was to separate from these wives.

**Ezra 10:12 Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, As thou hast said, so must we do.**

**Ezra 10:13 But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two: for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.**

The vast majority of the Israelites agreed that the remedy must be applied. Still, this was going to take more than a day or two. It was the rainy season. There were numbers who were guilty. Time would be necessary.

Do not think this was procrastination. The congregation was quite right in asking for time. Food supplies would have been exhausted over the period of time necessary to determine just who must separate.

**Ezra 10:14 Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us.**

Rather than all meeting together in Jerusalem at the same time, it seemed wise to let those who were guilty come from their own city to Jerusalem at an appointed time. They could be accompanied by the elders of the separate cities in which each dwelt. Every case might

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then be dealt with as the judges in Jerusalem found it to be necessary.

Ezra 10:15 Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahaziah the son of Tikvah were employed about this matter: and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them.

There was almost no opposition to the plan. Jonathan and Jahaziah seem to have been given the responsibility of making the appointments. They were assisted by Meshullam and a Levite named Shabbethai.

Some commentators contend that Jonathan and Jahaziah were opposed to the plan. If the King James translation is properly translated, this present writer sees no opposition by these two. On the contrary, they appear to have been assigned to see that the appointments were made in an orderly manner.

Ezra 10:16 And the children of the captivity did so. And Ezra the priest, with certain chief of the fathers, after the house of their fathers, and all of them by their names, were separated, and sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.

The plan was carried out. Ezra was assisted by responsible leading men from the various families as the determination was made concerning which men were guilty of the mixed marriages.

Ezra 10:17 And they made an end with all the men that had taken strange wives by the first day of the first month.

It required several months to hear each of the cases and make the proper judgments. It was the first day of the tenth month when the process began. It was the first day of the first month of the next year before the task was finished. At least three months had passed. Some believe there was an extra month in that particular year and that the total time was four months.

Ezra 10:18 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.

As mentioned before, the sins had reached into the very highest levels of the priesthood itself. Four of the descendants of Jeshua, the High Priest were found guilty.

Ezra 10:19 And they gave their hands that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their trespass.

Each who was found guilty agreed to put away the foreign wives and each offered a ram from the flock as a trespass offering.

Ezra 10:20 And of the sons of Immer; Hanani, and Zebadiah.

Ezra 10:21 And of the sons of Harim; Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uziah.

Ezra 10:22 And of the sons of Pashur; Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethaneel, Jozabad, and Elasa.

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The list continues with thirteen more from the priestly families. A total of seventeen from among the priests.

**Ezra 10:23 Also of the Levites; Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita,) Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.**

Of the Levites who were not priests, six were found.

**Ezra 10:24 Of the singers also; Eliashib: and of the porters; Shallum, and Telem, and Uri.**

Of the singers and porters who served in the temple four more were added to the list, making a total of ten Levites outside the priesthood.

**Ezra 10:25 Moreover of Israel: of the sons of Parosh; Ramiah, and Jeziah, and Malchiah, and Miamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah.**

There is no need to survey each of the names of the Israelites in general who had intermarried with the strangers. The list contains the names of eighty-six men. When the seventeen from the priesthood, the ten Levites, and the eighty-six from the congregation in general are summed up, we find the sum to be one hundred and thirteen.

Each of these men offered a ram as a trespass offering and put away the foreign wives and mixed children.

**Ezra 10:26 And of the sons of Elam; Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Eliah.**

**Ezra 10:27 And of the sons of Zattu; Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad,**

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and Aziza.

Ezra 10:28 Of the sons also of Bebai; Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

Ezra 10:29 And of the sons of Bani; Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, and Ramoth.

Ezra 10:30 And of the sons of Pahathmoab; Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezaleel, and Binnui, and Manasseh.

Ezra 10:31 And of the sons of Harim; Eliezer, Ishijah, Malchiah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,

Ezra 10:32 Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

Ezra 10:33 Of the sons of Hashum; Mattenai, Mattathah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

Ezra 10:34 Of the sons of Bani; Maadai, Amram, and Uel,

Ezra 10:35 Benaiah, Bedeiah, Chelluh,

Ezra 10:36 Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,

Ezra 10:37 Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasau,

Ezra 10:38 And Bani, and Binnui, Shimei,

Ezra 10:39 And Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah,

Ezra 10:40 Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,

Ezra 10:41 Azareel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,

Ezra 10:42 Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

Ezra 10:43 Of the sons of Nebo; Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jadau, and Joel, Benaiah.

Ezra 10:44 All these had taken strange wives: and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

Anyone who has commented on that which is recorded as having taken place in this chapter must be grieved along with Ezra and the congregation of Israel. It has

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been most difficult to write commentary on this entire book, especially on this final chapter.

Critics of the Bible have accused Ezra of having no human concern whatsoever. How could he have insisted that these strange wives and their children be cast off? They had not been taught the seriousness of marrying Israelite men. This would have been particularly true of the children. They had no choice.

The most reasonable answer to these criticisms may be that which was suggested by Adam Clarke and also Robert Jamieson. Each of these believed the men who put away their wives and children would have made sufficient provision for their needs after the separation. The Bible does not say this was done in the present cases. It does tell that God promised a blessing to Ishmael when Abraham sent Ishmael's mother, Hagar away. (See Genesis 17:20.)

*Gen 17:20 And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.*

It would be most pleasant if we could report that Israel learned a lesson from this experience and never fell into the same pattern of sin again. We can not give the reader that report. Not once, but twice, we find intermarriage with idolatrous and immoral strangers. Nehemiah 10:30 and Nehemiah 13:23 tell us that within thirty years, the same pattern of intermarriage was repeated.

We must not leave the chapter before making a contrast between what God has commanded men today with what He commanded then. We are told that, in the Christian age, if a man has married an unbelieving wife and she is pleased to dwell with him, he is not to put her away. (See I Cor. 7:12.)

*1Co 7:12 But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away.*

This verse must be carefully examined since Paul declares that this is his own advice, not that of the Lord.

We conclude the comments on the book of Ezra. The major theme of the book is that Ezra was a faithful servant of God who was able to teach such respect for the law of the Lord that a great reformation was brought about. He taught Israel that God meant what He said when He commanded Israel to “Be ye separate.” Christians would be well advised to note the heartache which resulted from mixing and mingling with those who are strangers to Jehovah.

The book of Nehemiah, which follows is so closely related to this book of Ezra that many think of the two books as one.





**The Book Of  
NEHEMIAH**





# Introduction To Nehemiah

## **The Author:**

There are those who contend that there should be no discussion about the author of the book of Nehemiah. They point to the very first verse which states “The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.” They also claim that the styles of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are enough different that the same person could not have written both.

Others note that the two books are combined as one in the Hebrew old testament and should be dealt with as the writings of one individual.

It is not surprising that the books of Ezra and Nehemiah should be combined. The major topic of each is very nearly identical. The book of Ezra tells of the restoration of the temple. The book of Nehemiah tells of the rebuilding of the city walls.

Your present writer considers Nehemiah to be the author of the present book because of the plain statement in the first verse.

## **The Date of the Book:**

Again we refer to the first verse. This time Nehemiah speaks of that which came to pass in the twentieth year, as he was in the palace at Shushan. This indicates the time was the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes who reigned in the time of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. Artaxerxes

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reigned from 464 B.C. to 423 B.C. The twentieth year would have been 444 B.C. This would have been about thirteen years after Ezra led his group back to Canaan.

The Historical Background:

Because of their compromises with the idolatry and the immorality of the nations around them in Canaan, God had allowed them to be taken into captivity in Babylon. Esther had become the queen in the time of Ahasuerus, or Xerxes. She was a Jew and had some degree of influence. This resulted in the decree of Cyrus permitting the return of the first group of Jews to Canaan under the leadership of Ezra.

Ezra was interested in the rebuilding of the temple which had been demolished by Nebuchadnezzar and his forces. Ezra succeeded in this effort, and started to rebuild the wall of the city. This did not succeed because the Samaritans reported the rebuilding of the city walls to the Persian king who sent forces to see that the work came to a stop.

Nehemiah was also a Jew. He became aware of the conditions of his fellow Jews in Canaan and decided to request permission from Artaxerxes to lead another group back to Jerusalem and replace the walls of the city. While Ezra was a priest, Nehemiah was more of a political figure. He set out to reconstruct the walls under the authority of Artaxerxes. It took him an astonishingly short period of time to accomplish it.



Chapter 1

Neh 1:1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

As suggested in the introduction, this verse is fairly positive proof that Nehemiah is the author of the present book. This is not the only occurrence in the old testament, of the name Nehemiah. There are two other instances. This man is distinguished from the other two by calling him the son of Hachaliah.

The month of Chisleu compares with part of the month of November and part of December in the United States. This was the cool of the year. Shushan was known also by the name Susa. Persian kings moved from summer to winter quarters and back again with the change of seasons.

Most Bible students concur that the time was the year 445 B.C. Nehemiah appears to have been going about his duties as cupbearer to the king. More about this just a bit later. He was apparently among those who chose to remain in the Persian empire when others returned under Ezra.

Neh 1:2 That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

It is thought that Hanani may have been a fleshly brother to Zepheniah, although the verse may be speaking of Hanani as a fellow Israelite.

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Zephaniah had remained in the area of the captivity when Ezra led his group back to Jerusalem, but that did not mean Zephaniah had lost his love and concern for those who had separated themselves from him. When he found that Hanani and others had come to the palace in Shushan from Jerusalem, he asked them about the condition of those who had returned. They are called those who had escaped because they had been given permission to leave and go back to their homes. They had not escaped in the sense of running away.

**Neh 1:3 And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.**

The reply to Nehemiah's questions was very bad news. Those who had returned were suffering. They were being mocked by those who had overrun the land during the years they were absent. The Samaritans had managed to prevent the rebuilding of the walls of the city.

In fact it is quite possible that this verse is informing us the forces which were sent in under the command of the Persian ruler destroyed the foundations which had been laid for the erection of the walls. The gates, being made of wood, had been burned to ashes. Jerusalem was laid open to the ravages of any enemy who decided to attack.

**Neh 1:4 And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven,**



Nehemiah followed the same pattern of action that many others of God's people did when grief and confusion came upon them. He wept. He mourned. He fasted and he prayed. His fellow Jews were hurting, and he was hurting with them. He wept with them that wept.

The term "God of heaven" is not used widely in the scriptures. The false gods and idols were thought to have ruled over certain people and territories. The Jehovah whom the Jews worshipped was not confined to a limited territory. He was omnipresent.

**Neh 1:5 And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:**

Nehemiah did not command Jehovah. He beseeched Him. He was addressed as the great and terrible God. The word "terrible" indicates Nehemiah's respect for the ability of Jehovah to either bless those who are obedient, or to punish those who are rebellious.

Nehemiah told God in his prayer that he understood God was true to His promises. He would not betray those who loved and obeyed Him. On that basis he begged Jehovah to attend to his pleadings.

**Neh 1:6 Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.**

God had promised that His eye would always be open to those who were faithful. He had also promised He

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would have an attentive ear to their prayers. Nehemiah was claiming those promises on behalf of his fellow Israelites who were suffering at Jerusalem.

The man was not praying twenty-four hours a day. He was, however, praying both in the daytime and at night. Surely the Lord would respond.

He was willing to confess that he and his people had not lived up to all the Lord expected. Even he and his father's household had been guilty. They did not deserve blessings, but God had promised He would hear those who repented and turned to Him.

Neh 1:7 We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

Sin against God produces corruption of the soul. Israel had failed to keep the commandments, the statutes and the judgments of their Maker, as He had spoken to them through Moses. There are slight variations in the meanings of these three terms. Commandments are the "Do's" and "Do not" that God has used to reveal His will. Statutes are established rules. Judgments are the punishments which are set out to correct the evildoers.

Israel had failed in all three areas.

Neh 1:8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

Nehemiah turned to the blessings and cursings Moses had detailed as he relayed God's will on Sinai. (See Deut. 30:1-4.)

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*Deu 30:1 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,*

*Deu 30:2 And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul;*

*Deu 30:3 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.*

*Deu 30:4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:*

**Neh 1:9 But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.**

Since God is not a liar, He will honor His word. When his people are ready to turn to Him and keep His commandments, He will embrace them with love and mercy. The place where God had chosen to place His name was Jerusalem, where the temple was located.

Today, God has chosen to set His name upon the church which is the bride of Jesus Christ. When those who have sinned and betrayed the Lord repent and pray for forgiveness with the full intention of being obedient in the future, He will welcome them with forgiveness and spiritual strength.

**Neh 1:10 Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.**

The heart of Nehemiah bled for his brethren. He was convinced the Lord would not cast off those people whom He had brought back from under the control of their captors. Certainly God would not bring them out of bondage and allow them to die in the promised land.

**Neh 1:11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.**

It was not just the prayer of Nehemiah that was being presented before God. It was that of both himself and his brethren in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah informed Jehovah that he knew he was but a servant, even though he held a very prestigious position in the castle of the king. Would God intervene through His providential power and cause the king to grant the favor he was about to ask? He had served as the cupbearer for the king. Perhaps this would open a door in order that the king would grant his request. After all, the king was but a man before the power and wisdom of the Almighty!

The cupbearer had a special relationship with the king. He was expected to taste of the wine which the king was about to drink. Then, if he was not harmed, the king would know the wine had not been poisoned. These cupbearers had very great influence with the king, and also with his subjects. They were sometimes given special privileges as Nehemiah was seeking at the time.

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Chapter 2

Very disturbing news had arrived from Jerusalem concerning the condition of the Jews who had returned from Persia. Nehemiah uttered an extremely heartfelt prayers “day and night” on their behalf. We find him now asking permission of Artaxerxes to go and help them build the walls of the city. His request was granted.

Neh 2:1 And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.

The month of Nisan was also referred to as the month Abib. It was the first year of the Jews calendar. It was, however, still during the twentieth year of Artaxerxes’ rule.

It seems that a banquet was being celebrated. Wine was a common part of that kind of ceremony. Being the cupbearer for the king, Nehemiah was tending to his duties as an advisor to the king, and as a taster of the wine to insure his cup had not been poisoned. The wine would be brought to Nehemiah. He would taste it. If no harm came to Nehemiah, he would pass it on to Artaxerxes.

It was expected that those who attended the king in these times of merriment would be in a cheerful mood. This was not true of Nehemiah. It was easy to tell that he had a heavy heart. This was highly unusual. The king had not previously seen him in this condition. He had managed to keep his concerns for his fellow Jews in Jerusalem from showing in his facial expression.

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**Neh 2:2 Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid,**

Artaxerxes did not believe the man was physically sick. He wished to know why Nehemiah looked like something was wrong. Was he worried about something?

This present writer wonders if he would not have asked a similar question. This was the king's official taster. If he had tasted the wine and he now looked like something was amiss, it was not impossible that the cup had been tampered with.

The king decided it was not physical. It must be something on Nehemiah's mind. What was causing him to be sorrowful?

Nehemiah was deeply concerned. What would happen if he revealed the reason for his depression? After all, Artaxerxes was responsible for the decree that the building back of the walls of Jerusalem was to cease. In spite of his fear, Nehemiah decided to open his heart to the king.

**Neh 2:3 And said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?**

He began with an effort to assure the king he had no animosity toward him. It was his duty to see that the king stayed alive. He desired that the king might live on and on.

Then Nehemiah poured out his inner feelings to Artaxerxes. The city where his forefathers had been



buried was in ruins. Even the gates of the great city had been burned. This could be expected to have a saddening effect upon the king's servant.

**Neh 2:4 Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.**

God was with Nehemiah. The king was sympathetic. Was there something that would cheer up the cupbearer? If there was anything he could do to remedy the sadness, Nehemiah was invited to make it known.

Nehemiah had good reason to pray to the God of heaven. The law of the Medes and the Persians was famed for being permanent. Artaxerxes would have to reverse the decree he had issued in the past. Nehemiah might have endangered his own life in just making such a request.

The prayer of Nehemiah was probably not uttered aloud. It was probably also a very short one. This may have been a strange place to pray. That does not mean the prayer could not be effective. Just such a prayer is recorded in the new testament records. The publican prayed, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

**Neh 2:5 And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.**

The king had asked what Nehemiah would like for him to do. Nehemiah took advantage of the offer. He wished to be excused from his duties as cupbearer for

a time in order that he could go to the city where his ancestors had been buried and supervise the rebuilding of the walls. Up to this time the name of the city had not been stated. We would expect, however, that Artaxerxes had guessed it was Jerusalem.

Artaxerxes had a way out. When he had issued the decree to cease the rebuilding of the walls, he had added that this was to be until he issued another decree.

**Neh 2:6 And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.**

It is thought by some that the mention of the queen sitting beside Artaxerxes was an indication she had a part in the upcoming decision of the king.

Although many of these eastern rulers had a number of wives, there was usually one who was a favorite. This favorite could have a strong influence on the ruler. It is more likely that the influence in this case was the providential supervision of the Lord.

**Neh 2:7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;**

At this point it is possible that Nehemiah could read the face of the king and realize he was agreeable to the request. Thus, the cupbearer went a few steps farther.

If the king was truly willing for him to go, he would need letters of permission to pass through the territory on the west side of the Jordan river to reach Jerusalem. With

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the authority of the king behind him, he could even ask them to help him on his way into the land of Judah.

Neh 2:8 And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

Nehemiah was becoming even more bold. Timber would be needed to rebuild the gates, for the walls, and for the house which Nehemiah would inhabit while he was supervising the work.

God has declared that all things work together for the good of those who love Him and keep His commandments. Just how this is accomplished is beyond the understanding of frail humans. Nonetheless, this promise should be cherished by those who trust Him. We are told here that the good hand of God was upon Nehemiah. We should do all we are able to do that might cause the good hand of God to be upon each of us.

Everything Nehemiah had requested was granted to him by Artaxerxes, even though it was a reversal of the previous decree.

Neh 2:9 Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me.

When Ezra made this same journey some time before, he had said he did not need armed forces. He would trust in the power and wisdom of God. Why when should

Nehemiah not show a same attitude? Perhaps it was because Ezra was a priest and was more apt to think in those terms. Nehemiah was a civil servant and he may have felt he needed the backing of the military.

Whatever was the case, Nehemiah was provided with a military escort, including officer and mounted horsemen. These would leave no doubt in the mind of the governors across the Jordan that Artaxerxes was favorable to what he was doing.

Neh 2:10 When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

Two enemies of the Jews were greatly disturbed when they found Nehemiah had come to assist the Jews. It is not difficult to imagine the hatred as this present writer sits writing these comments. The same hatred of the Palestinians toward the Jews is there in 2001 A.D. as was the case in the time of Nehemiah. Blood runs in the streets of Jerusalem.

Sanballat was a Horonite. Tobiah was an Ammonite. Both of these groups were longtime enemies of God's people. They had created much trouble.

Neh 2:11 So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

Nehemiah allowed a three day settling in time. Then he began to take action.

Neh 2:12 And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither

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**was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.**

In the dark of the night, or maybe the moonlight, Nehemiah and a select few men rode out on a very important tour. Nehemiah did not even tell the men whom he took with him what the reason was for their trip. None of the horsemen who had come with him were in the group. All was done in secrecy.

**Neh 2:13 And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.**

The gate through which he exited the city was the gate of the valley only a gap in the foundations which had been laid years before. The dragon well was a point where water poured into the city by issuing from the mouth of a stone image of a dragon. The dung gate was the gate where garbage and excretion from animals and humans was removed from the city.

Everything was in shambles. The only thing left of the gates was ashes from where they had been burned at the command of Nebuchadnezzar and Artaxerxes.

**Neh 2:14 Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.**

As he moved on he came to a place where the ass upon which he rode was unable to pass. We can imagine the heartache he felt when he found such ruins one time after another.

**Neh 2:15 Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.**

Some believe Nehemiah took a complete circuit around the city. Others believe he came back by the same route he went out. It matters little. In either case, he found the enormity of the task which had been laid out before him.

**Neh 2:16 And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.**

There were several groups who would have an interest, either positive or negative, in what was being planned. These are listed in verse sixteen. As leaders of the people, the priests, nobles and other rulers would be involved. The Jews would love to see the walls rebuilt. The ones who would assist in the work of the rebuilding would certainly have to find out before the work could begin. But the time for advertising had not been reached!

**Neh 2:17 Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.**

Then (after he had assessed the situation) Nehemiah called for help. He pointed out to his fellow Jews just how horrible the conditions were. They must arise and build back the ruins. While other cities remained fortified, Jerusalem lay exposed to all enemies. The people of





the land considered the Israelites to be a blot upon the countryside. This must not continue.

**Neh 2:18 Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.**

The silence had been broken. Nehemiah told the Israelites how God had made it possible for him to come. Artaxerxes was not against them. He was ready to help. There was no excuse for remaining idle.

His words were accepted. The Israelites rallied to the work and braced themselves for the task which lay ahead.

**Neh 2:19 But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?**

Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite were not as joyous as Nehemiah and his fellowmen. They ridiculed Nehemiah and wanted to know if he really wished to fortify the city of Jerusalem and defy king Artaxerxes. Apparently they did not have any confidence in the evidences Nehemiah had brought with him that both Jehovah and Artaxerxes supported the building of the city.

**Neh 2:20 Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but**

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ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was not in the least intimidated by the mockery. Jerusalem was the city of the Living God. It was a city for God's chosen people. The Ammonites, the Horonites and the Arabians did not have approval to interfere in the rebuilding. There was nothing they could do to halt the work.



Chapter 3

We have arrived now at one of the most unimpressive chapters of the entire Word of God. We have a long list of names which are difficult to pronounce, and parts of the city walls which are hard to visualize. If we are not careful we will overlook some highly important lessons which are presented. The Lord did not just happen to have this chapter included in the record. There is at least one very good reason, and we will suggest some others which can be quite meaningful to the Christian life.

Neh 3:1 Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.

Nehemiah had challenged the Israelites to arise and rebuild the walls. With the help of the Lord, he had managed to obtain permission from Artaxerxes to leave his duties as cupbearer to the ruler and take the lead in accomplishing this work. He was now entering phase two of the project. It would no doubt be just as difficult as was that of persuading the Persian king to allow it. He would find it necessary to rally the people rapidly and efficiently before enemies such as Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem could find a way to interfere.

This first verse suggests just how skilled Nehemiah was in getting the job completed. Even the high priest entered into the work. The priests were not noted for joining with those who were not of the priesthood in labors such as this. Even if the priests limited themselves to supervisory duties, this would have been unexpected. Not only was Eliashib a priest; he was the high priest!

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The *sheep gate* is the first of the gates mentioned. Your present writer is about to follow the example of J. Vernon McGee who brought this chapter to life for present day readers by relating each of the gates to a phase of Christian life. There are numerous differences in the doctrinal viewpoints of Dr. McGee and myself, but I believe the general plan he presented here is certainly worth noting.

In addition to pointing out the main theme of the chapter as the success of Nehemiah in obtaining and organizing the people, McGee let each of the gates picture some aspect of discipleship.

The purpose of gates is to allow entry and exit of various things from one place to another. Sometimes these things are entering. Sometimes they are exiting. Jerusalem was known as the “City of God.” The gates mentioned in this chapter allowed such movement. The present Church is known as the new Jerusalem. As we move through the chapter, let us see how each of the gates are related to such movement.

The sheep gate was located in the northeast part of the city wall. It was the gate through which sheep which were intended for sacrifice were brought into the temple area. John the baptist once declared, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.” (John 1:29) Without the sacrifice of this Lamb, men would still be lost in sin and eternally separated from the Godhead. The sheep gate is vitally important to mankind today.

**Neh 3:2 And next unto him builded the men of Jericho. And next to them builded Zaccur the son of Imri.**

**Neh 3:3 But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenaah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.**

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It was not just the dwellers in Jerusalem who entered into the work. Israelites from surrounding cities and villages were happy to participate. They may not have had the best smelling environment of the different gates, but their work was representative of another important aspect of life in the New Jerusalem.

Jesus pointed out to the fishermen early in the gospel record that if they would follow Him, He would make them “fishers of men.” Millions of men and women from that day to this have made use of the fish gate as they have led others into the Kingdom of God.

Neh 3:4 And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana.

If the reader will seek out a diagram of the city of Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah, he will find that the gates which are listed in this chapter follow in an anticlockwise direction around the city.

Altogether, there were some forty locations mentioned in this description. Some were gates. Some were sections of the wall between the gates.

Many of the names mentioned are found nowhere else in the Bible. Even if we presently do not recognize each of the persons, God knows the contribution each made, and each man will be rewarded according to his labors.

Neh 3:5 And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their LORD.

Do not miss either of the lessons presented in this verse. The Tekoites in general entered into the activities

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and did their part. The nobles among them did not. There are two possible reasons for their failure. First, they may have been too lazy or too much opposed. Second, they may have felt they were above such work. Not getting into the harness was so obvious to Jehovah that He had this recorded for our learning and admonition.

Not every man is talented in the same manner as others. But, every man has some ability and God expects him to find a way to use it.

**Neh 3:6 Moreover the old gate repaired Jehoiada the son of Paseah, and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah; they laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, and the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.**

Here we have gate number three. It is the *old gate*. The beams would have been made of the timber Nehemiah received permission to cut from the king's forest. They must be strong in order that enemies not be able to use battering rams to break them down.

But what significance does the old gate have? Jesus existed as the Word of God even before the creation of the heaven and the earth. He is the Alpha and Omega. No man comes to the Father but by Him. Rather than trying to make their own gates into the Kingdom of God, men need to recognize the One which has been in existence from the beginning.

**Neh 3:7 And next unto them repaired Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon, and of Mizpah, unto the throne of the governor on this side the river.**

What sort of emotions must have passed through the hearts of the enemies of Israel? Helpers of every sort were



coming from all directions to replace that which had been demolished by the forces of Zerubbabel and Artaxerxes.

**Neh 3:8 Next unto him repaired Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, of the goldsmiths. Next unto him also repaired Hananiah the son of one of the apothecaries, and they fortified Jerusalem unto the broad wall.**

Goldsmiths are not known for lifting heavy stones. The enormous boulders and cut stones which were used to repair the walls of Jerusalem would have been vastly different from the glittering earrings, etc, which they normally dealt with. That did not stop them. They did their share.

The apothecaries would have been those who did such things as manufacture the perfumes used with the sacrifices in the temple. It seems that not just individuals, but entire groups of laborers offered their energies to erect the gates and walls.

**Neh 3:9 And next unto them repaired Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem.**

Here we find the name of a man so prestigious that he ruled over half of the city. He was also helping.

**Neh 3:10 And next unto them repaired Jedaiah the son of Harumaph, even over against his house. And next unto him repaired Hattush the son of Hashabniah.**

In several places we find men repairing a part of the wall close to their own houses. This was another evidence

of care in assigning work to each of the laborers. It was a saving of time not to have to go to another more distant part of the city. It was also helpful in that the man would be interested in doing a good job if it increased the safety of himself and his immediate family.

The early Christians were told to preach in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the world. The gospel begins at home and moves outward.

**Neh 3:11 Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hashub the son of Pahathmoab, repaired the other piece, and the tower of the furnaces.**

**Neh 3:12 And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Haloheh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters.**

Was Nehemiah a promoter of equal rights for women? Shallum was the ruler over the other half of Jerusalem from Rephaiah. His daughters were found helping in the effort.

**Neh 3:13 The valley gate repaired Hanun, and the inhabitants of Zanoah; they built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof, and a thousand cubits on the wall unto the dung gate.**

This verse refers to two gates. The first is the *valley gate*. This gate could have opened in any direction from the city. Jerusalem was build upon a high place. Leaving it from any direction one would move to a lower elevation.

In the twenty-third Psalm, David spoke of walking through the valley of the shadow of death.





*Psa 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

Unless the Lord arrives in the clouds in His return, you and I shall walk through that valley. Let us walk during life, in such manner that we will be among the sheep rather than the goats when we are called to the bar of judgment.

We come to the *dung gate*. Modern cities have a sanitation department and a system of sewers. Jerusalem did not have these facilities. The dung gate was the one through which the filth was removed. Garbage and manure were sent out of the city by way of the dung gate.

Is there a corresponding gate in the present city of God? Most certainly! (2 Cor. 7:1)

*2Co 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*

God is not pleased with the presence of either physical or spiritual filth. The dirt may accumulate, but it must be removed periodically through the dung gate.

**Neh 3:14 But the dung gate repaired Malchiah the son of Rechab, the ruler of part of Bethhaccerem; he built it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.**

**Neh 3:15 But the gate of the fountain repaired Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of part of Mizpah; he built it, and covered it, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars**

**thereof, and the wall of the pool of Siloah by the king's garden, and unto the stairs that go down from the city of David.**

The *fountain gate* was connected with the pool of Siloam near the king's house. Water was critical to the safety and health of the citizens of Jerusalem, just as it is to modern cities. Life depended upon a supply.

The life of those entering into the present city of God is dependent upon being baptized in water for the remission of sins. (See Acts 2:38 and Acts 8:36-38.)

*Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

*Act 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*

*Act 8:37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

*Act 8:38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.*

**Neh 3:16 After him repaired Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of the half part of Bethzur, unto the place over against the sepulchres of David, and to the pool that was made, and unto the house of the mighty.**

Do not be confused. This Nehemiah is not the same as the one who supervised this entire rebuilding effort.

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Neh 3:17 After him repaired the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani. Next unto him repaired Hashabiah, the ruler of the half part of Keilah, in his part.

Neh 3:18 After him repaired their brethren, Bavai the son of Henadad, the ruler of the half part of Keilah.

Neh 3:19 And next to him repaired Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, another piece over against the going up to the armoury at the turning of the wall.

Neh 3:20 After him Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired the other piece, from the turning of the wall unto the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

Neh 3:21 After him repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah the son of Koz another piece, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib.

Surely Meremoth did not have a very long piece of the wall to rebuild. It stretched from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of Eliashib's house.

Neh 3:22 And after him repaired the priests, the men of the plain.

Neh 3:23 After him repaired Benjamin and Hashub over against their house. After him repaired Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah by his house.

Neh 3:24 After him repaired Binnui the son of Henadad another piece, from the house of Azariah unto the turning of the wall, even unto the corner.

The use of the two terms "turning of the wall" and "corner" indicate a difference in meaning. It is quite

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possible that a turning was a lesser change of direction than a corner.

**Neh 3:25** Palal the son of Uzai, over against the turning of the wall, and the tower which lieth out from the king's high house, that was by the court of the prison. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh.

**Neh 3:26** Moreover the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel, unto the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that lieth out.

Now we have the *water gate*. Is there a difference in the fountain gate and the water gate? We might be splitting hairs if we try to separate the two and relate each to a different point.

**Neh 3:27** After them the Tekoites repaired another piece, over against the great tower that lieth out, even unto the wall of Ophel.

**Neh 3:28** From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house.

Horses were not as common in Jerusalem as asses or donkeys. Horses were animals used in warfare. Solomon was once cautioned against multiplying women, horses and gold. The women represented fleshly lust. The gold represented wealth. The horses represented war. Emphasis upon any one of these is destructive. Solomon was guilty of amassing all three.

The horses went out through the horse gate to enter into military conflict.

**Neh 3:29** After them repaired Zadok the son of Immer over against his house. After him repaired

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also Shemaiah the son of Shechaniah, the keeper of the east gate.

The *east gate* is the one where the sun comes up. Malachi predicted that the Sun of Righteousness would arise with healing in His wings.

Neh 3:30 After him repaired Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, another piece. After him repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah over against his chamber.

Neh 3:31 After him repaired Malchiah the goldsmith's son unto the place of the Nethinims, and of the merchants, over against the gate Miphkad, and to the going up of the corner.

The goldsmiths are mentioned a second time. This time the merchants are associated with them. Merchants and gold have long been mentioned in the same breath. Both now worked together in building the wall.

The gate of Miphkad means the gate of “review.” When soldiers returned from battle it is likely that they passed through this gate to register their presence and return to their families.

Neh 3:32 And between the going up of the corner unto the sheep gate repaired the goldsmiths and the merchants.

We are back again to the sheep gate from which we started our inspection of the part played by each group of workers in the wondrous achievement of refortifying the city of Jerusalem.

It is appropriate that we list the gates which Nehemiah inspected as he made his circuit of the city of Jerusalem.

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1. The sheep gate.
2. The fish gate.
3. The old gate.
4. The valley gate.
5. The dung gate.
6. The fountain gate.
7. The water gate.
8. The horse gate.
9. The east gate.
10. The miphkad gate.

Each of us needs to be certain that we work diligently with other Christians to accomplish the goals and purposes of God. Each of us also needs to be certain that the gates of the City of God today are used to allow the entry of those who love the Lord and wish to obey His commandments, as well as the exit of spiritual filth which would otherwise contaminate the purity of that city.

## *Chapter 4*

The work had begun on the repair of the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Chapter four gives us a description of the efforts made by the nations around the city to bring the building to a halt. Every effort will prove to be in vain. God is, at this time, lending His support to the people of Israel. With His aid and their diligent effort, the rebuilding of the city walls will succeed.

**Neh 4:1 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.**

Sanballat was the first of the enemies to move into action. He was the leader of the Samaritans who were located to the north of the city. For many years his people had been rid of Israel. God had allowed his people to be taken into Babylonian captivity, where they had remained for seventy years. Now they had returned and Sanballat was livid with anger.

He had a very serious problem. When Israel was removed, Artaxerxes had made a decree that the building of the walls was to be stopped. Now the exact opposite was true. The ruler of the Persians had given both permission and support to the rebuilding. An attack on the part of the Samaritan forces would soon reach the ears of Artaxerxes and could very well bring the Persian forces down upon his own province. What was he to do?

The first plan was to ridicule and mock the aims and efforts of the Israelites. Sanballat invited his fellow Samaritans to join him in that mockery.

**Neh 4:2 And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these**

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feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?

The only army the provinces were to have was a defensive force in case they were attacked by outsiders. This would mean the number of soldiers would not be impressive. Yet, even that limited number would be a concern to Nehemiah and the returnees.

Sanballat set the seeds of humiliation in place by ridiculing the ability of the Israelites. The questions he asked were intended to be answered negatively. Who did Israel think they were? They were only a small band of wilted Jews. The Hebrew word which is translated as “feeble” is one that is also used to talk about a flower that has already begun to wilt and shed its petals. The implication is that Israel had run its course. It was no longer able to finish the project.

Sanballat also wanted to know if they expected to fortify themselves. In his estimation, that also was an illusion. The job was too big. The workers were too few and too weak. This was not the sort of thing which could be accomplished in a day. They did not have the strength to endure the long period of time it would take to do the building.

Also, Sanballat wondered where the Jews were going to get the stones to build the walls. The ones that were available were those that had been a part of the wall which had been burned. They were now lying in the midst of the rubbish.

Neh 4:3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.

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Tobiah, the leader of the Ammonites who were located to the east of Jerusalem, added his words of intimidation. In order to break down the walls of a fortified city battering rams had to be used. The strength of the wall the Jews were erecting was so pitiful that even the footsteps of a fox would be sufficient to send it crashing to the ground.

How was Nehemiah to meet the sarcasm of Sanballat and Tobiah? Would his workers lost heart and give up the effort? Not if he could help it!

**Neh 4:4 Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity:**

Nehemiah dealt with the ridicule in the way God's people should always meet such cutting remarks. He turned to Jehovah in prayer. He requested that the reproach they intended for Israel be turned back upon the enemy.

**Neh 4:5 And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.**

Nehemiah asked that God not ignore the accusations which had been made against His people. God Himself was being insulted by the belittling words of Sanballat and Tobiah. It was not necessary for Nehemiah to take vengeance upon them. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.

There are two answers to the objections Bible critics make here. They accuse the Israelites of failing to recognize the admonition to "Bless them that curse you" and "Do good to them that despitefully use you."

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First, the words of the enemy were against God. He was being asked to defend His own honor and that of His people. Second, these events were taking place in the time of the law rather than in the gospel age. The “eye for an eye” and “tooth for a tooth” principle was still in effect.

Neh 4:6 So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

The sarcasm and ridicule failed to stop the building. The “work and pray” plan was successfully defending itself.

Neh 4:7 But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,

Neh 4:8 And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.

Sanballat, Tobiah and their forces were not the only neighbors who were concerned about the fortifying of the city of Jerusalem. The Arabians, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites also despised Israel and joined in with the attempts to bring a halt. The numbers of the opposition were building up. The threat of attack was increasing.

Neh 4:9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

It became necessary to place watchers around the walls, both day and night, to warn of a possible military advance.

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**Neh 4:10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.**

It was bad enough that the enemy forces were increasing. Now problems began to arise from within the workers. The ones who were carrying the stones to the ones laying the wall were becoming weary. The stones were having to be separated from masses of rubbish before they could be moved to the spots where they were needed. They were beginning to feel that Sanballat was right. They could not finish what they had started.

**Neh 4:11 And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.**

**Neh 4:12 And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.**

Many of the Israelites were living outside the city and were in contact with the conversations of the ones who hated them. They came in and out of the city and carried the words of the enemies to one another.

The enemy was saying they would come in so quickly when they did attack that the Israelites would be defeated before they even knew they were in serious trouble. Over and over these threats were being made to Israel. They would come suddenly and they would come from all directions.

Nehemiah was facing more than ridicule this time. Even though Sanballat and the others would hesitate to attack because of the letter of permission which had been

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sent by Artaxerxes, there was the possibility of a feeling by the enemies that they could mop up the Israelites before Artaxerxes had time to intervene and stop them.

Neh 4:13 Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

To lessen the possibility of such a sudden attack, and to inspire the workers to continue the repair, Nehemiah brought the families of the workers inside of the walls and placed them near where the heads of the families were laboring.

Arms were provided for both long range and short range combat. Bows and spears would be used for long distances. Swords would be ready for hand to hand combat.

Neh 4:14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

Nehemiah addressed everyone who was involved in the work. They must remember the difference between fighting against the God of heaven, and fighting with Him at one's side. No human force is sufficient to win against God. The people must do their part. Their families and their property were at risk. With stout hearts and steady prayer, they would conclude the project.



Neh 4:15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.

The work had been interrupted briefly until Sanballat and the others became aware that the threat of an attack had not been successful. After a while the workers felt safe enough that they could resume their activities.

Neh 4:16 And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.

Even though the threat had dwindled, Nehemiah thought it best that arms be kept ready at all times. Some of the workers would be doing the construction. Others would have weapons which could be given to workers if an attack was launched.

The word habergeons is now added to the swords, shields, bows and spears. Habergeons were garments covered with thin metal plates. They were worn on the upper body to protect against arrows and other projectiles.

Neh 4:17 They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.

This sound slightly exaggerated to make a point. It would be well nigh impossible to put a heavy stone in place with only one hand. Both the ones carrying the

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stones to the wall, and those who were laying them in the wall had weapons where they could be grasped on a moment's notice.

**Neh 4:18 For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.**

Nehemiah had appointed a man to sound a trumpet at the first sign of attack. This man remained close by the side of Nehemiah where he could sound a call to attention as soon as Nehemiah indicated it was needed.

**Neh 4:19 And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another.**

**Neh 4:20 In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.**

Since the people were scattered all the way around the city, they would need to come together and meet the enemy regardless of the direction from which he came. As soon as the trumpet was heard, all must move toward the point of advance of the opposition.

“If God be for us, who can be against us?” God had annihilated the entire army of Egypt by drowning them in the Red Sea. Could He not defend His people again if this was needed?

**Neh 4:21 So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.**

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This was no five day a week, eight hours a day job. As soon as it was light enough in the morning, the work began. It continued until it became dark enough to see the stars.

Neh 4:22 Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day.

Those who had been dwelling among the enemy, outside the walls of the city were called to enter to the inside of the walls where they could help in both the labor and the watch keeping.

Neh 4:23 So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.

It was so urgent the rebuilding be completed and the city secured that the entire group did not even take the time to dress and undress from day to day. Only when the clothing became so soiled it must be cleansed was it removed from the body.

With all of the patience and prayer, plus the effort of the workers and the support of the Almighty God, the walls were raised to their full height in a period of less than two months.

Will the reader please not miss the point that simply praying, “Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done,” we are not doing all that is necessary to be pleasing to our Lord. We must work while it is day. For the night cometh when no man can work.”

Chapter 5

There is a difference of opinion among Bible students as to when the events of this chapter took place. It apparently speaks of a time in which there was a shortage of food in the land. Haggai, who prophesied during time of Zerubbabel, recorded such a set of conditions. Verse fourteen of this present chapter mentions the twentieth to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes. This would have been from 444 B.C. to 432 B.C. The food shortage seems to have been a more lengthy period of time than the two months during which the walls were rebuilt.

The present writer believes the shortages of chapter five occurred after the walls had been rebuilt and during the twelve years of Nehemiah's governing.

Neh 5:1 And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews.

This was another problem which arose from within the camp of Israel. The outcry was not primarily against the nations about them. It was directed at certain unmerciful Jews. The conditions were serious enough that even the women, who normally would have been extremely hesitant to voice their concerns, joined in the protest. They had good reason for this unusual boldness.

Neh 5:2 For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live.

One part of the problem was that there were large families involved in the suffering. There was not enough grain to keep themselves and their children alive.

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**Neh 5:3 Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.**

As a result of the dire need for food, those who were about to starve mortgaged their land and their homes in exchange for the precious food. There was no other alternative.

**Neh 5:4 There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.**

In addition to the need for food, there were taxes due to the king. Their property had been mortgaged to pay that debt also. The conditions had become unbearable!

**Neh 5:5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children: and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards.**

The point here is that the children of those who held the mortgages was Jewish flesh. The well to do were wrong to think their own children should be able to eat while the children of the less fortunate were starving to death.

It had become necessary to sell both their sons and their daughters. The sons and some of the daughters had become servants to their fellow Jews. Some of the daughters had even entered a state of bondage. This could

well mean that they were more tightly held than the servant daughters. They may have been second wives.

As a result of having already lost control of their land, they had no means of redeeming their own children from their condition of servants.

**Neh 5:6 And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words.**

**Neh 5:7 Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them.**

When the outcry of the oppressed people reached Nehemiah, he was furious. It was unthinkable that an Israelite would treat one of his fellow Jews in such a disgraceful manner. He thought things over for a while before he decided how to handle the problem. Then he called a large number of the people together, including the ones who had been committing the sins.

He did not hesitate to speak clearly and forcefully. The powerful were taking advantage of their power to manipulate the poorer classes. They were guilty of taking usury which God had condemned. (See Exo. 22:25.)

*Exo 22:25 If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.*

A Jew could collect interest from another Jew as a financial venture, but was forbidden to thus take advantage of the poor.

**Neh 5:8 And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were**

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sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.

Nehemiah and others had made an effort to buy back their fellow Jews who had been sold to their non-Jewish neighbors. Now the wealthier Jews were even buying and selling their own brothers in the flesh. This was an abomination in the sight of Jehovah. It must not continue.

Nehemiah must have held his breath for a moment in wondering just how his words would be received. Would the guilty admit their sin? Or, would they retort that Nehemiah had no right to interfere? He must have been relieved when they reacted in stunned silence.

Neh 5:9 Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?

Nehemiah added that it was a terrible thing that was taking place in that the heathen around them could see they were not acting in a God fearing manner, and this would result in insults to both themselves and Jehovah. There had been more than enough reproach in the past. Certainly they ought not to invite more in the future.

Neh 5:10 I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury.

It was pointed out that Nehemiah and those who served him as governor could have gained wealth at the expense of the poor, just as the selfish takers of usury had done. It was time to stop!

Neh 5:11 Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them.

Not only were they to stop taking usury and mortgaging on their fellow Israelites lands and home. They were to return that which they had taken from them.

The hundredth part of the money was in all probability a monthly interest collection which would amount to twelve percent per year. The property, the products of the land and the interest the poor had lost was to be given back.

Neh 5:12 Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.

Nehemiah, as governor and servant of God, had a double right to command the return of the wealth. He was authorized by Artaxerxes to govern on the civil level. He was acting for Jehovah on the religious level.

The wealthy reacted as they should have before God and man. They promised to correct their misconduct. Just to reinforce the promise the wealthy had made, Nehemiah called for the priests to hear their promise as an oath to the Lord.

Neh 5:13 Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even

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**thus be he shaken out, and emptied. And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.**

It was common in that time for a man to wear a garment with pockets in the front similar to what carpenters might presently use. Nehemiah shook his lap in such a way that any contents would be cast from him. Then he called upon Jehovah to cast off every man who failed to keep his promise, even as Nehemiah had cast off the objects which had been in his lap.

The people kept their promises.

**Neh 5:14 Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.**

This record of Nehemiah's relationships with his people was written after the twelve years during which he served.

During that entire twelve years he and those who were close to him had not received from the people that which could have been used by them under the authority of their position. Nehemiah had served as cupbearer to the king. That gave him the opportunity to gather enough funds to find receiving tribute from the people for his own use unnecessary. The bread of the governor would have been that which as governor he had the right to collect.

**Neh 5:15 But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had**

**taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.**

There were governors before him who had collected food, drink and even a certain amount of money. Neither Nehemiah, nor those who had been appointed as his helpers had made such collections.

**Neh 5:16 Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work.**

He had not remained aloof from the work of rebuilding the walls. He had joined whole heartedly in that work. He had even commanded his inferior workers to assist. None were so high and mighty that they looked down upon the rest and took advantage of them.

**Neh 5:17 Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us.**

Rather than taking advantage of others, Nehemiah had invited a large number of those who were lowlier than himself to eat from his own supplies. This should have been an example to them.

We have a question here. Were those who came unto them from among the heathen that were about them Israelites, or were they some of the heathen who requested assistance? Our suggested answer would be that these were the Jews whom Nehemiah had redeemed from among the heathen who had purchased them.

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Neh 5:18 Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine: yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people.

This was quite a bounty. An ox and six sheep, plus fowls would feed many persons. While the money hungry were growing fat at the expense of the helpless, Nehemiah had been doing his best to share his good fortune with those who had less.

Neh 5:19 Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Does this sound to the reader as if Nehemiah was presenting himself as the Pharisee did in Jesus parable of the Pharisee and the publican? This was apparently not the case. This last verse is a prayer to God. It is not a boast to the people. A good man is not out of order to ask God for His mercy and His grace, even as that man has shared that which he has at his disposal with those less fortunate.

Chapter 6

The foundations of the city wall had been closed before. Now the walls themselves had been built up to the normal height. The only thing left was to hang the gates. In spite of constant harassment from the enemies, the work had continued. We shall see in this chapter that the opposition was not about to quit as a result of the erection of the walls.

Neh 6:1 Now it came to pass when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;)

The three major leaders of the Samaritans, the Ammonites and the Arabians were keeping an anxious eye on every stone laid. They knew very well that the hanging of the gates would mark a huge step in the security of the Israelites.

Neh 6:2 That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief.

This invitation to meet with Sanballat and Geshem was far from a signal for peace. It was made to look as though they wished to meet with Nehemiah in order to work out some compromise which would allow all to live near one another without constant threats. In reality, they were only trying to lure Nehemiah out of the city

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to a point some nineteen miles away where they could ambush him and eliminate the leadership which he had provided to his fellow Israelites.

**Neh 6:3 And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?**

Nehemiah was not taken in by their deception. There were two reasons why he refused to meet with them. First, he had seen through their plan and had not the slightest intention of allowing them to kill him. Second, he was telling the absolute truth when he explained that he was too busy with a great work to leave his responsibilities as an organizer of the work.

If Christians would respond as Nehemiah did when attempts are made to prevent them from the service of Jesus Christ, far more progress would be made in the kingdom of God. All too often we allow ourselves to be distracted from the highest goals by frivolous debating and compromises with those who are interested in self advancement, glory and pride.

**Neh 6:4 Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.**

Sanballat and Tobias did not give up easily. Four times in a row they repeated the call for Nehemiah to leave the city and come down to the plains of Ono. Each time they received the same reply. He was far too busy to stop the great work he was doing in order to meet with them.

**Neh 6:5 Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand;**

Sanballat decided to take a more threatening path. He would threaten Nehemiah with blackmail. He sent what is called an “open letter” to him. An open letter is one which can be read by others as well as the one to whom it is addressed. We can suppose that the servant of Sanballat was instructed to read the letter to the public as he moved toward Jerusalem to deliver it. Sanballat wanted public support for the pressure he was planning to put on Nehemiah.

**Neh 6:6 Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words.**

Gashmu was another name for Gesham, the leader of the Arabians. The letter claimed that Gesham, or Gashmu, had accused Nehemiah and the Jews of building the wall of the city in order that they could rebel against the Persian ruler Artaxerxes, and appoint Nehemiah as king.

**Neh 6:7 And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together.**

Gesham had also reported Nehemiah to have sent out prophets to proclaim that God was behind Nehemiah

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with divine word that this was to be done.

Now, in view of these sayings, did not Nehemiah wish to meet his foes in the plains of Ono? Surely he would see the serious situation he was in if these things were to be carried out. The kings of Persia were not known for their leniency toward rebels.

Neh 6:8 Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart.

Nehemiah very bluntly let Sanballat know he had seen through the trickery. He had no such designs toward rebelling against Artaxerxes. These were falsehoods born in Sanballat's wicked heart.

Neh 6:9 For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

What was really going on was that the foes of the Jews were doing their best to discourage Israel from reestablishing themselves in the land of Canaan.

Nehemiah reverted to what he had done at other times when things looked dark. He went to the source of strength which he knew was greater than any threats or actions Sanballat and his allies could mount against the Jewish people.

Neh 6:10 Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to

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**slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee.**

We can see from the names of Shemaiah and those from whom he had descended that he was a Jew. This man had shut himself up as though he had given himself to fasting and prayer. We are not told why Nehemiah went to his house. Whatever the reason, Shemaiah warned Nehemiah his enemies were determined to kill him, and planned to do the deed that same night. The best way to protect himself was to go and shut himself up in the temple of God. He would be safe there.

**Neh 6:11 And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.**

Nehemiah's answer was that he did not intend to run to the temple to protect himself. If he was to leave the workers in the city, the work would be hindered. It was critical that he not act as a coward and run for his life.

Not only did he refuse to run to the temple because of failure to trust his life to God in the way he had been doing; he had another very good reason. Nehemiah was not a priest. Jehovah had given clear instructions that no one other than the priests were to enter the temple. (See Num. 1:51.)

*Num 1:51 And when the tabernacle setteth forward, the Levites shall take it down: and when the tabernacle is to be pitched, the Levites shall set it up: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death.*

It was permissible for one who had accidentally killed another man to flee to the altar and escape the avenger

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of blood. Nehemiah would not have been fleeing from an avenger of blood. Thus, he would have angered the very One whose support he needed very much.

Neh 6:12 And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

Nehemiah had seen through the plot. Shemaiah had not received a message from God. He was only presenting his warning because he was looking for a reward from Sanballat and Tobiah.

Neh 6:13 Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me.

If Nehemiah had been fearful because of the words of Shemaiah, and had fled to the temple, his foes would have shamed him before both God and his fellow Jews.

Neh 6:14 My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

God is able and willing to see grace and mercy given to those who love and obey Him. He is also able and determined to see those who promote falsehood and fear punished according to their evil ways. All we need say about Noadiah is that this person, as well as other false prophets, were clumped together in opposition to God's will. They would find God had not forgotten their wickedness.

Neh 6:15 So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.

When men and Jehovah work together wondrous things may be accomplished. These Israelites had worked with great fervor. They had not quit in the face of mockery, threats and extreme weariness. In fifty-two days the wall was finished. This time we assume the gates were also hung. It must have been a time of strong satisfaction for everyone who had participated in the work.

Neh 6:16 And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

Those who had tried every trick in the books to see the erection of the walls of the city blocked witnessed what they had feared so much. Israel had fortified the city. It would now be much more difficult to drive them from the land

Neh 6:17 Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them.

We are told if we resist the Devil, he will flee from us. No doubt this is a true statement. But, it usually involves a long struggle. Tobiah and the elders of the city had a number of communications after the walls were completed.



Neh 6:18 For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son Johanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah.

Tobiah had managed to persuade some of the leaders of Israel that he was not such an evil man as they supposed. He had married into a Hebrew family. He should be trusted.

Neh 6:19 Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

Even while his Jewish cohorts were presenting Tobiah as being trustworthy, he was writing letters to Nehemiah trying to instill fear in his heart. Such efforts would prove to be useless. Nehemiah was a true servant of the Lord.

Chapter 7

In this chapter we have record of the organization of the city of Jerusalem. With the wall built and the gates hung there was still work to be done. Guards were necessary to patrol the wall. Nehemiah would be in need of assistance from others who were capable leaders.

Not just anybody was to be allowed to live within the wall. The registers had to be checked to determine who qualified for a home in the city proper.

Neh 7:1 Now it came to pass, when the wall was built, and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed,

The porters were the keepers of the gates. They were responsible for seeing that those who entered were not a threat to the security of the temple and the homes of those who had homes within.

Several commentators wish to also connect the singers and the Levites with the gates. Then an attempt is made to explain why the singers and Levites should be associated with certain gates. The verse does not say the singers and Levites were assigned to certain gates. It first tells of the porters being assigned. The singers and the Levites had other chores to attend to.

The singers were to take the lead in organizing the worship hymns. Song was a very important part of the life of God's people. Anyone who reads through the book of Psalms can easily verify that statement.

The Levites could be singers, but there were fires to be lighted, rubbish to be removed, animals to be fed, etc. The Levites were responsible for numerous duties as they assisted the priests.



Neh 7:2 That I gave my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the ruler of the palace, charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God above many.

Was Hanani a brother in the flesh to Nehemiah? Was he a brother Jew? We cannot answer those two questions. The important thing is that he was highly qualified for the task he was given. He was a man of faith. He was a man who feared God. The fact that he was the one who first called the attention of Nehemiah to the horrible conditions of the Jews who had returned to the Jerusalem area has caused some to wonder if there was preferential treatment given because he was the brother of Nehemiah. With the description given in this verse, and with what we know of the character of Nehemiah, the assignment is not to be questioned.

Some consider the similarity between the names Hanani and Hananiah to be two forms of the same name. The translators of the King James Version seem to have felt these were two separate individuals, and that the pronoun “he” refers only to one of the two.

Neh 7:3 And I said unto them, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun be hot; and while they stand by, let them shut the doors, and bar them: and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, every one in his watch, and every one to be over against his house.

Even in modern times some cities in Palestine close the gates and permit no entrance or exit after sundown. This is a matter of protection from those who might cause destruction. The gates of Jerusalem were to be closed

and barred during the night, and until the sun had risen sufficiently to heat the area.

Patrols were to be spaced around the top of the wall. Those who were appointed as watchers were to be positioned where they would be close to their own house. The houses at this time were probably being built close to the walls and not scattered over the entire city.

Neh 7:4 Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.

During the time from the return of the fifty-two thousand who returned along with Ezra until the return under Nehemiah, the Jews had lived in the surrounding cities and villages. Any concentration of Jewish homes in the ruins of Jerusalem during that time would have met the same type of resistance which Nehemiah had to contend with when he began to lead the restoration of the city. The city walls had now been erected and it was easier to settle inside.

It would be interesting to know just how large the territory inside the walls was at the time when Nehemiah finished reconstructing the city. This is not an easy piece of information to determine. The city has had at least three different walls. The present wall has a circumference of two and one eighth miles. If we divide this by four because of the four sides of the city, we could hardly come up with much in excess of one half mile on each side.

This would be a total of around twenty-six hundred feet x twenty-six hundred feet for the total area. My arithmetic would indicate 2700 homes, each with a lot of fifty by fifty feet. The temple area would be subtracted

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from this total. The area at the time of Nehemiah may have differed from the present dimensions. Only a limited number of houses had been built at the time referred to in the verse.

**Neh 7:5 And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and found written therein,**

With respect to Nehemiah's statement here about God putting this thought into his heart, there are some very impressive Bible verses. (See Prov. 3:5-6 and Jer. 10:23.)

*Jer 10:23 O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.*

*Pro 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

*Pro 3:6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

If every person in every generation would make it a practice to study God's word and pray for God's help, that person could say the same as did Nehemiah. God will lead him or her in paths of righteousness.

It was important to Nehemiah that only those who were true Jews be allowed to live in the rebuilt city. He located a register of the names of those who had returned with Ezra and checked to see that the ones allowed to reside within the city were able to prove their ancestry back to those in the register.

We now have a list of those who returned under Ezra. This list is almost identical with the one found in the second chapter of the book of Ezra. Only the very last verses have a variation. They are inconsequential.

**Neh 7:6** These are the children of the province, that went up out of the captivity, of those that had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and came again to Jerusalem and to Judah, every one unto his city;

**Neh 7:7** Who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number, I say, of the men of the people of Israel was this;

**Neh 7:8** The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two.

**Neh 7:9** The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two.

**Neh 7:10** The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two.

**Neh 7:11** The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand and eight hundred and eighteen.

**Neh 7:12** The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

**Neh 7:13** The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five.

**Neh 7:14** The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore.

**Neh 7:15** The children of Binnui, six hundred forty and eight.

**Neh 7:16** The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and eight.



**Neh 7:17** The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred twenty and two.

**Neh 7:18** The children of Adonikam, six hundred threescore and seven.

**Neh 7:19** The children of Bigvai, two thousand threescore and seven.

**Neh 7:20** The children of Adin, six hundred fifty and five.

**Neh 7:21** The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight.

**Neh 7:22** The children of Hashum, three hundred twenty and eight.

**Neh 7:23** The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and four.

**Neh 7:24** The children of Hariph, an hundred and twelve.

**Neh 7:25** The children of Gibeon, ninety and five.

**Neh 7:26** The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, an hundred fourscore and eight.

**Neh 7:27** The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight.

**Neh 7:28** The men of Bethazmaveth, forty and two.

**Neh 7:29** The men of Kirjathjearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty and three.

**Neh 7:30** The men of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one.

**Neh 7:31** The men of Michmas, an hundred and twenty and two.

**Neh 7:32** The men of Bethel and Ai, an hundred twenty and three.

**Neh 7:33** The men of the other Nebo, fifty and two.

**Neh 7:34** The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four.

**Neh 7:35** The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.

**Neh 7:36** The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five.

**Neh 7:37** The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and one.

**Neh 7:38** The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.

**Neh 7:39** The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three.

**Neh 7:40** The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two.

**Neh 7:41** The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven.

**Neh 7:42** The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.

**Neh 7:43** The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, and of the children of Hodevah, seventy and four.

**Neh 7:44** The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred forty and eight.

**Neh 7:45** The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, an hundred thirty and eight.

**Neh 7:46** The Nethinims: the children of Ziha, the children of Hashupha, the children of Tabbaoth,

**Neh 7:47** The children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon,

**Neh 7:48** The children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Shalmal,

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Neh 7:49 The children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar,

Neh 7:50 The children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda,

Neh 7:51 The children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Phaseah,

Neh 7:52 The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephishesim,

Neh 7:53 The children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur,

Neh 7:54 The children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha,

Neh 7:55 The children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Tamah,

Neh 7:56 The children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.

Neh 7:57 The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida,

Neh 7:58 The children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel,

Neh 7:59 The children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth of Zebaim, the children of Amon.

Neh 7:60 All the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred ninety and two.

Neh 7:61 And these were they which went up also from Telmelah, Telharesha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer: but they could not shew their father's house, nor their seed, whether they were of Israel.

Neh 7:62 The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred forty and two.

Neh 7:63 And of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai, which took one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite to wife, and was called after their name.

Neh 7:64 These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.

Neh 7:65 And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.

Neh 7:66 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore,

Neh 7:67 Beside their manservants and their maidservants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty and seven: and they had two hundred forty and five singing men and singing women.

Neh 7:68 Their horses, seven hundred thirty and six: their mules, two hundred forty and five:

Neh 7:69 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five: six thousand seven hundred and twenty asses.

There is no reason for comment on the genealogical list above other than that which is found in Ezra, chapter two.

Neh 7:70 And some of the chief of the fathers gave unto the work. The Tirshatha gave to the treasure a thousand drams of gold, fifty basins, five hundred and thirty priests' garments.

Neh 7:71 And some of the chief of the fathers gave to the treasure of the work twenty thousand

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**drams of gold, and two thousand and two hundred pound of silver.**

**Neh 7:72 And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand drams of gold, and two thousand pound of silver, and threescore and seven priests' garments.**

If the reader wonders about the source of this large amount of gold, silver and garments, we remind him that many of these Jews had risen to places of leadership in the Persian empire at the time it was ruled by Artaxerxes with Nehemiah as cupbearer to the king.

**Neh 7:73 So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.**

About one month after the walls and gates were finished. The registers of the people had been searched and the Jews had been assigned to the cities of their fathers before the captivity by Nebuchadnezzar.

## Chapter 8

It is wise to look back at the last verse of chapter seven as we begin the examination of chapter eight.

*Neh 7:73 So the priests, and the Levites, and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinims, and all Israel, dwelt in their cities; and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.*

Some wish to place this verse at the close of chapter seven. Others see it as being more properly the beginning of chapter eight. If it is meant as a concluding statement after the erection of the walls and is telling us it was approximately one month after the wall was erected before the people were established in their homes, we have quite a different thought than is the case if we are being told this was the time for the observance of the feast of tabernacles, as specified in Leviticus 23.

We must ask ourselves also, just how widespread these cities were in which they dwelt. Was this speaking of only those cities close by the city of Jerusalem, or did it include the cities throughout the land of Canaan. Earlier, in chapter seven it seems that the people were assigned to their cities by tracing their genealogies back to those who had been taken into Babylonian captivity. What is meant by “all Israel?”

**Neh 8:1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.**

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The amount of time which had passed between the statement that all Israel dwelt in their cities, and this statement that “all the people gathered themselves together as one man” leads one to think a period of time had passed from the time the people scattered to their own cities, and this time in which they gathered again to hear the reading of the law of Moses.

If over fifty thousand people gathered, it would have been well nigh impossible for all to hear Ezra read from the law.

The street that was before the water gate would have been a broad place outside one of the more important of the city gates. The water gate was a source of water for the city. The people felt a need to commune with God. This would be natural after having seen the blessings He had bestowed upon them in bringing them back to their places in the land and protecting them from the efforts of their enemies to turn them back from the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem.

The question on their minds would have been how they could respond to God’s goodness. What would He have them do now that they were settled? We should be asking similar questions today. God has extended His grace and mercy to sinners through the gift of Jesus Christ. Now what does He desire that we do in return? We need to assemble to hear the reading and explanation of the new covenant.

Neh 8:2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

Suddenly Ezra the priest appears on the scene after he disappeared during the time of the restoration of the

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city. It is futile to ask where he had been during that time. Regardless of his whereabouts during those years, he is available at this time and the people are hungry for him to read the Word of God to them.

This verse does not say that those who could not hear with understanding were not present. It says those who could hear and understand were present. Infants and mentally deficient could have been in the assembly. Mothers with crying babies would not have been excluded in order to avoid disturbance. Mothers and babies should both be in attendance as such services and the babies should be taught proper behavior as rapidly as possible.

**Neh 8:3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.**

From sunrise until midday is a considerable length of time for one to read aloud continuously. Surely we must assume that he ceased reading for rest periods at various times. The important point is that the effort continued throughout a half day with the people giving close attention to what the law of Moses said.

Christians today are not noted for their patience when sermons are extended for more than an hour. We read of those in earlier days who listened to gospel preachers for as much as two or three hours at a time. Could it be that the spiritual hunger is not as sharp as it has been in the days of Ezra, or even in the latter part of the eighteen hundreds?

**Neh 8:4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.**

This was not a spur of the moment occasion. A pulpit stand of wood had been prepared for Ezra and those who stood beside him. There were seven of these men on one side and six on the other. As much as we might anticipate seven on each side, the Bible says there were six on one side and seven on the other.

**Neh 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:**

The verse says Ezra opened the “book.” The book, at that time would have been one or more scrolls written by hand. Ezra was in a position where he could be both seen and heard by the members of the assembly. It was right that Ezra do the principle reading. He was a priest. He was also a scribe. Few, if any would have been more familiar with the contents of the book which he opened than he was.

Out of respect for the Word of God, the people stood as Ezra prepared to read. We do not know that they continued standing from daylight to midday. We do know they stood as he opened the book. Some assemblies in these later days stand while the Bible text is being read. They are to be commended.

**Neh 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.**

If the reader will take the time to look up the definition of the word “bless” in the dictionary, he will find at least eight different definitions. We usually use the term to speak of the good things God makes available to humans. How can humans bless God? One definition of the word is “to praise or give honor to.” That is the sense in which Ezra blessed Jehovah. Amen means “truly”, or “be it so.” The listeners agreed with Ezra as to the greatness and glory of the Great God of Heaven and Earth.

Watchers on television have seen those of the part of the world where Jerusalem is located, lifting their hands up toward the sky as they stood. Then those same persons will fall on their knees and bow their heads to the ground as they humble themselves in worship. These people to whom Ezra was about to read the law understood that these truths did not originate in the minds of men. They were expressions of the Divine will.

**Neh 8:7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.**

We come to a second list of thirteen names. These thirteen, along with the Levites, caused the people to understand the meaning of that which was being read to them. It is suggested that the present reader not concern himself

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with the number thirteen, and attend to the importance of those who could understand, being caused to do so.

Neh 8:8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

The pronoun “they” is used here. It was not just Ezra who was reading and explaining. His assistants were helping. This explains how the reading could have continued from sunrise to midday without destroying the vocal cords of Ezra.

This was one great revival, in the truest sense of the word. These people had been deprived of spiritual feasts such as the one they were sharing. Now they were ready to make up for lost time.

There were two possibilities as to the meaning of “caused them to understand the reading.” These people had been in Persia and had been speaking that language rather than their native Hebrew. It might have been necessary to have the Hebrew translated into the language they had spoken in the land of their captivity. Secondly, there are many truths in the scriptures which challenge the finest minds of men. Those who were hearing may have had questions needing answers. These could have been supplied by Ezra’s assistants.

Public Bible reading should always be done in a clear manner, and should be explained such that people can understand what has been read. Mumbling when reading, or discussing the social topics of the daily newspapers does not match well with what was being done by Ezra and those helping him.

Neh 8:9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that

taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

If there was any question before about the identity of the Tirshatha, this clears it. Tirshatha means “governor.” Nehemiah was the governor of the people.

As the reading progressed, the people began to mourn and weep. They realized how far they had missed the paths that Jehovah had set out. There are, of course, two reasons for weeping. One can weep for joy. One can weep in sadness. These were weeping over their sins.

Ezra, Nehemiah and the others who were teaching the people were displeased when they saw the sadness. This was a very special day during which they were privileged to praise the Lord. They must dry their eyes and, as least for the moment, turn their thoughts to the goodness of God

Neh 8:10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

The Jews were commanded not to eat the fat of an animal. That part belonged to God. Why then are they told here to eat the fat and drink the sweet? The word “fat” as it is used here refers to the best. They were to enjoy the wonderful blessings which God had made available to them. It was a time for joy, not sorrow.

There is a happy medium between those who never see the bright side of anything. Every cloud and every



pain is a forecast of horrible things to come. The other side of the coin are those who never see life as a serious matter. All is fun and games. The true follower of God will realize the eternal consequences of present actions. There is a joy which can be realized by Christians without limiting life to partying and jokes. That kind of joy gives strength to God's children.

Neh 8:11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved.

Neh 8:12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

The words of encouragement had their effect. The people halted their grieving and began to enjoy the blessings and fellowship of the day. In addition, they did not forget there were others who might be less fortunate than themselves. They sent food and drink to the needy in order that all might share in the pleasant occasion.

Neh 8:13 And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law.

The study of the law of Moses was continued on the second day. This time a more select group gathered with Ezra. An effort was being made to explore the duties God had laid out for His people. We can only begin to understand what a period of time as long as Israel had spent in the land of the Persians had done to their grasp of His law. God has stated that when men seek righteousness, they will find it.

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**Neh 8:14 And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month:**

What did they find when they sought the truth? They found a command that Israel should live in tents during a feast which was to take place in the seventh month. That was the month in which they were living. Something needed to be done right away.

The booths or tents were to remind them of the days in which they wandered through the wilderness after escaping from Egypt. (See Leviticus 23:40-42.)

*Lev 23:40 And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.*

*Lev 23:41 And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.*

*Lev 23:42 Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths:*

**Neh 8:15 And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.**

**Neh 8:16 So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street**



**of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim.**

How eager Israel was to keep the Word of the Lord! As soon as they learned what God expected, they set out to please Him. Here they were, just settled down to their own houses in Palestine, and they were willing to leave those houses and live in tents to remind them of God's love and care.

Some placed their tents on the flat roof of their house. Others put them in their yards or in the street. God was silent as to where they were to place them. They had a degree of freedom in that matter. The general tone of these verses argues that many of the people lived in, or close to the city of Jerusalem.

**Neh 8:17 And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness.**

On the face of it, this verse indicates that no ceremony of this type had been shared by Israel for the entire stretch of time from the death of Joshua until the time of this present event. Some have felt they have discovered a contradiction in the Bible when this verse is compared with Ezra 3:4. (See below.)

*Ezra 3:4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;*

We do not necessarily have a contradiction. Verse seventeen may only be stating that the joy and sincerity of this feast had not been matched in all that time.

**Neh 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.**

The words “according to the manner” are speaking of doing all things in accordance with the pattern laid out by God. They were happy to have the opportunity to worship in spirit and in truth.

As we come to the close of this eighth chapter we are reminded of the observance of the Lord’s Supper by Christians each first day of the week. Has such become commonplace with the reader? Imagine being prevented from partaking of the Lord’s Supper with other Christians for a period of one year. Our own gratitude might also overflow if we were to experience such a return of blessings once withheld.



## Chapter 9

After long neglect of the laws and statutes of Jehovah, Israel was in the process of returning to the God given ways of life and worship which had been presented to them in the centuries past. Ezra, Nehemiah and the Levites had read from the book of the law and had caused the reading to be understood. They were responding to what had been taught. See the entire twenty-third chapter of Leviticus.

**Neh 9:1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.**

On the first day of the seventh month, the Feast of Trumpets was celebrated. The Day of Atonement took place on the tenth day of the same month. The Feast of Tabernacles began on the fourteenth day and lasted for seven days. There was a very brief pause between that feast and the events of this chapter.

The people had begun to mourn and grieve when they saw the contrast between what they were doing and what God had intended for them to do. But, they had been told to cease their sadness and rejoice in the fact that the walls of the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt and that they had been allowed to return to Palestine. If they had immediately plunged into sadness it would have been less meaningful than what was now to take place. They were now gathering with less quick emotion and with more insight.

Fasting and casting dust upon the head and wearing clothing made from sackcloth were a way of denying



themselves of pride and pleasure as they humbled themselves before the Lord.

**Neh 9:2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.**

God had commanded that His people be a separate people. Israel had failed to keep that commandment. They had intermarried with the strangers, and had followed their ways of idolatry and immorality. They were now ready to confess their shortcomings. This included those of their fathers and also those of their own. The following verses of this chapter will make it clear as to the nature of these confessions.

This introduces an important point. When the Lord calls upon men and women to repent and confess after having departed from His ways, just what is included? Each individual did not go before the assembly and give a detailed description of his sins. Some today believe one who repents and confesses sin should go into detail about the precise nature of the sin. Such a revelation would not serve a useful purpose. It would give the gossips fuel for their fires. A public sin deserves a public confession. A private sin known only to God and the individual should be confessed privately to God.

We should also note the difference between the confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the confession of personal sin for which one is penitent.

**Neh 9:3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part**



**they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.**

Again we find the word “stood.” The people remained in place while the book of the law was being read. This reading and explanation lasted for three hours. Then, for another three hours, the people confessed sins. We have then a total of six hours, or half of the light part of a day.

What effect would it have in the present time if an assembly was called for a similar purpose? Are we so much more righteous than they, that we would be dumbfounded and run out of words to express our sinfulness and praise for God’s goodness, mercy and power?

**Neh 9:4 Then stood up upon the stairs, of the Levites, Jeshua, and Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani, and cried with a loud voice unto the LORD their God.**

The stairs of the Levites could refer to the platform upon which Ezra stood while others were on both his right and his left sides.

It would have been pandemonium if all of these men cried out in loud voices to the Lord at the same time. It is more reasonable to think of one after the other expressing praise and glory to Jehovah.

**Neh 9:5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, and Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabniah, Sherebiah, Hodijah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.**

The entire assembly was urged to stand and bless the name of the Lord. Obviously they were not to stand there in front of the platform for the rest of their lives shouting out praise. However, the Lord is deserving of men's praise for ever and ever. He has been the everlasting God. He deserves the praise of every generation of men, from Eden to the end of time, and even beyond!

**Neh 9:6 Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.**

God is to be praised because he brought all things into being. He created the sun, moon and stars. The host of heaven may mean the material bodies filling the sky, or it may mean the angelic beings who exist in the third heaven.

God is to be praised because he created the earth and all things associated with it. This included the atoms, the chemical elements, and the living organisms of every kind.

God is to be praised because He created the oceans and seas with all the marine life existing in them. Whether it be the lithosphere, the hydrosphere, the atmosphere, or the spiritual realm, God spoke them into existence.

He is to be praised because He is the CREATOR.

**Neh 9:7 Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham;**





God is to be praised because in the midst of a wicked human population, He did not destroy it utterly. He chose one man from the land of Ur of the Chaldees and changed his name from Abram, meaning “mighty father” to Abraham, meaning “Father of a multitude.” Through the seed of this man the faithful would be blessed.

**Neh 9:8 And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous:**

God is to be praised because He made a covenant with this man Abraham. Abraham was to be faithful to Him. He would then provide the land of Canaan for Abraham’s descendants. The Canaanites held control of the land at the time, but would be removed in favor of Abraham’s multitude.

**Neh 9:9 And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea;**

God is to be praised because He continued His grace after seventy souls who were the family of Jacob, had been made slaves in the land of Egypt. Moses was called from the herding of sheep and sent to Egypt to lead Israel out of the land of the taskmasters and to the shore of the Red Sea.

**Neh 9:10 And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they**

**dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day.**

This release from bondage had been the result of signs and wonders such as the ten plagues which came upon Pharaoh and those who were persecuting God's special people. From that seventy souls who went into Egypt, over six hundred thousand men, plus women and children left that land after some four hundred years.

**Neh 9:11 And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters.**

In what might have been considered a hopeless situation, with Pharaoh and his chariots behind them, and the Red Sea in front of them, God caused the sea to part. This allowed them to pass through, after which the sea returned to its place, removing the pursuers.

God is to be praised, because only He could have caused these signs and wonders.

**Neh 9:12 Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go.**

After Israel had crossed the Red Sea and were without guides in the awesome wilderness which lay beyond the sea, God provided a pillar shaped cloud to lead them back to the land of Canaan. It could be seen both night and day.

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Neh 9:13 Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

The cloud led them to the base of Mount Sinai, where the Lord presented directions for both daily life and for worshipping Him. These were from the all knowing mind of God, and were perfect for the time and the place. No man or group of men could have produced these laws, statutes and commandments.

Neh 9:14 And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant:

At this time God also made it known that He expected His people to rest on the seventh or last day of the week. He had created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh. Israel was given a similar pattern. Both the people and the land of Canaan would enjoy a periodic rest.

It is true that the seventh day sabbath was taken out of the way and replaced by the first day of the week in the Christian age. But, at the same time, God has said there remaineth a rest for His people. (See Hebrews 4:9.)

Heb 4:9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Heb 4:10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Heb 4:11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Neh 9:15 And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them

out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them.

Nor did Jehovah forget the physical needs of His people. He caused manna, or bread from heaven to satisfy their hunger. They were not able to cultivate fields of grain while they were moving through the wilderness. He gave them bread.

They also needed water. We are told that there was a rock which followed them from which water came to quench their thirst. Moses made the horrible mistake of striking the rock and failing to give God the glory for the water which came forth.

Christ serves as the spiritual rock from which flows living water for His brethren today. God did not forget fleshly Israel then. He has not forgotten spiritual Israel today.

God is to be praised for all of His wondrous love and care, in that time and in ours.

Neh 9:16 But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments,

In view of all these reasons for praising and honoring the Lord, how had Israel repaid Him? They had become proud and stubborn. They had hardened their necks.

Any responsible parent or schoolteacher will understand what is meant by the hardening of the neck. Your present writer has had both experiences. When a human of any age refuses to obey authority, they tend to stiffen and challenge the one giving commands. That stiffening is a way of preparing for contention. Israel had fought against God rather than obeying Him. That was to be a losing battle.

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**Neh 9:17 And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.**

The people reached such a state of confusion as a result of ignoring God's guidance that they appointed a human captain to lead them back to the slavery of Egypt. They decided the conditions of Egypt were preferable to those in the wilderness under the care of Jehovah. The record at that point only tells us they intended to appoint a human leader. This passage reports that they had even chosen one.

Even so, God did not eliminate them from the face of the earth. In His foresight, he knew a Saviour could be brought forth from their descendants. He had promised Abraham. He would keep that promise.

**Neh 9:18 Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations;**

They even went so far as to make a calf out of gold and begin to worship it. Did God not have a perfect right to let them die in the barren wilderness? Yet, He did not.

**Neh 9:19 Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by**

night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go.

**Neh 9:20** Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.

**Neh 9:21** Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not.

For a full forty years God tolerated their ingratitude, not because of their righteousness, but because of His plan for the redemption of man and the eternal company of His faithful children in heaven.

**Neh 9:22** Moreover thou gavest them kingdoms and nations, and didst divide them into corners: so they possessed the land of Sihon, and the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.

After that long period of wandering, they came up on the east side of the Jordan River and defeated both King Sihon and King Og. Dividing them into corners means assigning parts of the land of Canaan to each of the tribes.

**Neh 9:23** Their children also multipliedst thou as the stars of heaven, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it.

**Neh 9:24** So the children went in and possessed the land, and thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest



**them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would.**

None of the rulers of the land of Canaan were able to prevent Israel from possessing the land. Some have been tempted to criticize the displacing of the heathen of the land in the keeping of the promise to Abraham. God explained His reasons for this in Deuteronomy 9:4-5. Read it carefully!

*Deu 9:4 Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the LORD thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the LORD hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out from before thee.*

*Deu 9:5 Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

**Neh 9:25 And they took strong cities, and a fat land, and possessed houses full of all goods, wells digged, vineyards, and oliveyards, and fruit trees in abundance: so they did eat, and were filled, and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness.**

Canaan was called a “fat land” because of the abundance of food and other necessities compared to what had been available in the land of Egypt where they had eaten leeks and cucumbers.

**Neh 9:26 Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.**

We must not forget the source of all of these words. The leaders of the people were pointing out to them just how miserably they had sinned before the face of the One who had made such blessings possible.

After being established in the land of Canaan, they ignored God's law and turned their faces from it as if it did not exist. They had finally provoked Him to send them back into bondage.

**Neh 9:27 Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviours, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies.**

In the time of the Judges, God sent one of these leaders after another as He gave His people every opportunity to repent and obey Him.

**Neh 9:28 But after they had rest, they did evil again before thee: therefore leftest thou them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them: yet when they returned, and cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and many times didst thou deliver them according to thy mercies;**

When things became miserable, the people cried out for help. Time after time, He heard their cry. As soon

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as there was relief from their enemies, they would turn their faces away again.

Neh 9:29 And testifiedst against them, that thou mightest bring them again unto thy law: yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man do, he shall live in them;) and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their neck, and would not hear.

To withdraw the shoulder is to refuse to bear the burdens assigned to one. God does not require more than His children can bear. With every burden, He will provide a way to deal with that burden.

Neh 9:30 Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.

Prophets are those whom God sends with His messages for men. He did not send just one. He sent many. They would not hear. This resulted in God giving Israel over into the hands of powerful rulers such as the Assyrians and the Persians. Even at the time these words were being given to them, they were under the dominion of Artaxerxes.

Neh 9:31 Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art a gracious and merciful God.

Neh 9:32 Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day.

Neh 9:33 Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly:

There is frank admission that the Lord had done everything that could be done to deserve respect. He was righteous. They were sinners.

Neh 9:34 Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies, wherewith thou didst testify against them.

Neh 9:35 For they have not served thee in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, neither turned they from their wicked works.

Neh 9:36 Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it:

They were not slaves as they had been in Egypt. But, they were ruled by the king of Persia.

Neh 9:37 And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of

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**our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.**

In consequence of this servant status, they were required to pay tribute to the foreign rulers and see them prosper at the expense of the Israelites.

**Neh 9:38 And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.**

This entire chapter is a prayer recognizing the sinfulness of Israel and the wonderful providence of God in the face of that sinfulness. The people were ready to make a covenant with the Lord and verify that covenant with a written promise. Their leaders would place their signatures or seals upon the agreement. Israel was sorry! They would try to do better!

## *Chapter 10*

In that great chapter which precedes this one, Israel had confessed their sinfulness in contrast to the goodness and longsuffering of God. They determined to strengthen their relationship with God by setting up a covenant with Him. This present chapter gives details of the nature and establishment of that covenant.

**Neh 10:1 Now those that sealed were, Nehemiah, the Tirshatha, the son of Hachaliah, and Zidkijah,**

In present day language we sometimes speak of something as being “signed, sealed and delivered.” Signing and sealing a document is a means of finalizing it. A number of respected men of Israel affixed their names of seals to the new agreement with the Lord.

It is reasonable that Nehemiah, as the governor, would be the first to sign. His name heads the list. Following the name of Nehemiah, we have the name Zidkijah with is another spelling of the name Zedekiah. Since the word and is placed between the name of Nehemiah and Zedekiah, the two seem to have stood out from the rest of the signers. Zedekiah may have been a secretary for Nehemiah.

**Neh 10:2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,  
Neh 10:3 Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah,  
Neh 10:4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,  
Neh 10:5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,  
Neh 10:6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,  
Neh 10:7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,  
Neh 10:8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah: these were  
the priests.**

The list of priests varies from place to place. One of the problems involved in harmonizing the different lists is that apparently individual names were used in one list, while family names were used in another.

Three familiar names in the above list are Obadiah, Daniel and Baruch. This does not mean these are identical with persons by those names in other Bible locations. We still have many persons today who are named Daniel.

**Neh 10:9 And the Levites: both Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;**

**Neh 10:10 And their brethren, Shebaniah, Hodijah, Kelita, Pelaiiah, Hanan,**

**Neh 10:11 Micha, Rehob, Hashabiah,**

**Neh 10:12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,**

**Neh 10:13 Hodijah, Bani, Beninu.**

The list of priests is followed by a list of the Levites who signed the covenant. These were Levites who were not priests. The list in verses two through eight was of those who were the descendants of Aaron.

**Neh 10:14 The chief of the people; Parosh, Pahathmoab, Elam, Zathu, Bani,**

**Neh 10:15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai,**

**Neh 10:16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin,**

**Neh 10:17 Ater, Hizkijah, Azzur,**

**Neh 10:18 Hodijah, Hashum, Bezai,**

**Neh 10:19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai,**

**Neh 10:20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir,**

**Neh 10:21 Meshezabeel, Zadok, Jaddua,**

**Neh 10:22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah,**

**Neh 10:23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hashub,**

**Neh 10:24 Hallohesh, Pileha, Shobek,**

**Neh 10:25** Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,  
**Neh 10:26** And Ahijah, Hanan, Anan,  
**Neh 10:27** Malluch, Harim, Baanah.

We have a third list now. These are the chief, or princes of the people, who were not of either the priests or the Levites.

**Neh 10:28** And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding;

The rest of the people who had realized their sinfulness and disregard for the will of God supported the Priests, Levites and Princes. This does not mean every individual of the nation of Israel made this commitment. There may have been numbers of them who were not in agreement.

We noted before that those were called to gather in the assembly had been all who were able to comprehend the meaning of the law when it was clearly and distinctly read and explained.

**Neh 10:29** They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;

All who were willing to enter into the covenant and observe the commandments of the Lord, as given through



Moses, agreed to place themselves under an oath and make themselves subject to a curse if they turned away. An oath was a promise before God. A curse was the punishment for breaking the promise.

**Neh 10:30 And that we would not give our daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for our sons:**

The matters mentioned in these next few verses were areas of the law which had been ignored in the past. They were to be corrected.

First, the practice of intermarriage with non-Israelites was to be discontinued. This would not be an easy promise to keep. They had not driven the Canaanites out of the land. Beautiful women and handsome men attract one another, regardless of race, religion or background. Israel miserably failed to keep this part of the agreement, as will be seen in the last chapters of this same book.

**Neh 10:31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.**

Second, they agreed not to have any business dealings on the sabbath day with the Canaanites. The people of the land had no hesitation to bring their products and display them for sale on the sabbath. The Israelites were to ignore these merchants.

Not only the seventh *day* sabbath, but the seventh *year* sabbath was to be honored. On the seventh year the land was to lay idle. On the seventh years all debts between Israelites were to be cancelled.

**Neh 10:32 Also we made ordinances for us, to charge ourselves yearly with the third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God;**

The services of the temple would need to be supported. Artaxerxes had donated a certain sum to be used for that purpose, but there was a need for the Jews to take that responsibility on their own hands. Each man was to give one third of a shekel for the operation of the temple and it's sacrifices.

Earlier the amount had been set at one half shekel. (See Exo. 30:11-15.)

*Exo 30:11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,*

*Exo 30:12 When thou takest the sum of the children of Israel after their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul unto the LORD, when thou numberest them; that there be no plague among them, when thou numberest them.*

*Exo 30:13 This they shall give, every one that passeth among them that are numbered, half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary: (a shekel is twenty gerahs:) an half shekel shall be the offering of the LORD.*

*Exo 30:14 Every one that passeth among them that are numbered, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering unto the LORD.*

*Exo 30:15 The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering unto the LORD, to make an atonement for your souls.*

In the time of Jesus Christ, the amount had returned to one half shekel. The poverty of the people could have been the reason for the reduction at this time from one half to one third.

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Neh 10:33 For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of our God.

In both the Mosaic age and the Christian age, God has expected his people to support those who have committed themselves to temple and church worship services. His servants must receive a reasonable salary, and either monetary or material gifts must be offered to sustain the religious activities.

Neh 10:34 And we cast the lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, after the houses of our fathers, at times appointed year by year, to burn upon the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law:

Burnt offerings required wood. Lots were cast to see which of the priests, Levites and others would bring the wood, and at which time of the year they would bring it.

Neh 10:35 And to bring the firstfruits of our ground, and the firstfruits of all fruit of all trees, year by year, unto the house of the LORD:

They agreed to give God the first and the best of their blessings. This included grain such as wheat. It also included figs, etc., from their trees.

Neh 10:36 Also the firstborn of our sons, and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the firstlings of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, unto the priests that minister in the house of our God:

Even the firstborn male child was to be dedicated to the Lord. God, however, did agree to receive the tribe of Levi in place of the firstborn son. The people were then expected to support that tribe.

The firstborn of the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep belonged to God. The priests received these animals to use as sacrifices.

Neh 10:37 And that we should bring the firstfruits of our dough, and our offerings, and the fruit of all manner of trees, of wine and of oil, unto the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground unto the Levites, that the same Levites might have the tithes in all the cities of our tillage.

That which the people enjoyed as the fruit of their labor was to be shared with the Levites. Wherever the fields were tilled, the tenth of the produce was to be contributed to the welfare of the Levites.

Neh 10:38 And the priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Levites take tithes: and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes unto the house of our God, to the chambers, into the treasure house.

In turn, the Levites were to give to the priests one tenth of that which they received from the people. When

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the Levites collected the tithes from the people, the priests were to supervise the actions. This would insure that the Levites collected the right amount from the people, and would also insure that they in turn contributed the tenth of what they received for the support of the priests.

**Neh 10:39 For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.**

The people agreed that they would keep the commandments to provide for the operation of the temple and it's services.

Although this last verse is pointed primarily at the financial and material support of the priests, Levites and temple worship, there is another angle which needs to be noted. The forsaking of the house of the Lord is cheating one's self of blessings God intended for His children to enjoy.

1. God is in His house of worship in a very personal way. Most persons would make an effort to accept an invitation to meet a human of outstanding importance. God is infinitely more important.

2. The finest people in the world gather in God's house of worship. It should be satisfying and enriching to share in such a fellowship.

3. A worship service with other true followers of God is as close to heaven as one can get while still on earth. Why would anyone forsake such an experience?

4. Spiritual growth is promoted by association with

God's people, and the study of God's Word.

The word "house" can be used to refer to the place of worship, or it can refer to family or household of God. The support of the worship and fellowship of other members of the family are blessings not to be taken lightly.



## Chapter 11

Ordinarily your present commentator does not spend much time criticizing the Bible critics. It is felt that the reader is more interested in what the Bible has to say than what the form critics have to say about it. As we approach chapter eleven there is a need to mention an item which is discussed by a number of writers.

The eighth, ninth and tenth chapters of this book have given the “scholars” something to chew on. In the seventh chapter of the book Nehemiah mentioned that Jerusalem was large and the number of inhabitants was small. He wished to bring true Jews into the city to man the defenses. Then, the eighth chapter looks like a sharp break in thought. Much is said in the eighth, ninth and tenth chapters about the spiritual organization of the temple, the priests, the Levites and the provisions for maintaining the sacrifices.

Burton Coffman has an excellent point here when he declares these three chapters to fit perfectly into establishing the security of the city of Jerusalem. The spiritual strength of the persons who had an interest in the city was a very critical part of that security. After describing the precautions taken to hold the people close to God, Nehemiah is ready to return to the populating of the Holy city.

**Neh 11:1 And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities.**

The rulers of the people would naturally be more apt to abide in the capital city than many other classes. The

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city had been defenseless for some time when the walls had not yet been rebuilt. But now the walls had been erected and those who were to rule the people were the first to move inside and make their homes within those walls.

Nehemiah led the general population in casting lots to see which of them would leave their homes in the surrounding villages and move inside. The casting of lots was considered a valuable means of determining God's will. It was used as late as the selection of a successor for Judas, the apostle who betrayed the Christ. We might add that those at the foot of the cross cast lots for the Lord's garments.

This time it had been decided that one tenth of the Jews who lived outside the city would be chosen by lot to move inside. It is clear that many of the people did not wish to leave the homes in the towns and villages to abide in the city. They were willing to do so if the lot fell upon them.

Neh 11:2 And the people blessed all the men, that willingly offered themselves to dwell at Jerusalem.

The rest of those outside the city, who were not chosen wished those well who had agreed to move inside. To bless them meant that they wished them well and were grateful to them.

Neh 11:3 Now these are the chief of the province that dwelt in Jerusalem: but in the cities of Judah dwelt every one in his possession in their cities, to wit, Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinims, and the children of Solomon's servants.



There were two classes; those who moved into the city, and those who remained where they had been living.

Among those who moved into Jerusalem were priests, Levites, Nethinims and servants. There was thus a cross section of the total Jewish population.

Neh 11:4 And at Jerusalem dwelt certain of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah; Athaiah the son of Uzziyah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalaleel, of the children of Perez;

Neh 11:5 And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shiloni.

Neh 11:6 All the sons of Perez that dwelt at Jerusalem were four hundred threescore and eight valiant men.

The total of the male descendants of Judah through Perez, or Pharez was 468.

Neh 11:7 And these are the sons of Benjamin; Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jesaiah.

Neh 11:8 And after him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred twenty and eight.

Neh 11:9 And Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer: and Judah the son of Senuah was second over the city.

The male descendants of Benjamin totaled 928. The tribes of Benjamin, Judah and Levi were those who had territory in the Jerusalem area.

Neh 11:10 Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin.

Neh 11:11 Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, was the ruler of the house of God.

Neh 11:12 And their brethren that did the work of the house were eight hundred twenty and two: and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashur, the son of Malchiah.

Neh 11:13 And his brethren, chief of the fathers, two hundred forty and two: and Amashai the son of Azareel, the son of Ahasai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer,

Neh 11:14 And their brethren, mighty men of valour, an hundred twenty and eight: and their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of one of the great men.

Of the priests we find a total of	822.
Of the chief fathers, a total of	242.
Of the mighty men a total of	128.

Neh 11:15 Also of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hashub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni;

Neh 11:16 And Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chief of the Levites, had the oversight of the outward business of the house of God.

The outward business of the house of God would have been those activities taking place outside the walls of the temple.

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**Neh 11:17 And Mattaniah the son of Micha, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, was the principal to begin the thanksgiving in prayer: and Bakbukiah the second among his brethren, and Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.**

Asaph was the leader of those who offered thanksgiving in song.

**Neh 11:18 All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred fourscore and four.**

Of the Levites we have a total of 244.

**Neh 11:19 Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brethren that kept the gates, were an hundred seventy and two.**

Of the porters or gatekeepers a total of 172.

**Neh 11:20 And the residue of Israel, of the priests, and the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, every one in his inheritance.**

The other nine tenths of the people did not move into the city of Jerusalem. Among these were priests and Levites.

**Neh 11:21 But the Nethinims dwelt in Ophel: and Ziha and Gispa were over the Nethinims.**

**Neh 11:22 The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micha. Of the sons of Asaph, the singers were over the business of the house of God.**

**Neh 11:23 For it was the king's commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day.**

Asaph and his fellow singers were provided by the king with a daily provision of food. We see no reason to question the identity of this king as Artaxerxes. He had been friendly to the returnees since they had left Persia for Canaan. He had designated a contribution to establish and sustain their worship.

The total number listed above is 3,044. We must assume at least a wife and two children on the average. This would mean over 12,000, which would be one tenth of the original group living near Jerusalem. Thus the population of those inside and outside the city would have reached above the 100,000 mark. Only 52,000 had accompanied Zerubbabel when he returned. We have at least a doubling of that number.

**Neh 11:24 And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabeel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people.**

Artaxerxes had appointed Pethahiah as an intermediary between himself and the Israelites.

**Neh 11:25 And for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah dwelt at Kirjatharba, and in the villages thereof, and at Dibon, and in the villages thereof, and at Jekabzeel, and in the villages thereof,**

**Neh 11:26 And at Jeshua, and at Moladah, and at Bethpheet,**

**Neh 11:27 And at Hazarshual, and at Beersheba, and in the villages thereof,**

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Neh 11:28 And at Ziklag, and at Mekonah, and in the villages thereof,

Neh 11:29 And at Enrimmon, and at Zareah, and at Jarmuth,

Neh 11:30 Zanoah, Adullam, and in their villages, at Lachish, and the fields thereof, at Azekah, and in the villages thereof. And they dwelt from Beersheba unto the valley of Hinnom.

These last verses of the chapter mention various villages in which those from the tribe of Judah lived, and in which those from the tribe of Benjamin lived. Verses twenty-five through thirty deal with the villages inhabited by those of the tribe of Judah.

Neh 11:31 The children also of Benjamin from Geba dwelt at Michmash, and Aija, and Bethel, and in their villages.

Neh 11:32 And at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,

Neh 11:33 Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,

Neh 11:34 Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,

Neh 11:35 Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.

Verses thirty-one through thirty-five deal with the villages inhabited by those of the tribe of Benjamin.

Many of the above villages are familiar to us from a variety of accounts in the scriptures. Listing them would almost be attaching an important event or circumstance to each of those mentioned throughout verses twenty-five to thirty-five.

Neh 11:36 And of the Levites were divisions in Judah, and in Benjamin.

The Levites who remained outside the city of Jerusalem were scattered through the territories of both Judah and Benjamin.



Chapter 12

There are two main topics in this chapter. The first deals with the genealogies of the priestly families from the time of Zerubbabel to the time of the dedication of the city walls of Jerusalem. The second deals with the events associated with the dedication of the walls.

The commentators have much to say about copyist additions, subtractions and misplacements. Many are all too willing to credit a “chronicler” for having gathered the material from a number of sources and presenting us with his final product in the book of Nehemiah as we read it today. This present writer is willing to trust the providence of Jehovah to have given us an inspired record of that which He viewed as critical to His plan of redemption for mankind.

Neh 12:1 Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,

We begin by examining a listing of the priests and Levites who accompanied Zerubbabel back from Persia to Canaan. This is not a list of every individual priest. It is a listing of the priestly families.

**Neh 12:2 Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,
Neh 12:3 Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,
Neh 12:4 Iddo, Ginnetho, Abijah,
Neh 12:5 Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,
Neh 12:6 Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah,
Neh 12:7 Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua.**

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Note that these are called the “chief” of the priests. There were more than this if each individual had been counted.

**Neh 12:8 Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, which was over the thanksgiving, he and his brethren.**

**Neh 12:9 Also Bakbukiah and Unni, their brethren, were over against them in the watches.**

**Neh 12:10 And Jeshua begat Joiakim, Joiakim also begat Eliashib, and Eliashib begat Joiada,**

**Neh 12:11 And Joiada begat Jonathan, and Jonathan begat Jaddua.**

In verses eight through twelve we have a list of the Levites in that group.

The name Jaddua has caused some commotion. Josephus tells of a high priest named Jaddua who so impressed Alexander the Great that Alexander bowed before him in great respect. The name “Jaddua” may have had reference to more than one person. One could have served a century previous to another.

**Neh 12:12 And in the days of Joiakim were priests, the chief of the fathers: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;**

**Neh 12:13 Of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;**

**Neh 12:14 Of Melicu, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph;**

**Neh 12:15 Of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai;**

**Neh 12:16 Of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam;**



**Neh 12:17 Of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai:**

**Neh 12:18 Of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan;**

**Neh 12:19 And of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;**

**Neh 12:20 Of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber;**

**Neh 12:21 Of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethaneel.**

Above we have another listing of chief priests from the time of Joiakim.

**Neh 12:22 The Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, were recorded chief of the fathers: also the priests, to the reign of Darius the Persian.**

**Neh 12:23 The sons of Levi, the chief of the fathers, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib.**

**Neh 12:24 And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward.**

**Neh 12:25 Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the ward at the thresholds of the gates.**

**Neh 12:26 These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest, the scribe.**

The above list of priests is now followed by a list of Levites who also served in the time of Joiakim. A list of

the priestly families at two different dates is presented below for comparison's sake.

| Nehemiah 10:2-8<br>Nehemiah's time | Nehemiah 12:1-7<br>Zerubbabel's time |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Seriah                             | Seriah                               |
| Azariah                            | Jeremiah                             |
| Jeremiah                           | Ezra                                 |
| Pashur                             |                                      |
| Amariah                            |                                      |
| Amariah                            | Malluch                              |
| Malchijah                          | Hattush                              |
| Hattush                            | Shecaniah                            |
| Shebeniah                          | Rehum                                |
| Malluch                            | Meremoth                             |
| Harim                              | Iddo                                 |
| Meremoth                           | Ginnethoi                            |
| Obadiah                            | Abijah                               |
| Daniel                             |                                      |
| Mijamin                            |                                      |
| Ginnethon                          | Maadiah                              |
| Baruch                             | Bilgah                               |
| Meshullam                          | Shemaiah                             |
| Abijah                             |                                      |
| Joiarib                            |                                      |
| Mijamin                            | Jediah                               |
| Maaziah                            | Sallu                                |
| Bilgal                             | Amok                                 |
| Shemaiah                           | Hilkiah                              |
|                                    | Jediah                               |

There is another list given in Nehemiah 12:12-21. It varies slightly from both of the above and is from a time between the two lists above.





**Neh 12:27 And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps.**

From this point to the end of the chapter Nehemiah will discuss the ceremonies associated with the dedication of the city wall.

The Levites did not all live in Jerusalem. At the dedication, Levites were brought to the city from the different villages in which they had settled in the tribal territories of Benjamin and Judah. They were assembled to be present for the dedication. They would join in the joyous occasion by singing and playing various musical instruments. Our minds are drawn to the book of Psalms and the praises associated with King David.

**Neh 12:28 And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi;**

**Neh 12:29 Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem.**

**Neh 12:30 And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall.**

They came from every direction to meet and praise Jehovah. Washings and sacrifices took place as needed to render the priests, the Levites and also the people ceremonially clean.

**Neh 12:31 Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall, and appointed two great companies of them that gave thanks, whereof one went on the right hand upon the wall toward the dung gate:**

Nehemiah separated two large companies of men from the group and prepared them for a march.

When Kathleen Kenyon surveyed the remains of the city wall, she stated that the walls were some nine feet in width. This was wide enough that the two companies of men could march around the top.

**Neh 12:32 And after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah,**

**Neh 12:33 And Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam,**

**Neh 12:34 Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah,**

**Neh 12:35 And certain of the priests' sons with trumpets; namely, Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph:**

**Neh 12:36 And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them.**

**Neh 12:37 And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward.**

Ezra led one of the companies up the stairs at the fountain gate and around the top of the wall until they came to the water gate.

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Neh 12:38 And the other company of them that gave thanks went over against them, and I after them, and the half of the people upon the wall, from beyond the tower of the furnaces even unto the broad wall;

The other company marched in the opposite direction around the top of the wall, until they met the first group at the broad gate. Nehemiah followed after the second company.

Neh 12:39 And from above the gate of Ephraim, and above the old gate, and above the fish gate, and the tower of Hananeel, and the tower of Meah, even unto the sheep gate: and they stood still in the prison gate.

Neh 12:40 So stood the two companies of them that gave thanks in the house of God, and I, and the half of the rulers with me:

Neh 12:41 And the priests; Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Michaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets;

Neh 12:42 And Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang loud, with JEzrahiah their overseer.

Those stationed around the top of the wall sang and gave thanks to the Lord for His blessings in allowing the return to Canaan and the completion of the rebuilding. They did not just go through the motions. They made melody in their hearts and sang with loud voices.

Just a note here! Singing loud is not a demonstration of lung power and musical ability. As these persons

praised God, they were stirred in soul and spirit, as they offered praise and thanksgiving to the God of all the earth.

Neh 12:43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off.

Everyone became involved in the celebration. Wives and children shared in the great joy. The sound of the music and singing could be heard from a distance.

Neh 12:44 And at that time were some appointed over the chambers for the treasures, for the offerings, for the firstfruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them out of the fields of the cities the portions of the law for the priests and Levites: for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites that waited.

There was organization along with the shouts of joy. Nehemiah was a person who was capable of appointing those of Israel to assignments in such a way that all of the tasks were accomplished in harmony. This must have been quite a sight as the tithes and offerings were brought into the city to the priests and Levites.

Neh 12:45 And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son.

Neh 12:46 For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God.



The gatekeepers and the singers entered into their tasks as God had instructed from the time of David and Solomon. Memories of the past were coming back to life.

Neh 12:47 And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, every day his portion: and they sanctified holy things unto the Levites; and the Levites sanctified them unto the children of Aaron.

There is a pattern that all who truly serve God will recognize in this chapter. Service to Jehovah brings joy in the heart. Joy in the heart inspires even greater service to Jehovah. What a contrast this present scene was to the sinfulness which led to the captivity when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city walls and took the people into Babylon.

Chapter 13

This last chapter of the book of Nehemiah tells of his efforts to repair the damage which had been done to the cause of Jehovah during the time of his absence as he reported back to king Artaxerxes in Persia.

It tears at our very heartstrings to realize that Malachi lived and prophesied at about this time. God had extended his grace to the breaking point as the Jews repeatedly stopped their ears and closed their eyes to his commandments. They could hardly wait until his governor left Jerusalem before they broke the recent covenant they had sworn under oath to uphold.

Nehemiah did his best to let them know of the serious consequences they would face unless they kept the law of the Lord.

Neh 13:1 On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;

We are not certain as to “that day.” It could have been a feast day, or it could have been a special day set up by Nehemiah when he returned from reporting to the palace at Susa. With all of the corruption which he faced when he returned, it is not unthinkable that he decided a special reading of the law of Moses was needed.

Nor do we know just how long it had been since Nehemiah had left to report to king Artaxerxes before he returned to Jerusalem. Later in this chapter we find that many of the children produced through mixed marriages were having trouble speaking the Hebrew tongue. This

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would have taken some time to develop. Many Bible students think Nehemiah was gone about one year. This writer believes it was a longer period than that.

While reading in the law of Moses, it was found that the Ammonites and the Moabites were not to be allowed in the congregation of the Lord forever. Yet they were there when Nehemiah returned.

**Neh 13:2 Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing.**

The reason God forbade the Ammonites and the Moabites to come into the congregation was that when Israel was about to enter the land of Canaan, these two groups of people resisted their entry. Not only did they not assist Israel in moving into the land; they hired Balaam to pronounce a curse upon them. (See Deuteronomy 23:5.)

*Deu 23:5 Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.*

**Neh 13:3 Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.**

This would have been unusual if Nehemiah had still been absent. He was very likely the one who had called for the reading of the law when he saw all of the disrespect which had developed during his absence.

The mixed multitude would have been those who had

intermarried with Moabites and Ammonites, plus the children produced by such marriages.

**Neh 13:4 And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah:**

This verse does not say Eliashib was the High Priest. He is only called a priest. There was a High Priest named Eliashib, but this could have been another lesser priest with the same name. It does seem, however, that if this man had the authority to oversee the storage chamber of the temple, he would have had this authority only as a High Priest. If this is the case, his alliance with Tobiah was a grave situation. Tobiah, Sanballat and Gershom had provided keen resistance to Nehemiah and the Jews in the past.

Tobiah's alliance with Eliashib is thought to be a result of a mixed marriage. Tobiah was an Ammonite. He had not only entered into the congregation. He had found himself a cozy place in what was intended to be the storage area for tithes and offerings. The High Priest had arranged this.

**Neh 13:5 And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests.**

The word translated as "chamber" is a plural in the Hebrew. He may have had more than one room. Previously the support for the Levites had been stored in these quarters. Now an Ammonite lived there.

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Neh 13:6 But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king:

Nehemiah is making it clear that these insults to God had taken place while he was absent from Jerusalem and with Artaxerxes in the palace at Susa.

The phrase “all this time” is also an indication that the time period during which he was gone was more than one year.

Neh 13:7 And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

Neh 13:8 And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber.

Nehemiah was most unhappy, to say the least, when he found that Eliashib had installed Tobiah in a chamber within the courts of the very temple. He did not hesitate to evict Tobiah along with all of his household goods. This could only have taken place if Nehemiah had come back with full authority as governor of the people.

Neh 13:9 Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

The chambers in which Tobiah had dwelt were polluted by the presence of the Ammonite. They were

ceremonially cleansed in order that they might once again be used for their intended purpose of storing the items needed for support of the Levites and the worship services.

Neh 13:10 And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field.

It was immediately clear to Nehemiah that the collections which had been taken for the Levites and the singers and stored in the chambers used by Tobiah had not been received. As a result they had found it necessary to work in the fields and support themselves in that way. The apostle Paul wrote about this topic in his first letter to the church at Corinth. (See I Corinthians 9:14.)

1Co 9:9 For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

1Co 9:10 Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

1Co 9:11 If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

1Co 9:12 If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

1Co 9:13 Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?

1Co 9:14 Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

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**Neh 13:11 Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place.**

The neglect of the collection of the tithes, etc. was the fault of the rulers of the people. Nehemiah called them together and brought them to task for their lack of attention to their duties.

It is quite understandable that this might have taken place. No one enjoys paying taxes. When the governor had departed for the distant capitol at Susa, the people did not wish to make their contributions, and the rulers did not wish to face the objections of those over which they ruled.

**Neh 13:12 Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries.**

After Nehemiah gave them a verbal spanking, they collected and they contributed. The tithes flowed into the storehouse from which Tobiah had been evicted.

**Neh 13:13 And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren.**

In order to insure that the tithes were properly taken and cared for, Nehemiah assigned certain priests and Levites to oversee that work. He was cautious to appoint

only those whom he had found faithful. They were to see that the rest of the Levites and the priests had their needs cared for.

**Neh 13:14 Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.**

Here is a short prayer offered by Nehemiah. He was concerned that the efforts he had put forth to see the work of the Lord put in order would not be dissolved in the future. He was not asking that God mark them up in the heavenly record books and not forget to give him credit for his good works. He wished to see the people more faithful than they had been in the past.

He was ready to continue chastising and correcting the sins of the congregation. He prayed that God would assist him in that work.

**Neh 13:15 In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals.**

The next matter that needed attention was the work that was being done on the sabbath day. Everyone knew of God's decree that no work be done on that sacred day. But, Nehemiah could see the people working on that day just as energetically as the other six days of the week.

He let those who were doing these things know their



labors were in vain. They might prosper for the moment. The prosperity would not continue when the wrath of God fell upon them.

**Neh 13:16 There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.**

The merchants were bringing fish in from the region of Tyre on the coast of the Mediterranean. All kinds of goods were being offered for sale on the sabbath day, and this was taking place right in the city of Jerusalem.

**Neh 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?**

To contend is to point out places where you disagree with others. A contentious person is one who is constantly pointing out others faults. Nehemiah was not sinning in his contention with the nobles of Judah. He was teaching them the need for following God's commandments. Remembering the sabbath was one of those commandments.

**Neh 13:18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.**

What did these nobles believe had brought about all the misery Israel had faced during their captivity in Babylon and Persia? Were they ready to plunge

themselves right back into the same type of punishment again? To “profane” is to make something which is holy to be unholy. What would Nehemiah do to correct this sin?

**Neh 13:19 And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day.**

Since it seemed that the people were so intent on buying and selling on the sabbath day, he decided to have the gates of the city closed just before the sabbath day began in the evening, and left closed until the sabbath closed when the shades of evening gathered on the following day. The sabbath began and ended with sundown.

**Neh 13:20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.**

**Neh 13:21 Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath.**

Those who were merchandising on the sacred day did not give up easily. They pitched their camp just outside the gates of the city where it would be tempting for the citizens to either sneak through the gates or look at the goods and build up desire for them.

The governor was not even willing to let this behavior continue. He warned the merchants he would order

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physical force to be used to remove them if they came again.

Every commentator we read has pointed out the similarity between Nehemiah's treatment of the merchants here and that of Jesus Christ when he cleansed the temple of the moneychangers in his day.

May we suggest that our present society has become so material minded that the first day of the week has fallen victim to the same fate. This trend will probably continue until the Lord decides to teach us another lesson.

Neh 13:22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

Levites were placed in watch positions at the gates to see that the sabbath was kept sacred. Then Nehemiah added another short prayer. Would God please observe his disgust for these sins and not consider him guilty and have mercy upon him.

Neh 13:23 In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:

As Nehemiah went about the land, he saw more cases of intermarriage with the heathen. This was a constant battle. No matter how many times the warning was issued, the sexual attractions proved impossible to ignore. Here are those names of Ammon and Moab once more. This time Ashdod is added.

Neh 13:24 And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.

The languages of the nations around Israel were somewhat like Hebrew, but enough different that the children of the mixed marriages were having difficulty in understanding that which was native to the Jews. The reader will understand if he was raised where a slow southern drawl was spoken and then found himself having to listen to others who spoke in a clipped northern brogue. The problem with these youngsters was making it impossible for them to hear and understand when the law was read in Hebrew.

Neh 13:25 And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.

Is it wrong to contend earnestly for the truth? Nehemiah did not think so. His contention went so far as to have these persons who intermarried smitten and shaved. I do not believe the word plucked off means the hair was pulled out by the roots. Shaving the head was a means of bringing shame upon the individual.

He did not command them to put away their heathen mates. He may have done so, but it is not recorded here. He did tell those who had not married strangers they were not to do so.

Neh 13:26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there

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**no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin.**

These strangers did not worship in spirit and in truth. Intermarriage would turn them away from the pure and undefiled religion presented by Jehovah.

Solomon was a man who began his reign in the fear of God. He was known as the “wise man.” He was warned not to amass wealth, depend upon chariots and horses, or multiply wives. He later did all three. The “outlandish” women he married caused him to disobey the Lord. We are told that the word “outlandish” developed from the idea of those who came from lands *outside* one’s own.

**Neh 13:27 Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?**

Who was to listen to the other side. Were Nehemiah and the Jews expected to follow in the tracks of those who married Ammonites and Moabites, or were the strangers who had been marrying with the Jews to marry among their own?

**Neh 13:28 And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.**

How had Tobias managed to obtain living quarters in the courts of the temple. We may have the explanation right here. A grandson of the Eliashib, the High Priest had married a daughter of Sanballat. Sanballat was a buddy of Tobiah and may well have used that influence to receive the favor.

**Neh 13:29 Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.**

God is faithful concerning the blessings He has promised. He is just as true to His threatened curses. Nehemiah assures himself that those who have tried to break down the covenant which Israel made with God will face the consequences of their actions.

Christians in these latter days are subject to the same type of evil men and women. Each Christian is a priest of God. Those who dilute their faith, or poison their soul will be remembered when the sheep and the goats are separated at the end of time.

**Neh 13:30 Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;**

**Neh 13:31 And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.**

Had Nehemiah succeeded in uprooting every mixed marriage? He had made a grand effort. How we wish that those efforts had been longer lasting than they were. When Jesus Christ dealt with the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Jerusalem, he faced just as serious flaws in the priesthood and the rulers of the Jews as Nehemiah faced in his time.

One of the greatest joys available to God's faithful is that the last book of the Holy Bible pictures a complete and total victory of Christ and His church over the pride filled and the selfish!





**The Book Of  
Esther**



# Introduction To Esther

## **Authorship:**

The author of the book of Esther is not known. It is claimed by some that Mordecai, or one of his kinsmen wrote the book. Others of a liberal bent contend that it was written at a later time by a Jew who was trying to explain how the Feast of Purim originated.

It would be presumptuous on our part to make any further attempt to give a specific identity. Let us accept the fact that the Lord our God was the true author and that the penman only acted as His scribe.

## **Date:**

There are some Persian words in the book which would have been in use no later than 300 B.C. The author seems to have been well acquainted with Persian history and with the customs related to the royal palace.

The Jews went into Babylonian captivity in 605 B.C. and the decree of Cyrus gave permission for them to return to Palestine and Jerusalem seventy years later in 535 B.C. Some of the Jews took advantage of the decree and returned. Many others chose not to, and remained in the area of Persian dominance. The events of the book of Esther refer to events which took place after the return of the Jews who chose to do so.

The reign of Xerxes, or Ahashuerus as he is called in the book of Esther, began in the year 480 B.C. Thus

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we must date the book after this time and still within the time of someone who was very familiar with the events.

Purpose of the Book:

Books of the Bible serve varying purposes. Genesis was written to tell us of the creation. Job was written to tell us of patience during suffering. The book of Esther demonstrates the providence of God. The names of God are not mentioned in the entire book. Yet the providence of God shines out on every page of every chapter. We could ask a dozen or more questions about the events occurring in the book which can only be answered by reference to the “Finger of God.”

The Messiah was to come through the Jews. If the command to annihilate the Jewish race from the face of the earth had been successful, all of mankind would have faced eternal separation from everything that is holy. Esther played a highly important role in preventing the extermination of her people.

After reading this touching account, who can still feel that God’s purposes will fail in their final design?

Credibility of the Book:

Bible critics have taken aim at the book and have referred to it as fictional romance. They ask a number of questions which they feel indicate that the work is that of a master writer who knew how to build drama into his product. Among the questions they ask are these. Why did Queen Vashti even entertain the thought that she could reject the King’s command to come and show off her beauty to his guests? Why did the King make a decree that

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the Jews were to be exterminated some eleven months after the decree was made? Why did Haman direct his anger at all of the Jews when only Mordecai refused to bow down before him?

The answer to these questions is deeply rooted in the egotism of the critics who believe they have the right to vent their suspicion of any book in the canon in the attempt to establish their scholarly credentials.

The feast of Purim has been celebrated through the centuries from the time of Esther to the present. This feast was instituted as a celebration of the victory over the demand that the Jews be erased from the face of the earth. God had a chosen people. Although the spiritual Jew has now replaced the fleshly Jew as God's chosen, Jews are still recognizable in nearly every nation on earth. The beautiful maiden known as Esther played a major role in bringing this about. The account is real!

### **Herodotus and the Book of Esther:**

The Greek historian Herodotus tells the story of Esther, although he equates the name of Ahashuerus in the Bible with King Xerxes of Persia. He also uses the name Amestris in place of Vashti. The events recorded in the book of Esther took place during the time Xerxes ruled in Persia. The Persian word Khshayarsha is given in our King James translation as Ahashuerus. The Greeks shortened the name to Xerxes in their language. Xerxes and Ahashuerus are the same person.

Excavations have uncovered the remains of the palace of Xerxes. It seems that the debris covering the site preserved many details to such a marvelous degree that the harmony between the spade of the archeologists and the descriptions in the Holy Book reinforce each other.

## **Powerful Lessons from the Book:**

1. God may turn his face away from a disobedient people for a time, but his concern for them never ceases.
2. The most powerful rulers on earth cannot snuff out the plans and purposes of Jehovah.
3. When a people turn to God in prayer, His ear is open to their pleas.
4. Like Esther, each of us has come to the Kingdom for a reason. We must not shirk or evade that responsibility.

## **A Chapter by Chapter Outline:**

- Chapter 1 Vashti is rejected as queen.
- Chapter 2 Esther is chosen to replace Vashti.
- Chapter 3 Haman decides to destroy the Jews.
- Chapter 4 Esther risks her life to save them.
- Chapter 5. The King is highly pleased with her.
- Chapter 6. The sleepless King reads the record.
- Chapter 7. Haman dies upon the gallows.
- Chapter 8. The Jews are allowed a defense.
- Chapter 9-10 The Feast of Purim is instituted.





## *Chapter 1*

**Est 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:)**

This Ahasuerus is but one of several by the same name. The name is similar to Caesar. Just as there were a number of Caesars, there were a number named Ahasuerus. This is not the same one as is mentioned in the book of Daniel. This one is distinguished from the others by the fact that he ruled over a vast empire which reached from India to Ethiopia. Some evidence exists that both of these territories were included in the empire. The fifty states of the United States of America give us some understanding of the meaning of the one hundred twenty seven provinces.

The time was nearly five hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

**Est 1:2 That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,**

We understand that Shushan, or Susa, was but one of the capitals where there was a royal palace. Babylon was also a city of great distinction. At this particular time the king was reigning from his throne in Shushan.

Sitting may be only a figurative term. To sit on the throne is perhaps only a way of saying he was the ruler at that time. Yet, kings are known for sitting in dignity while their subjects labor in their efforts to merely survive.

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Est 1:3 In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:

By the third year of his reign, he had established himself both with respect to the people of his own domain, but also with respect to any other kings who might entertain any idea of invasion. He was “the ruler.” He intended that everyone recognize that fact.

Some believe the feast described in this chapter was an effort to garner support from his underlings for an invasion of Greece. The various princes and nobles could well have been invited in order that they might be assigned responsibilities for providing both financial and military support for that venture.

Est 1:4 When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.

The word “power” is not added here, but the riches, the glory and the honor of the kingdom certainly implied that Ahasuerus had tremendous power to achieve his objectives.

The monarchs of this part of the world have had a record of such displays. This one just happened to be one of majestic proportions. One hundred eighty days is very nearly six months. It is possible that the princes and nobles did not all gather during each of these days. The king might have invited them in one by one, or in small groups to impress each in succession.

Est 1:5 And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were



present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace;

At the end of the one hundred eighty days, the king commanded that a seven day feast be held in the palace garden. Everyone who was connected with the palace, including the princes and nobles, as well as the least in importance, was to be invited to join in the festivities.

The palace itself was not large enough to accommodate all of those who were invited. Thus the gathering was to take place in the courtyard.

Est 1:6 Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.

Some of the pillars of marble have been found by archeologists. From one of these marble pillars to another, decorative cords of beautiful colors were strung. From these cords hung draperies, held up by silver rings. A pavement of varicolored marble provided support for couches which were either made of gold and silver, or else were covered with gold and silver spreads.

What gaudy display! Large companies today shove off new promotions by such lavish demonstrations. This one seems to have been the granddaddy of them all.

Est 1:7 And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king.

In such parties, dignitaries are accustomed to making alcoholic beverages available to their guests. This one was no exception. Wine from the royal palace supplies was flowing freely. The king had plenty. There would be no shortage.

The containers from which the guests drank were made of gold. In addition, every one of these vessels was different from the others. Women are proud of their silver sets today in which the engraving on each piece is identical. The opposite was true here. There was pride in the individuality of the vessels.

Est 1:8 And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

The law was that every man could drink as much as he wished, or he could decline any further imbibing. No one was forced to drink. No one was forced to stop drinking. Everyone could get as drunk as he pleased.

It is considered discourteous at today's company cocktail parties to decline drinks. One is expected to follow the crowd. It is probably true that such follow the leader tactics were also evident in the feast at Shushan.

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

While the men were frolicking in the palace garden, queen Vashti was entertaining the women inside the king's house. It was common practice for the men and women to gather separately for such festivities. Often the men's gatherings were held for the purpose of military



decisions. The women were not expected to join in these considerations.

Est 1:10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

On the last of the seven appointed days, the king became drunk. Drunken parties are supposed to make the guests “feel good.” Dirty songs and dirty jokes are not unusual in the entertainment. The king was “feeling good.” Paul told Timothy to “*Take a little wine for the stomach’s sake* (I Tim. 5:23)” But the same man wrote to the Christians at Ephesus and told them not to become drunken with wine. “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; (Eph. 5:18)*. One of the qualifications for elders is that they not be given to much wine. Ahasuerus had given himself to *much wine*.

Since the seven chamberlains listed in this verse had access to the women’s quarters, they are thought to have been eunuchs. They were called into the presence of the drunken king to carry out a most foolhardy command.

Est 1:11 To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.

The chamberlains were to summon queen Vashti that she might appear before the king’s guests. She was a very beautiful woman and the king wished to show her off to the other men.

There are two distinct types of women in the east. There are those who find it immodest to allow men to

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see any part of their body that might provoke lust. These women have head covers and peek out through openings as they hide even their faces. Then there are those who entertain as dancing girls. They do not hesitate to bare their bodies in a most immodest manner.

In this present writer's opinion Vashti was being commanded to come before the princes and nobles in lust provoking garb, if indeed she was not expected to appear naked. Of course it is possible to see a woman's beauty without her being unclothed, but the situation here implies more than that.

**Est 1:12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.**

Queen Vashti refused to obey the king's order. This was a mark of high character on her part. It was not a mark of insolence and lack of subordination to her husband. She was not a prize horse who won blue ribbons at the fair. She was a woman with proper morals.

The king would have hesitated to make the demand he had made if he had been the ruler. The fact is that he was not the ruler at the moment. The wine he had consumed was the ruler. Therefore he became incensed over her refusal to appear. Those who are drunk tend to move from one emotion to another. He was filled with lust and pride when he required Vashti to appear. Now he was furious at her refusal.

This is the same king who later beat on the waves of the sea that had claimed some three hundred of his ships while he was trying to defeat the Greeks. He was accustomed to having his way. Temper tantrums rose



at the least provocation. This was too much. The queen must pay for this insult to his pride.

**Est 1:13 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:**

Asheurus called his top advisors together for a consultation. This is a bit of a surprise. It is a wonder that in his fit of anger he did not order her immediate execution.

He did take the time to ask the wise men what they thought should be done to Vashti. These men were familiar with the law. They also knew what the effects of these laws were.

**Est 1:14 And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;)**

**Est 1:15 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?**

Now we have a list of the names of these powerful princes of the Medo-Persians. These were not just commoners. They were similar to the cabinet members who assemble with the chief executive of a nation. What would they suggest needed to be done in the way of the law and the possible consequences of their actions?

**Est 1:16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done**

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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.

Memucan was one of the princes. He suggested that this was a far worse matter than disobedience by one woman toward her husband. It would become known to all of the people of the empire. This one woman had wronged every man in the empire.

Est 1:17 For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.

Est 1:18 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.

Since this was not done in a private manner, but was done in public, every woman in the empire would see that the king was not able to rule his own wife. If the king could not rule his wife, other women would rise up in defiance of their husbands.

If such an uprising came to pass, there would be contempt of the wives toward their husbands, and this would provoke resulting wrath in the husbands toward their wives. The entire empire would be filled with chaos.

One is led to the conclusion that Memucan had some domestic problems already. He felt that the way to bring a wife into compliance with the will of her husband was



effected by force rather than praise and appreciation. That is a serious mistake!

Est 1:19 If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she.

Memucan advised that the king write a commandment that would be included in the records of the empire. That commandment was to be unchangeable as were all of the laws of the Medes and Persians. Vashti was to nevermore come into the presence of king Ahasuerus.

Human laws which cannot be changed are dangerous. Conditions change. The laws must keep pace. God can make unchanging laws. Men cannot.

Est 1:20 And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.

We do not know how much of Memucan's advice was based upon what he thought to be proper action, and how much was an attempt to pacify the wrath of Ahasuerus and avoid danger to Memucan's position of prestige. It seems to be well mixed with flattery.

The king was certainly in line for ridicule by his subjects. It is doubtful, however, that Vashti's lack of subservience would have endangered the domestic tranquility of the empire.

Est 1:21 And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan:

Est 1:22 For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

Since the time of Eden God has made it a principle that women should be in subjection to their husbands. It is not the case that a ruling from the head of the government can enforce this directive. Some men are not as strong in leadership as others. Some women are more dominant in nature than others. Some women are forced to take more leadership because of invalid conditions of their husbands.

The laws of the Medes and the Persians should have taken such individual cases into account and left things up to Jehovah's command and the needs of each couple.



Chapter 2

Est 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.

It seems there was a considerable lapse of time between the events of chapters one and two. It is probable that Ahasuerus, or Xerxes set out to conquer Greece. His efforts backfired and he returned home in disgrace. His army was defeated and he lost many ships to a fleet much smaller than his own fleet.

Now he had time to reflect upon the decree that Vashti be removed and never come into his presence again. Although he would have had access to numerous women who were concubines, he did not have that one with whom he could have a more singular relationship. His sex life must have become much less satisfying. When women are treated as slaves and playthings they will not return the affection that they would if they were the one choice of their mate. Ahasuerus was beginning to regret the decree. It was impossible to reverse a decree among the Medes and the Persians. He could not bring Vashti back!

Est 2:2 Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king:

The king's attendants could hardly fail to notice the problem, nor did they fail to see it's cause. They advised him to remedy the situation by choosing a new queen to replace Vashti. This new queen must be beautiful for two reasons. Her beauty would satisfy his physical need. It

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would also suit her well in the social events in which she would be expected to participate. She needed to possess royal dignity.

By the way, Ahasuerus was getting up in years by this time. It makes one wonder if the relationship between an older man and a fair young maiden would be as satisfying as the king and his attendants might suppose. God has a way of increasing and decreasing sexual desire in a harmonious fashion between a man and woman who have married and aged together.

**Est 2:3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them:**

There were one hundred twenty-seven provinces in the empire. We might assume from this that at least that many young virgins were selected. There may have been more. A reasonable guess would put the figure above two hundred of the most beautiful women in the empire.

Nothing is said about the way in which these young women were brought to the house of the women in the royal palace. It is likely that some of them were overjoyed to be chosen. It is just as likely that others would rather not have been. It would have made little difference to the king. They would have been taken either voluntarily or by force. The chances of being selected as queen were minute. After each had experienced her night with the king, she would be sent back to the harem as a concubine. She would not marry, or have children unless the king



called for her by name. This does not seem to be an ideal situation by any means.

The women were placed in the care of a eunuch named Hege. This name is spelled Hegai in some other places. We suggest that he was a eunuch because only eunuchs were normally assigned such duties. The word which is translated as chamberlain has a literal meaning of “beardless” or “weak loined.”

Hege had the responsibility of assisting the women in their preparations for their one night meeting with the king. They were to go through a purification process before that event.

**Est 2:4 And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.**

The suggestion of his advisors was approved by Ahasuerus. The king was to be the sole judge of which maiden was selected as the new queen. He would of course be thinking about both her appearance and her behavior, both in the bedroom and in social interaction.

The plan was put into action.

**Est 2:5 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;**

It just so happened that there was a Jew named Mordecai at the palace. He had not returned with those who went back to Palestine by the decree of Cyrus. Since later we find him at the gate there is reason to believe he had risen to some kind of official position. The gate was

similar to our present day courthouses. This was where the elders gathered to make major decisions. It was also a place where an eye could be kept on anyone who came into the palace grounds.

Mordecai was a descendant of the man who threw stones at king David in years gone by. If David had killed him, Mordecai would not have existed. Again, we can see the finger of God in these events.

**Est 2:6 Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.**

God had punished the Jews for their disobedience in intermarrying with foreigners, and bowing down before idols. Nebuchadnezzar had been allowed to take the city of Jerusalem and deport most of the Jewish population to Babylon. Mordecai was one of those deported.

**Est 2:7 And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.**

The name Esther means "a star." Esther also was known by the name Hadassah. Since Esther's father and mother had both died, Mordecai had raised her as if she was his own daughter. Actually she was a cousin. Your uncle's daughter would be your cousin. She is sometimes spoken of by Bible teachers as a niece. She was not Mordecai's niece. She was his cousin. One of the reasons why this error has occurred is that she was a

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cousin young enough to be raised as his daughter. This is not usually the case.

This was commendable on the part of Mordecai.

Est 2:8 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.

How many are *many*? As was suggested before it is reasonable to believe there was at least one from each of the one hundred provinces, and perhaps even two or three times that many.

Mordecai had duties at the palace gate and thus Esther must have been found very near the palace itself. We are not told whether she volunteered or whether she was selected against her will. It could be that Mordecai saw this as an opportunity to advance her welfare and nominated her. At any rate, she was one of the many maidens who were gathered under the supervision of Hegai. This time we find the name spelled Hegai, whereas it was Hege before.

Est 2:9 And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave 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.

How was it that Esther pleased Hegai? Was it because of her beauty, or because she was making an effort to please in order that she might become the chosen one? I

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rather doubt that Esther was selected as a member of the group of maidens against her will. When my wife doesn't like something I have done, I find that she becomes less pleasing in her demeanor. The fact that Esther was pleasing to Hegai indicates to me that she was happy to have been selected as one of those who was to be brought to the king.

Hegai did everything he could to promote her above the others. He gave her the things she needed for her purification and provided seven maids to attend to her. He saw to it that she had every convenience that might cause her to be chosen.

Now the question of divine providence arises again. Just what was behind the attitude of Hegai? Did God know what all of the ramifications of this would be ahead of time? Since God knew the end from the beginning, He must have known that this young Jewish maiden had the potential to rescue her people from extermination. How much of what happened here was because God caused it? How much was a result of God permitting it to occur? It may have been a combination of the two. Is it possible that God plants thoughts in the mind of men? If so, we have the possibility of interference in the free moral choice of men. Yet we can also see the possibility that God could only plant the thought and leave man with the ability to follow it or reject it.

We do know that God steps into the natural realm in order to sway the attitudes and actions of men. The plagues on the Egyptians were an effort on His part to cause penitence among the Egyptians in general, and Pharaoh in particular. It is this writer's conviction that God does intervene in the opportunities which are offered to the good person for encouragement, and to the evil person for repentance. He can do it as He hides himself in the shadows. But, He can also do it in more evident

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manner. He has the power to do it through natural means, or through mental suggestion.

How was it that I personally traveled over five hundred miles to meet a fine young Christian woman who became my wife. She had dated several others before we met. I had done the same. Nothing had worked out for either of us. I had received a scholarship to attend the University of Michigan. I not only failed to maintain my scholarship, I failed miserably. As a result I traveled those five hundred miles to attend a Christian college. We met while we were both singing in a group that visited the tuberculosis hospital in Nashville. I do not know how God arranged it. Nevertheless, I am absolutely confident that He did arrange it.

Est 2:10 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

Esther had been very careful not to allow anyone to know she was a Jew. This would have prejudiced others against her. Anti-Jewish feelings have existed through the centuries and in many nations.

Here is more proof that Both Mordecai and Esther were in agreement with her selection as a member of the virgin group. Mordecai had given her advice which would have aided in her selection, and Esther had cooperated fully with that advice. They both desired that she become the new queen.

Est 2:11 And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

Mordecai was very seriously concerned over the way things were going. If Esther became queen, all was well.

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If she did not become queen, she would return to the house of the women and would be only a concubine who had no hope of marrying or bearing children. His cousin Esther was a very beautiful and gracious lady. At the same time, the possibility of the choice of this woman over many others was remote.

**Est 2:12 Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;)**

What was the purpose of this one year period of purification before the women could have their night visit with the king? First, it seems clear that women have always wished to be attractive. Cosmetics have been a part of the solution. They were known from the very earliest days. Oils of various kinds have been used to increase muscle tone and enhance the appearance of the skin. Perfume makes up a sizable part of the shelves in every department store. These women were to be as radiantly beautiful and as healthy as they could be.

Second, nine months are required from conception to the birth of a child. These were very attractive women at the time they were selected. If any had conceived before their selection, the twelve month purification time would have made the pregnancy more than evident. The king was not interested in choosing a queen who had lost her virginity.

**Est 2:13 Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go**

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with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house.

Each of the women were granted the items they felt would please the king. The clothing they wore could be expensive. It could be revealing. She could choose her jewelry and cosmetics.

Est 2:14 In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

Did each woman stay for an entire twenty-four hour day, or just for the night? Did they meet one another coming and going, or did one leave in the morning hours of the following day after she had arrived in the evening. It seems to me that the king would have wished for her to remain during some of the daylight hours in order to evaluate her social grace as well as her bedroom appeal.

When her visit was over she did not return to the first house of the women with Hegai. She was sent to the second house where Shaashgaz had custody over the concubines. Her chances of being called by name to come again to the king were almost zero. She would be destined to forfeit all of the responsibilities, pleasures and privileges of normal womanhood.

Est 2:15 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

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**the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.**

All who observed Esther viewed her as being outstanding. She was gaining in popularity and was looking more and more like she might be the new queen.

At this point we catch a glimpse of the character of Esther. She was not so proud that she avoided taking advice from one who knew better than she did just what would please Ahasuerus. Hegai had a considerable amount of experience. She depended upon his expertise.

Hegai clearly suggested that the king liked natural beauty. Esther asked for nothing special in the way of adornment. She would depend entirely upon her natural appearance and her personality.

Was Esther a captive against her will? Hardly! She was cooperating fully. Here was have reason to compare the attitudes of Esther and Vashti. Vashti is often given the role of villain, while Esther is exalted as a heroine for saving her Jewish kinfolk. There is another viewpoint. Vashti refused to come into the king's drunken party to show off her beauty like a blue ribbon pet. That was commendable. Esther hid her Jewish origin as one of the chosen people of God, in order that her hope of become queen would become a reality. This was not commendable. Esther knew quite well that she was in a beauty contest with the bedroom as a critical evaluation point. She entered into the contest with enthusiasm. Think about it!

**Est 2:16 So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month,**

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which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

Est 2:17 And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

We get the impression that whatever virgins were in line to follow Esther were not even invited to the king's bedroom. Esther impressed him so greatly that he made a quick and absolute decision. Esther had the qualifications to be queen. She stood head and shoulders above the rest. He had a new queen.

Est 2:18 Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

The king decided to sponsor another feast. This was his way of celebrating Esther's coronation. He proclaimed it as Esther's feast and offered a release to the provinces. This probably means he offered them a relief from their taxes for a given time. It is not likely that he offered them independence from the Persian empire. In addition, he gave gifts which were in accordance with his wealth.

Est 2:19 And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.

There appears to have been two rounds of virgins. Esther would have been one among the second group.

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Mordecai was vitally interested in the welfare of Esther. Although she had been chosen as the new queen, his anxiety over her had not dimmed. He had been separated from one whom he had raised as if she were his own daughter. He could not easily forget his concerns for her safety.

**Est 2:20 Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.**

Esther had obeyed the charge of Mordecai not to reveal that she was of Jewish ancestry. She still respected his judgment and kept his word. In one sense this seems commendable. After all Mordecai had done for her, she surely owed him respect. But, God had always taken great pride in the Jews as His peculiar people. To act as Esther was acting was to deny that fact. She was obedient to Mordecai. She was willing to deny her Jewishness to guard her security.

**Est 2:21 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.**

One could hear many things while people passed through the king's gate. One day while Mordecai was in that vicinity he must have heard two of the chamberlains or eunuchs plotting against Ahasuerus. They were planning on violence. Although their present plot was destined to fail, the king did lose his life years later when he was assassinated.

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Est 2:22 And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name.

We are not informed how Mordecai became aware of the plot. Did he hear about it directly, or did someone else hear it and pass the information on to him?

Mordecai quickly took action. He would not have had direct access to the king. He did have an avenue through which he could send the message. He told Esther and Esther then relayed the information to Ahasuerus. Esther told the king she had received news of the plot through Mordecai.

Est 2:23 And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

Ahasuerus charged that an investigation be made to find out if it was true. If it was, he wished to know who the would be assassins were. The investigation revealed that Bigthan and Teresh, of the king's chamberlains, were the culprits.

An entry was made in the record books of the empire, and the two chamberlains were hanged. This may not have been hanging as we use the word. We think of hanging as placing a noose around the neck of the person and hanging him to the limb of a tree. The word which is translated as hanged could also be translated impaled. The two may have been pierced through from the loins up to the neck by a sharp pointed stave and allowed to hang upon that stave until they were dead. If so, they paid dearly for their deadly intentions.

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The fact that Mordecai just happened to be in the right place to hear of the assassination plan is one more evidence of divine providence in action.





## *Chapter 3*

**Est 3:1 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.**

By saying “after these thing” the author of Esther is indicating he is following time sequence. That which is to follow is that which followed in the series of events as they occurred in the actual history.

We have no idea what caused Haman to be selected rather than other candidates for the high place he was awarded. Haman was a descendant of the king Agag whom Saul failed to kill when he was instructed to kill all of that group. If Saul had obeyed Jehovah, there would have been no Haman to cause the trouble recorded in this chapter.

Haman was given a position in the government only second to the king. His position was similar to that of the prime minister of Britain, or the Vice President of the United States.

**Est 3:2 And all the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.**

The king’s servants who were in the gate were important officials of the empire. The king issued a commandment that when Haman arrived in their presence everyone was to bow down to him. The bowing down was not just a bending at the waist to demonstrate respect. It was more like the bowing down the Moslems

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do in our day, as they get down on hands and knees and touch their forehead to the ground in worship.

All of the subjects of the king followed the commandment Ahasuerus had given except for Mordecai. This man was a Jew. Jews had been under a commandment from the True and Living God that they not bow down in worship before any but Him. Mordecai was not being disrespectful to Haman. He was being obedient to the Lord Jehovah.

There is also the possibility that Mordecai knew Haman was an Agagite. The Agagites were of the tribe of Amalek. The Amalekites were long time enemies of the Jews.

Est 3:3 Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

The rest of the king's servants were amazed that Mordecai would allow himself to stand out alone as being unwilling to bow down. They pleaded with him to join the rest in prostrating in the presence of the newly appointed Haman.

Est 3:4 Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew.

After repeatedly urging Mordecai to bow down, and seeing no sign of compliance on his part, they decided something needed to be done to bring him into subjection. They went to Haman with the matter and told him of their concerns. This was out of order. They should have



allowed Haman to handle it rather than bringing it to his attention. Haman might never have noticed if they had remained quiet.

The fact that Mordecai had let it be known he was a Jew could have influenced them to react as they did. The word “Jew” has provoked negative feelings in the minds of others for many centuries.

A question arises. Why did Mordecai instruct Esther to keep the fact she was a Jew under cover when he revealed his own background? If people knew he was a Jew, and knew he had raised Esther as his own daughter, they should have realized she was also a Jew. Could they have failed to make the connection between Mordecai and Esther? Apparently they had not made such a connection.

Est 3:5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.

Human pride has caused untold damage. Pride is essential in the form of moderate self confidence. However, when it grows into such a giant that an individual becomes self centered and disrespectful of others, that pride is the father of wrath, jealousy and envy. Haman was under it's control. He became intensely angry.

Est 3:6 And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

Irrationality is a child of pride. What logic would cause a man like Haman to take out his wrath upon all of the Jews in the empire when only one of them had caused it.

Critics of the Bible point to this as fantasy. Surely, they say, "No one would be so irrational." We beg to differ. Adolph Hitler saw the Jews as an obstacle to his desire for a world dictatorship. As a result it is estimated that over four million Jews were massacred. Nebuchadnezzar had the same attitude.

Because God selected the Jews as His chosen nation and made promises of a Messiah King who would govern all nations in an endless reign, other political figures have opposed the entire group. These Jews have been scattered all over the world. Too many times, they are looked upon with either envy or hatred.

Est 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.

Bible students will recall that they cast lots at the foot of the cross for the garments of the Lord Jesus Christ. There were other occasions recorded in which this method of choosing was utilized.

The casting of lots was done in several ways. One could cast lots today by rolling dice and noting which number came up. Each day for eleven months lots were cast to find out which day they were to annihilate the Jews. Apparently Haman instigated these actions without the knowledge of the king. When the day was settled, Haman went to Ahaseurus to gain his backing.



Est 3:8 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.

Haman did not name the Jews in particular. He only said, "A certain people." The thrust of his plea was that there was a class of persons scattered over the whole empire who ignored the law of the Medes and Persians because they lived under laws of their own which were different from those of Persia. If this situation was not remedied Haman was implying that chaos could appear. Ahasuerus must take action.

Est 3:9 If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

If the king agreed to destroy this "certain people" Haman would take money from his own pocket to finance the enforcement of the decree.

It would require quite an amount of money to do as Haman had suggested. The treasury of the nation might have been depleted by the expensive war with Greece. Haman would see that the enforcement of the decree would not cause financial problems.

Ten thousand talents of silver is an enormous amount. The talent is 96 pounds avoirdupois. The reader can do some simple multiplication and addition to find out the value of the ten thousand talents. Find the value of silver

per ounce. Then multiply that number by 16 to get the value of a pound of silver. Then multiply the value per pound by 96 and the value of one talent of silver will be the result. That value must then be multiplied by ten thousand to discover the value of Haman's offer. This will vary from time to time because of the fluctuation of the price of pure silver. The final figure will reach into the millions.

Haman's hatred of the Jews, and especially that toward Mordecai must have been boundless.

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

In the time of Esther and in the middle east kings used their signet ring as a means of authorizing decrees. The signature of the king was carved into the set of the ring and was then stamped on the decree to show it was authentic. The king carelessly handed his ring over to Haman in order that he might authorize the command.

This verse offers one of the reasons why Haman was so insistent. He was a descendant of Agag and was of the Amalekites. The long standing hatred between the Jews and the Amalekites had reared it's ugly head.

Est 3:11 And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.

The king had been suckered by Haman. He did not realize that his new queen Esther would be one of those to be eradicated by the decree. He would have been well advised to investigate things much more carefully before

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handing his personal signature to a man like Haman.

Ahasuerus even went so far as to decline Haman's offer to finance the slaughter. He did not know the "certain people" were the Jews. He did not know that Esther was a member of that people.

**Est 3:12 Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring.**

One hundred twenty-seven documents had to be written and signed with the king's signet ring. Arrangements had to be made as to who would carry out the commandment and how it would be enacted.

The documents had to be written in the language of that province that received it. The empire was so vast that many different languages and dialects were spoken in the various provinces.

**Est 3:13 And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.**

The posts were those persons who delivered the mail. Today we have postmen who deliver our own mail. Ours

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travel by gasoline powered vehicles. Theirs traveled by horseback.

The murders were to take place in a single day. The day was months in the future. If I had been a Jew, I would have very seriously considered leaving for other parts of the world by that time. Every Jew was to be killed, even the women and children. No one was to be left. Does this remind the reader of the command of God to king Saul?

Those who murdered a Jew were to have permission to confiscate his property for their own. Under those conditions, we can imagine some were trying to kill as many as possible that they might be enriched by the spoil.

Est 3:14 The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.

The commandment of Haman, authorized by the signature of Ahasuerus was to be placed before all of the people. They were to be ready for that day to come. The Persians were to be ready to kill the Jews. The Jews were to expect the massacre.

Est 3:15 The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

The posts quickly rode out of the city to deliver the documents. The king had commanded it, and they could well be made rich by complying with the commandment.



Haman and Ahasuerus observed the occasion by sitting down to a nice cold cocktail. In their minds, those dangerous “certain people” who defied the laws of the Medes and Persians would cause no more trouble.

Though Haman and the king were pleased and satisfied with what was taking place, the citizens of the capitol city of Shushan were puzzled. Why would such a commandment be issued when only one man had refused to bow before Haman? What was so dangerous about this entire group of persons? What would happen to those who had intermarried with the Jews? Would their wives, husbands and children be killed with the rest? They had good reason to be perplexed.

Chapter 4

Est 4:1 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;

Mordecai had heard the horrible news. The Jews throughout the entire empire were to be destroyed. He must have felt that he was personally responsible for the decree. Haman had become filled with wrath when Mordecai did not bow down in his presence. Therefore, Haman had taken his vengeance upon every Jew in the land.

It is not surprising that this man went into a very public state of mourning. He was filled with sorrow over the fact that his behavior had led to such terror. It was typical of heavy mourning in that time to put off the normal garments and put on clothing which was made from fabric of the crudest sort. If we were to take similar steps, we would wrap ourselves in rough burlap and would pour ashes over it.

Mordecai seems to have had some sort of dignified position at the gate of the city where important decisions were discussed. This is quite a contrast to see him going about the streets of the city in sackcloth and ashes. In addition, he is uttering loud cries and moaning. We have no mention of prayer here, but such mourning was ordinarily accompanied by prayer.

Est 4:2 And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

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Mordecai even went so far as to approach the king's gate while expressing his grief. The law of the land stated that no one clothed as he was could enter through that gate. The king must not be exposed to such sights and sounds. It was alright for the king to make a decree which would bring on this mourning, but it was unlawful for those who were distressed by the decree to vent their sorrow in his presence.

The reader will need to recall Mordecai's hesitancy to disobey the law. In just a short time he urged Esther to ignore the law.

**Est 4:3 And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.**

Why is there no mention of prayer among these wailing and mourning Jews who have clothed themselves in sackcloth and lay in ashes? May I suggest a possible reason? God had made it possible for all who desired to return to Palestine to do so. These were Jews who had failed to follow the obvious will of Jehovah. They may have not felt they had a right to be heard.

**Est 4:4 So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.**

Inside the palace, Esther had been isolated from much of the disturbance going on outside the king's gate in the city. When her servants came and told her of the events,

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and how Mordecai was behaving, she was also grieved. Why should her beloved cousin, who had raised her as a daughter, be so distressed? Something must be done immediately.

Esther sent respectable clothing to Mordecai to save both him and herself from further embarrassment. The grief stricken man would not put off his sackcloth.

Est 4:5 Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was.

The king had selected a eunuch named Hatach to serve Esther's needs. There were no doubt services which she required which were too burdensome for her handmaids to take care of.

Esther called for Hatach and sent a message by him asking Mordecai the cause of his mourning. She must have wondered if there was any action she could take to show her gratitude for Mordecai's past care for her.

Est 4:6 So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate.

Est 4:7 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.

When Hatach delivered the message, Mordecai held nothing back. He revealed to Esther all of the details of that which had taken place. He even told her of Haman's promise to pay ten thousand talents into the king's



treasure if the decree was carried out. One would think the offer of Haman would have been a private issue. Did someone who was on the inside carry this promise to Mordecai, or had the shameful promise been made public to all the citizens?

Est 4:8 Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people.

Copies of the decree had been made and sent to every province in the empire. Mordecai gained possession of one of the copies and gave it to Hatach that Esther might see it in person.

Then Mordecai made a request of Esther that must have shocked and astonished her. He charged her to appear before the king on behalf of her people. She must make a plea for their survival.

Est 4:9 And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Est 4:10 Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

Est 4:11 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 scepter, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

When Hatach returned and told Esther of Mordecai's charge, she gave her cousin a clear picture of the situation in which she found herself. Though she was the queen, and had been pleasing to the king, she did not know exactly what her present place was in his thoughts.

Everyone in the empire was aware of the law that no person was allowed to visit the king without his specific permission. If anyone dared to bypass gaining that permission, they were to be killed. The sentence was not thirty days in jail. It was death! The only recourse was that if the king extended his royal scepter toward the invader, they were forgiven.

Did Mordecai really expect her to put her life at such risk? If she had been the constant companion of the king, such an action might have been less dangerous. The truth was that the king had not requested her company for the last thirty days.

History informs us that Xerxes or Ahasuerus was subject to massive changes of emotion. He could be light hearted at times. Then he could quickly change moods and throw temper tantrums.

Est 4:12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

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

Mordecai had an answer to Esther's objections. She was not to hide behind the security of the king's palace. She was a Jew. If all the Jews were to be destroyed, she would be included. Her life was in serious danger if she appeared before the king. Her life was also in serious danger if she did not plead for her fellow Jews.



Est 4:14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

Mordecai continued with his charge. His words show a confidence in the promise of God to Abraham that through his seed the world would be blessed, and that He would never forsake his people. A Saviour would appear who would bring salvation to all men who would receive Him. Mordecai did not quote the promise. He did imply that God was aware of what was taking place and would see that help would be given. If Esther did not accept her responsibilities, God would use someone else.

This is one of the most powerful statements in the Bible.

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

God has eternal plans. We may choose to be His ally, or His enemy. He has provided certain talents, blessings and opportunities. There are things each person can do that God will get done in other ways if the individual shirks his or her duty. Do you wish to work with God, or against God?

Est 4:15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer,

Est 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and

my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Esther's reply is as eloquent as Mordecai's charge. He was to gather all the Jews who lived in the capitol city of Shushan. There is no way of knowing how many were there. Reason tells us there must have been an impressive number. This gathering was to neither eat nor drink for three days as they showed their concern for the queen's welfare. Esther would also ask her personal servants to join in the fasting. After that, she would go in and appear before Ahasuerus. Esther's commitment to her people was evidence of a strong character. She was alive at the time. Perhaps something would intervene that both she and her people would be saved. If she appeared uninvited before the king, it was almost certain that she would be killed. Vashti had been punished for her lack of respect. Could she expect less?

Jesus Christ came to earth knowing He would be slain as prophesied by the fifty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah. It was not a case of "If I perish." He knew He would perish. If Jesus knew He would perish, and if Esther was willing to give her life when God's will required it, all Christians ought to commit themselves in like manner.

Est 4:17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Mordecai took Esther's promise to appear before the king seriously. He gathered the Jews of Shushan for three days of fasting on behalf of the life of their queen.

Has it occurred to the reader that with the Jews fasting for three days and demonstrating such anxiety, it could be difficult for Esther to keep her intention of

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appearing before Ahasuerus from being discovered? The answer to this is that the Jews had already been grieving in public over the decree the king had issued. The Persian citizens of Shushan would not have realized this three day fast was any more than another way of showing their grief.

## *Chapter 5*

**Est 5:1 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.**

This was the third day of the three day fast which Esther had asked Mordecai to observe along with all the Jews in the city of Shushan. Esther had promised that she and her attendants would also fast for those same three days in her quarters.

She has now dressed in the finest garments she has. It is possible that she was wearing sack cloth during the three days. If so this would have been a major contrast. At this point she was ready to keep her promise to Mordecai and make an appearance before Ahasuerus to plead for her Jewish kinfolk. She needed to do everything possible to insure a positive reaction from him. She was risking her life by disobeying the law which required all to presented themselves to the king to gain permission first, or face execution if he did not hold out his royal scepter in approval of their appearance. Esther had appeared without special adornment when she went in to the king at the time when she was selected as the new queen. This time she needed the adornment.

Just where was it that Esther came before Ahasuerus? Were there two houses, one called the king's house and another called the royal house. Or were both of these descriptions of the same building? Most think there were two buildings. The reader can make his or her own guess.

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At any rate the king was seated on his throne in majestic dignity. He was ready to officiate over the affairs of the great Medo-Persian empire. There was no more important individual in their known world than this man. What would happen when he realized his queen had appeared before him without having been invited? Esther's heart must have been pounding as she stood waiting anxiously. We are not told that she prayed to God, but can the reader doubt that a Jew of her character would have faced a moment like this without prayer?

Est 5:2 And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter.

Ahasuerus did not consider Esther's appearance an offense against the law of the empire. He regarded it as a special moment when his beloved queen had come to him with some type of request.

The king held out the royal scepter toward her as evidence of his approval. Thus far all was well. However, there were other obstacles ahead. The decree to massacre the Jews had to be overcome in some way. The power of Haman also had to be limited. Neither of these could be assumed.

Est 5:3 Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

Ahasuerus must have been able to see concern in the face of his queen. He did not relish seeing her in distress. What was it that had motivated her to risk her life by

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appearing without permission? He offered to grant her desire, no matter what it was. His statement about half of the kingdom was no doubt an exaggeration, but it does show how much he wished to please her.

**Est 5:4 And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.**

If Esther had made her request known in full at this time, there is reason to believe it would have faced greater opposition than it did later. She was not yet ready. She must have surprised the king. Haman was not present at the time. He would hear of the invitation later. Esther's only request was that both the king and his prime minister attend a banquet that she would prepare for the two of them. Even the present day readers of this account are somewhat shocked at Esther's assumption that the two would come to her banquet.

**Est 5:5 Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.**

If the king had no more unpleasant official decisions to make than the one before him, he would have had a very easy life. This invitation was highly pleasing to him. He had not seen Esther for thirty days. This would be a delight. He ordered Haman to join him in attending the banquet.

This is most interesting. Haman will be led to think he is in complete control. His plan to exterminate Mordecai, along with the rest of the hated Jews was moving forward without opposition. He had received an invitation to dine

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privately as the sole guest of the royal couple. His pride would grow by the hour. The banquet was held. The king and Haman both were present.

Est 5:6 And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.

Ahasuerus knew the concern he had seen in Esther was more than just a need to meet with him at a banquet. Again he asked her what he could do for her. He repeated his former statement which intensified it. Things were moving in the right direction to accomplish Esther's goals.

Est 5:7 Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is;

Est 5:8 If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said.

Since things have moved as well as they have thus far, Esther decided to risk another delay in presenting her inner heart. She will prepare a second banquet the next day. She will make her desire known then.

One commentator made what I thought was a very apt suggestion. The king had not seen Esther for thirty days. Her appearance had pleased him greatly. Perhaps a night together would further cement the possibility that her request would be carried out. The suggestion is out of order. Ahasuerus spent a sleepless night while his attendants read the chronicles of the kingdom to him.

Est 5:9 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.

Haman was elated! He was in what is sometimes known as “hog heaven.” For two successive days he was to dine with the king and queen with no other guests present. Only the royal pair stood in higher dignity than he did.

His delight was to be punctured. When he left the feast he found Mordecai there. Mordecai showed no inclination to reverence him. He did not bow. He did not move to subject himself in any way. Haman's rage rose to an even higher pitch.

Est 5:10 Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.

Haman managed to hold his temper in check for the moment. He would see this impudent upstart dead as soon as the decree of the king was carried out. Mordecai, as well as all of the other Jews would be eliminated.

Haman gathered a number of friends together at his home and began to boast to his wife and his friends about his position and his accomplishments.

Est 5:11 And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.



He had enough money to offer the king ten thousand talents to finance the murder of the Jews. He had ten sons, and perhaps a number of daughters. He was second only to king Ahasuerus himself with respect to authority in the empire.

Est 5:12 Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king.

The capstone of his pride was that he had been invited to dine with the king and queen for two days in a row. No one else had shared such prestige.

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

There was one fly in the ointment. Haman could not fully wallow in his pride as long as that pesky Jew refused to honor him when he passed through the gate.

Small men have petty minds. In spite of his wealth, his family and his high position, Haman was immature. He was not in control of himself. His pride ruled.

The reader needs to take note. What type of things cause you to fly off the handle and act in an irrational fashion. If the things are incidental, you need to grow up. Big persons do not allow minor matters to shatter their composure.

Est 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.

Haman's wife made a proposal to which his friends agreed. If Mordecai was so insistent on humiliating Haman in public, he needed to be punished in public. A gallows should be constructed fifty cubits in height. Speak to the king about this impudent fellow and have him hanged high enough where all could see the results of such conduct.

Little did Haman know that he and his ten sons would feel the rope of the hangman's noose around their own neck on that very gallows!

The suggestion to have Mordecai hanged publicly greatly pleased the vicious Haman. He put the plan into action. The gallows was built. Where would one get a tree tall enough to build a gallows seventy-five or eighty feet high. There is no real problem. The actual gallows could have been constructed and supported on a platform high enough that the noose was seventy or more feet above the surface of the ground.



Chapter 6

Est 6:1 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.

Every reader has had similar experiences. There are times when sleep comes easily. There are other times when one tosses and turns for hours without even coming close to snoring. Ahasurus was having one of those sleepless nights. This could have been mere happenstance. However, there are far too many happenstances in the book of Esther for all of them to be coincidental.

The king had eaten a banquet meal during the day. This sometimes leads to stomach distress and inability to drop off to sleep. He had allowed a decree to be mandated that some “certain people” were to be eliminated from the empire. But he did not know this was an act of injustice. It is not likely that he was suffering from a pinched conscience.

The far more probable reason for his sleeplessness is that God’s finger was once more active in his life as the Lord was standing in the shadows watching over his people.

Est 6:2 And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

I can hardly think of anything I would find more boring than reading from the United States congressional records. Perhaps that is why the king chose to have the

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chronicles of the kingdom read to him. It would be an excellent way to get to sleep.

If that was his reason, it failed. It *just happened* that the reader turned to the place where it was recorded that Mordecai had reported a plot to kill the king. Mordecai had passed the information on to Ahasuerus and prevented serious injury or even death.

**Est 6:3 And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.**

Ordinarily Ahasuerus would have rewarded the person who prevented his assassination. Had the reader missed that part of the record, or had Mordecai received no recognition whatsoever for his loyalty? The answer was negative. Nothing had been done to honor the man. This was a serious breach of courtesy which needed to be remedied at once. Mordecai must be given the dignity he so richly deserved.

**Est 6:4 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.**

Ahaseurus had apparently been awake for most of the night. The following events seem to have taken place early in the morning of the day after the first banquet.

Haman had arrived in time to get ahead of the day's activities. He was ready to make his request that Mordecai be hanged on the gallows he had constructed for that purpose.



What a contrast in the motives of the two! Ahasuerus is ready to praise Mordecai. Haman is ready to hang him. Haman is accustomed to manipulating the king. Mordecai is but a guard at the palace gate. In Haman's mind the fate of Mordecai must have been already settled. He was as good as dead.

**Est 6:5 And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.**

Now it *just happened* that Haman was ready to enter the inner court just at the time when the king was wondering what should be done for the man who saved his life. Ahasuerus was glad to see Haman. He needed a suggestion as to what type of honor Mordecai should be given. Haman was invited to come in.

**Est 6:6 So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?**

Haman was completely unaware of the purpose for the question he was about to be asked. His answer reflects his absolute misunderstanding of the circumstances. Ahasuerus wished to know what he should do for a man whom he had decided to honor. Did Haman have a suggestion?

As soon as Haman heard the question, he knew that person the king wished to honor was himself. After all, he had risen to a position second only to his king. He had been invited to dine with both the king and the queen

the day before, and also later on in the present day. Here was a free ticket to even greater glory and prestige. He did not take long to decide.

**Est 6:7 And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour,**

**Est 6:8 Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head:**

Haman had an entire list of suggestions. First, this man must be dressed in royal garments which the king had worn. Then he must be placed upon the horse which the king rides. Next the royal crown should be placed on his head.

Does the reader have any doubt as to what Haman was thinking? A multitude of people would see him dressed in royal clothing, riding the royal horse and wearing the royal crown. Haman was making preparations for replacing Ahasuerus on the throne of Persia. He was reveling in delusions of grandeur.

**Est 6:9 And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.**

Haman was not quite through. One of the most noble of the princes of the land should lead the king's horse through the streets of the city and cry out for all to hear



that this was being done for a man whom the king was pleased to honor.

Could anything be sweeter? Now that upstart Jew at the gate would begin to realize what a serious mistake he was making.

**Est 6:10 Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.**

The higher they climb, the farther they fall. The New Testament puts it this way. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

To Haman's utter amazement, the man of whom the king was speaking was that same Jew he had come to have hanged. Haman was instructed to "make haste" and do all that he had suggested. It was to be done for Mordecai. Haman was not to leave out any part of his proposal.

It is not always as clear as in this case that God rewards the faithful and punishes the wicked. But it is just as sure and certain in the end. We are to be faithful unto death and there will be a crown of life waiting.

**Est 6:11 Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.**

Haman was absolutely helpless. There was nothing he could do to avoid the king's command. Every hoofbeat of the king's horse reminded him of his horrendous mistake.

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Even worse, he was obliged to announce loudly just what an honorable man the rider of the horse was.

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

After the ride through the city was finished, Mordecai returned to his place at the king's gate. He made no attempt to take advantage of his moment of glory. He was a believer in the philosophy that if you take a low seat there is less chance of being told to move to a lower one.

Haman, on the other hand, was so completely mortified and humiliated that he hurried rapidly to his house with a covering over his head so he would not be recognized.

Est 6:13 And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.

We might have expected Haman's wife and his friends to extend sympathy to him when he explained the humiliation he had suffered. If he anticipated sympathy, he was disappointed. The very ones who had encouraged him in his attempts to destroy Mordecai advised him that if Mordecai was a Jew Haman was bound to be defeated. Even his wife informed him that he had already begun his fall!



Est 6:14 And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Haman had not even had time to catch his breath before the king's eunuchs came to remind him he was about to be late for the banquet to which Esther had invited him. He still did not know the relationship between Mordecai and Esther. It would not be long before he was made aware of it.

Chapter 7

Est 7:1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.

This was the second day in a row in which Haman had been invited to join the king and queen in a banquet. I am informed that the word banquet used here could have been translated as imbibe. Haman must have been feeling on top of the world. Everything had been going his way except for that pesky Jew called Mordecai who would not bow as Haman passed through the king's gate.

Est 7:2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

Ahasuerus was very much aware that Esther had some purpose in mind other than just a nice meal. He had asked her twice before what it was that she desired he do for her. He had even repeated his statement that she could have anything she wanted up to half of the kingdom. Haman, of course, was listening. The king must be quite infatuated with his queen.

Est 7:3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

Mordecai had advised Esther to keep her Jewish ancestry a secret. She had followed that advice up to this

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point in time. This was the proper time to let it be known! It is an important part of her answer to her husband.

She must have shocked Ahasuerus beyond belief when she revealed that her life was in serious danger. How could that be true? Not only was her own life threatened. Her people were in the same kind of danger as herself. She was pleading for their lives.

**Est 7:4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.**

At the moment that Esther used the word “sold” Haman should have been starting to realize she was speaking of the Jews and that Esther was a Jew. Haman had offered ten thousand talents to finance their extinction. He had put that price upon their head.

Esther explained in more detail. She would not have felt the need to take the action she was taking if the Jews had only been delivered into slavery. But she could not hold her tongue when they were about to be slaughtered.

She also stated that the price Haman had offered was not sufficient to cover the damage the king would do to the empire if the slaughter took place.

**Est 7:5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?**

Ahasuerus was furious. His queen was telling the truth. How could anyone be brazen enough to make an

attempt on the life of his beloved? He must know the name of that person. He must know where to find him. Action would be taken immediately!

**Est 7:6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.**

Esther pointed directly at Haman and said, "This is the man!" Terror filled the heart of the would be murderer. He trembled with fear. How quickly the scene had changed from sitting on top of the world to complete disaster! He could imagine the consequences of his evil intentions.

**Est 7:7 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.**

Ahasuerus rose from the table without a word. He held his temper in check for the moment while he went out into the palace garden to gather his thoughts. His own prime minister was the culprit. What line of action should he take?

As soon as the king had left, Haman took the only course of action he could see open. He began to beg Esther that his life be spared. The king had murder in his eye and Esther was the only one who could remove it.

**Est 7:8 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.**

Ahasuerus returned from the palace garden just in time to see that in his pleading, Haman had fallen upon the bed or couch upon which Esther was reclining. It was common for the dignitaries to be seated on such a piece of furniture while feasting. In his intense plea for his life, Haman had fallen into a position such that it appeared to the king that he was intent on sexual abuse. When Ahasuerus put his shock into words, he did not have to pass sentence upon Haman. The attendants covered the face of Haman as an indication of the death penalty.

Ahasuerus' rage was so great that he did not realize Haman would have to be insane to carry out such an assault in the palace with the king present.

**Est 7:9 And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.**

The only question at this point was the nature of the coming execution. Harbonah, who was one of the attendants could see the gallows which Haman had caused to be built for hanging Mordecai. Mordecai had saved the king's life. He did not deserve to be hanged. Haman had instituted a plot which would have resulted in the death of the king's wife. He deserved to be hanged.

Ahasuerus responded to Harbonah's reminder with just three words. *"Hang him thereon!"*

**Est 7:10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.**

I remind the reader that God's ultimate purposes will come to pass. Evil may prevail for the moment. It will not do so in eternity. It may look as if it is prevailing temporarily. It is not.

"As ye sow, so shall ye reap" is one of the great truths in the Holy Scriptures. Haman had been sowing death. Death is what Haman was now ready to reap.



## *Chapter 8*

**Est 8:1 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.**

The king wasted no time in taking action. Haman had held the second highest position in the empire. He had abused that responsibility to the degree that he forfeited his life. In contrast, Mordecai had exposed a plot against the king's life. A very logical solution to the filling of the vacant position was to replace Haman with Mordecai. The possessions of Haman were given to Esther.

**Est 8:2 And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.**

The ring with the king's seal was used to authenticate various decrees or law of the empire. There is some doubt as to the wisdom of the king in allowing others the privilege of using it as freely as seems to have been the case.

Esther did not care to supervise the property and servants of Haman which had been given to her. She passed this oversight on to Mordecai.

**Est 8:3 And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.**

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Even though Haman was dead, the decree to annihilate the Jews from the empire still stood. Esther was in tears with anxiety for the safety of her people. She took the chance one more of appearing before the king. We do not know whether this was unannounced, or whether the king had informed her that she was free to do so.

She fell down at his feet to plead for some kind of action which would prevent the destruction of her kinfolk.

This introduces a thought which must have crossed many minds. Does kneeling or prostration aid or indicate a deeper humility than simply bowing the head. Very few Christians today drop to their knees in public prayer. This writer can recall several older persons who did so fifty years ago. If Esther fell at the feet of the king to show her dependence upon his majesty, are there implications that we should do the same before God. The other side of the picture is that one might do so hypocritically with no more humility than one who just bowed the head. How will individuals react when facing God in the judgment?

Est 8:4 Then the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king,

Holding out the golden scepter was a mark of approval. We remind the reader that Esther could have lost her life if the king had not held out the scepter. To see his queen weeping touched the heart of the monarch deeply. She felt she was on safe ground to press for his help.

Est 8:5 And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes,

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**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:**

Esther pleaded for the annulling of the decree to eliminate all Jews from the empire. She mentioned the ancestry of Haman as being from King Agag. Who was left alive by Saul when he was told to destroy every one of the Amalekites. She must have felt there was some relationship between the present problem and the mistake which Saul made many years before.

**Est 8:6 For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?**

Esther did not mention the danger to herself. She spoke of her people and her kindred. She very well knew that Ahaseurus would realize she was an important member of the people concerning whom she spoke. The decree spelled out his queen's death just as it did that of her people.

**Est 8:7 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.**

The king reminded Esther and Mordecai that the one who had instigated the writing of the decree was gone. He would cause no more trouble. He had been hanged.

**Est 8:8 Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.**

Ahaseurus explained that the laws of the Medes and the Persian could not be obliterated. However, there was a solution. Mordecai had the king's ring and could declare a decree which would do the same thing for the Jews that he had done for Mordecai and Esther. He had turned over the possessions of Haman to Mordecai. Mordecai was given permission to defend the Jews just as the previous decree had spelled out their persecution.

**Est 8:9 Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, 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.**

The empire was vast. It reached all the way from the north of the Mediterranean Sea to Ethiopia in the African continent. Many different languages were spoken in the various provinces. Mordecai gave orders that the officials of each of the provinces receive the instructions he was about to deliver so the citizens in every part of the empire could read them in their own language. They were to be





certain that the new decree was written in the language the Jews themselves used.

**Est 8:10 And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries:**

The decree documents were all to be impressed with the seal of the king and were to be sent at once to all parts of the empire.

The posts would correspond to our present day postmen. Rather than riding in Fords, Chevrolets and other self propelled vehicles, they rode upon the best they had. Adam Clarke, who is a linguist of the highest level, says the words translated as mules, camels and dromedaries are somewhat uncertain. The main point is that the decree was received throughout the entire territory.

**Est 8:11 Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,**

To the present day reader it may seem a little picky to deny this was a cancellation of the previous order. What it did do was let the people know the king had made up his mind to nullify the effect of the earlier order. The Jews would have time to organize their defenses against any who would attack them. They were assured that

they could defend themselves without retaliation by the government.

Under these conditions it would be ridiculous to attack them. It would be to place one's self in opposition to the will of the ruler. The Jews were safe!

**Est 8:12 Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.**

**Est 8:13 The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.**

Each of the one hundred twenty-seven provinces was to receive the new order on the same day. Every person in the empire was to be informed of the Jews preparation to oppose any force used against them.

**Est 8:14 So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.**

The messengers received copies of the new decree in each of the languages of the people. There was no wasted time. The king had commanded action. The riders mounted their steeds and carried the decree in every direction, to the very ends of the empire.

**Est 8:15 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.**

Jews have very often risen to high places in the government of the nations in which they resided. Mordecai had now done that and apparently his rise produced joy among most of the people in the capitol city. Haman had been a cruel and selfish leader. The new arrangement would be a relief.

**Est 8:16 The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.**

**Est 8:17 And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.**

Instead of being exterminated, the Jews were more secure than they had been previous to Haman's viciousness. They celebrated this new found security with great happiness.

The change in the prestige and honor of the Jews caused large numbers of the people who were not of Jewish ancestry to associate themselves with the Jews and follow Jewish customs.

## *Chapter 9*

**Est 9:1 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;)**

It had been nine months since Ahashuerus signed the decree as requested by Haman that the Jews be annihilated from the empire. The time to put the decree into action was close at hand. The enemies of the Jews had been waiting anxiously for the hour to arrive.

The last phrase of this verse is a preview of what is to take place. It turned out to be a monstrous surprise for the Jew haters. They were the ones who were brought under the power of the Jews.

**Est 9:2 The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.**

The second decree of the king was that the Jews had a right to defend themselves. With the obvious sympathy of the king supporting them, the Jews took full advantage of the new attitude. They organized their resistance and prepared to retaliate against whatever persecution might arise.

It is difficult to tell how much of this fear of the Jews was due to their support by Ahasuerus and how much



arose from their connection with Jehovah. Whatever the case, we have all seen small birds chase large crows. A lack of confidence can turn a bully into a coward.

**Est 9:3 And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.**

This verse helps us to understand at least a part of the fear. The governing officials of the various provinces were backing Mordecai. These powerful men turned to the side of the Jews rather than fighting against them.

**Est 9:4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.**

Mordecai and Ahasuerus were getting along magnificently. There would be no serious uprising against his orders.

**Est 9:5 Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.**

With the governmental officials on their side the issue was cut and dried. The result was most dramatic. The Jews enemies were either slaughtered or persuaded to desist from their offensive behavior.

**Est 9:6 And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.**

It is surprising that in the very area of the palace there was serious conflict. The Jews came out victorious.

**Est 9:7 And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha,**

**Est 9:8 And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha,**

**Est 9:9 And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha,**

**Est 9:10 The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand.**

I agree with those commentators who contend earnestly that the book of Esther is not fictional. What writer would draw ten Persian names such as the ones above from a hat and call them the ten sons of Haman? This is an account of real events and real people.

These ten sons of Haman were killed. It is commendable that the Jews did not confiscate the possessions of the sons of Haman. They were not interested in enriching themselves. They only wished to be rid of the persecution.

**Est 9:11 On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.**

**Est 9:12 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.**

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When the king was advised of the massive killing he wondered just how many more might have perished in the whole one hundred twenty-seven provinces. Was Esther satisfied, or did she have additional requests.

A non-Biblical record states that the queen was very vindictive. I doubt that this was the case. She wished to make absolutely certain that the persecution would cease.

Est 9:13 Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.

Est 9:14 And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons.

Esther did have a further request. She desired that Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows. These men were already dead. The purpose of hanging them up on the gallows was to strike fear into any who still entertained any ideas of continuing the persecution.

Est 9:15 For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand.

Est 9:16 But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey,

Here is the answer to the kings earlier question. There were some seventy-five thousand who were killed through-out the entire one hundred twenty-seven provinces. This would definitely be sufficient to deter any others who might wish to kill or drive the Jews out of the empire.

Est 9:17 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.

A celebration was set up. All work ceased and for two days the Jews feasted with great joy. They had very good reason to rejoice.

Est 9:18 But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

It was just a bit different in the palace area. In that location three days were devoted to the celebration. The first two days were days of rest. The third was a day of great joy.

Est 9:19 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.

We can see a strong resemblance between our Christmas celebration and the fasting and feast of the Jews. Presents were sent to one another. It is probable
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that those who had an abundance shared with those who had much less.

**Est 9:20 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,**

**Est 9:21 To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly,**

**Est 9:22 As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.**

Mordecai saw this as an opportunity to establish a perpetual annual celebration with would memorialize the release of the Jews from the oppression which was intended.

**Est 9:23 And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them;**

**Est 9:24 Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them;**

**Est 9:25 But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.**

Haman's lust for power had resulted in his own death, and also the death of his ten sons. King Saul should have destroyed all of the Amalekites when God commanded it. He did not. He saved King Agag. God was now ready to finish the job.

**Est 9:26 Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them,**

**Est 9:27 The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year;**

**Est 9:28 And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.**

Because Haman had cast lots to determine which day would be best to rid the empire of the Jews, the feast which would celebrate their release from the terrible decree was to be called Purim, which means casting of lots.

**Est 9:29 Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim.**

Esther and Mordecai used all of the authority they had been given to see that the feast of Purim was begun



and would be perpetuated into the future. Orthodox Jews celebrate the Feast of Purim to this day.

**Est 9:30 And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth,**

**Est 9:31 To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry.**

**Est 9:32 And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.**

Under the organization of Mordecai and Esther, and also with the encouragement of the king, the fasting and the feasting of the days of Purim began and continue annually, year after year.

## *Chapter 10*

**Est 10:1** And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea.

**Est 10:2** And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?

**Est 10:3** 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.

King Ahasuerus was established solidly as the ruler of the empire. Mordecai was given prestige second only to the king. Mordecai proved to be an efficient governor. He stimulated both peace and wealth in the land. The works that Mordecai did have been carefully recorded in the chronicles, or minutes of the governmental records.

The book of Esther records but one of the major triumphs of God's servants in past times. While examining the contents of the book, one sympathizes with them during their times of trial and takes pride with them in their later triumphs. In a sense, this book is a preview of the promised victory of the faithful over the world. May the reader be among those who will someday be invited to "Enter into the joys of the Lord."



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