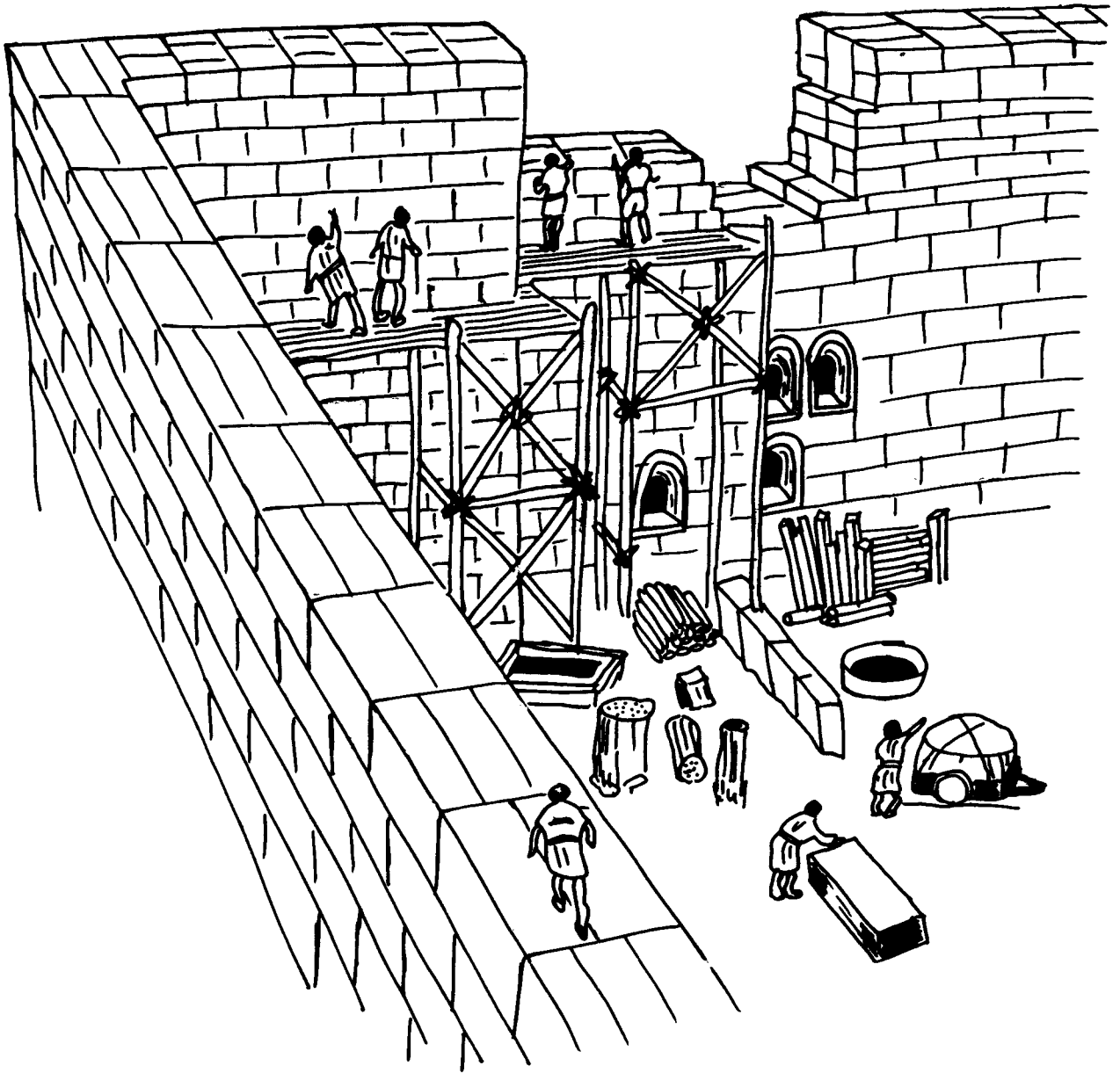


A STUDY ON NEHEMIAH

Let Us Arise And Build



“The God of heaven will make us prosper
and we his servants will arise and build”

I am doing a great work....

I cannot stop!

NEHEMIAH

Remember me O God

for good....

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THESE NOTES

cf. compare

ibid. quoted from same source as previous footnote

e.g. for example

i.e. that is

(Yg) Robert Young: *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965).

Ro. Joseph Rotherham, *The Emphasized Bible*: (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1967).

Comp. Bible E.W. Bullinger, *Companion Bible* (London: The Lamp Press).

A.V. Authorized King James Version

R.S.V. Revised Standard Version, 1952

vs. verse, verses

mg. alternative translation given in margin

Heb. Hebrew

Gk. Greek

Preface

July, 1977

Among all the books of the Bible there is none that so readily stirs the soul to the theme of re-building as that of "Nehemiah". There are truly many great works of renewal covered in Holy Writ but there is none that comes so readily to mind as that of the days of the faithful governor Nehemiah when the people, few though they were, united their voices to exclaim, "Let us rise up and build"! (2:18)

The peculiar nature of the book of Nehemiah is that the Spirit has arranged that it be written auto-biographically. Nehemiah was the principal figure of the times and he has written the book. We rejoice to read the historical record of the revivals of Hezekiah and Josiah, for example, as given in the books of Kings and Chronicles. But in Nehemiah we have the man's *mind*; for the drama of his life is presented as we stand with him looking out at the problems and difficulties that swarmed upon him. The record is punctuated with his many prayers in which he reveals his profound awareness of and attachments to his God in every circumstance of life. The immensity of the work that faced him is impressed upon the reader as we travel secretly with him through heaps of rubble inspecting by the light of the moon, the walls and gates of Jerusalem. And when the problems, the privations, the betrayals and the temptations come upon him we are told explicitly not only what Nehemiah did to overcome them but also how he saw and thought about them. "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy"! (13:22)

The Scripture Study Service has therefore much pleasure in producing these verse by verse notes on Nehemiah. It is the first time we have printed the work of one so far from our shores. There is however some particular appropriateness in the arrangement for when brother Ron Abel visited us from Canada in 1970-71 the book of Nehemiah was one of his principal studies; he greatly loved this book. Upon returning home he worked upon these notes and we in Australia, and elsewhere, are now, we pray, to benefit from those labours.

Let the final words of this foreword be his, *"May the dynamic power of this book move us mightily 'to strengthen our hands for this good work'".*

Christadelphian Scripture Study Service,
17 Braemar Road,
Torrens Park. 5062
SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Foreword

Nehemiah is a diary account of a great man of faith and action. It affords interesting reading even for the casual reader, once the intrigue of the nobles, Meshullam and Eliashib is perceived. Seldom does the Bible student have to strain or resort to tenuous exposition to make his exhortational points - they flow almost unbidden from the narrative. In such a setting, detailed study and Bible marking is a sheer delight, repaying rich rewards indeed, to this a legion of Christadelphians could add their testimony.

The note-writer does have his problems, however. Should the notes be "microscopic" in nature - that is, setting out the meaning of all the Hebrew words used? Or should they be "macroscopic" - thematic in nature, pausing only for details of exceptional interest. Your committee has decided upon the latter as providing a good first beginning.

A Bible student attempts to discover as much as he can from his analysis and to assume as little as possible. But in choosing a theme - a structure, there is obviously a subjective, and perhaps an arbitrariness to the decision. This is necessarily "imposed" by the student. A number of different themes might be selected, each of which could be useful. Since the book, Nehemiah, is autobiographical, the trials of Nehemiah is the theme selected in these notes as a guide for Bible marking.

The hot Palestinian summer, a time of famine in the land, and men whose occupations as goldsmiths, perfumers, priests and nobles, would afford little preparation for the arduous work of wall building - the height of which was 200' in places! There would be many blistered hands, aching muscles and sun-baked lips. Against implacably hostile adversaries, half-hearted brethren and avaricious Jews, the circumstances were ideal for character building. The fire of trial was testing the building of Eliashib, the high priest, Meremoth, Meshullam, the nobles and other workmen. It revealed the hay, wood and stubble to be consumed as well as the gold, silver and precious stones which would endure.

The walls which were rebuilt and repaired crumbled under Gentile invaders only a few years later. God was not so much concerned with the completion of the walls in 52 days as with the kind of building each was doing - the kind of characters being fashioned by the trials of the times. From the divine point of view the wall-builders were in a divine university and trial was the examination for passing or failing.

May it be the lot of you, the students of Nehemiah, to build your walls with gold, silver and precious stones which will endure the fire of divine trial in the day when "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is". To this end these notes have been prepared. May the "joy of Yahweh be your strength" and may He remember you for good.

"Let us arise and build!"

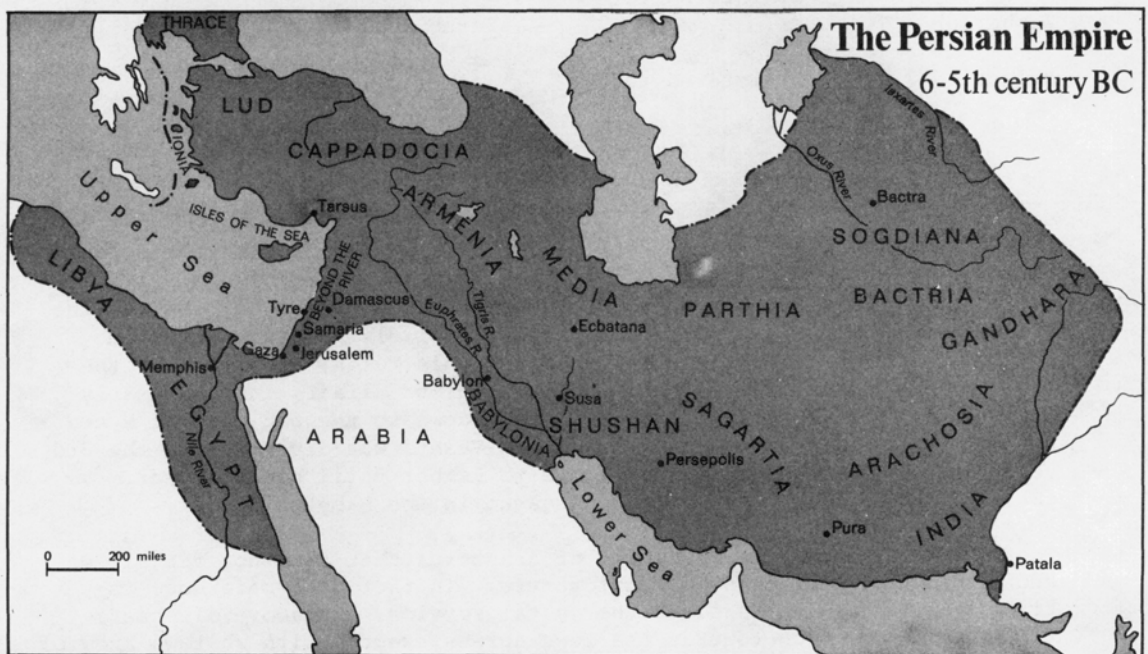
Ron Abel.

Background Information^v

1. CLUSTER STUDIES

As with nearly any book of the Bible which might be selected for study, Nehemiah occurs in a historical context. To study one book of the Bible greatly assists the study of others belonging to the same historical period.¹ For this reason, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah, Esther and Malachi are all related. Their respective contents may be summarized as follows:

Ezra - A great scribe who "prepared his heart to study God's law and to do it". His book recounts the return of 42,360 Jews under his leadership (Ezra 2:64). This return was made possible by the Medo-Persian defeat of the Babylonians and the favourable proclamation of Cyrus, (Ezra 1:1-3).



Haggai - A prophet whose prophecies (carefully dated) were designed by God to rebuke and encourage the returned exiles to overcome the discouragement of Samaritan opposition and lethargy in things divine, to rebuild the Temple.

Zechariah - He prophesied contemporary with Haggai (Ezra 5:1,2) and encouraged Zerubbabel (the Governor) and Joshua (the High Priest) in the work of rebuilding the Temple.

Nehemiah - A diary account of Nehemiah's work in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

¹"Cluster studies" also include those books which are related by similarity of theme. Galatians for example, is the rough model of which Romans is the "finished" product. The contents of Colossians and Ephesians are so similar as to be mutually helpful the one to the other.

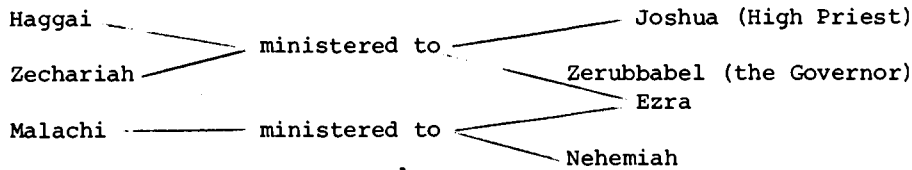
Esther - There is a good possibility that Esther was the wife of Darius Hystaspes, the King in whose service Nehemiah worked as a cupbearer.² Did you notice the significant parenthesis "(the queen [Heb. "shegal", "wife", A.V. mg.] beside him)", (Neh. 2:6, R.S.V.)?

Malachi - His prophecy probably relates to the apostasy while Nehemiah had returned to Persia³ (between Nehemiah chapters 12 and 13).

This cluster of studies might be summarised as follows:

Esther	-	preservation of Jewry
Ezra	-	restoration
Nehemiah	-	reconstruction

Prophets:



²"The dates and events of the Book of Esther fit exactly with the reign of Darius Hystaspes. Hystaspes occupied the first 2 years of his reign in overthrowing Gomates, and other pretenders to the throne of Persia. The 3rd year was thus a year of peace (cf. Esth. 1:3). Babylon revolted against him twice; once in the 1st year of his reign, and again in the 4th. On this occasion, the siege was a tedious affair, lasting nearly two years (Herod. 3:151). This brings us down to the 6th year of Hystaspes, and explains how it was that though Vashti was divorced in the 3rd year of Ahasuerus, he was not married to Esther until his 7th year (Esth. 1:3, 2:16). He was busily engaged in the Babylonian war.

There is nothing in the character of Ahasuerus that does not fit all we know of Darius from classical literature. In fact, the reference to tribute and money matters, to the postal service, and above all his friendly disposition towards the Jews agrees exactly with what we know of Darius, the organiser of the Empire who issued the decrees of Ezra 6:6-12; 7:12-26, ('Romance of Bible Chronology'). Quoted in *"The Story of the Bible"* (May, 1963), p.29.

³This deduction is based on the similarities of problems in Malachi's prophecy and the conditions prevailing in Jerusalem as described in Neh. 12,13. Consider the following:

- i. Condemnation of the taking of Gentile wives - Mal. 2:11; Neh. 13:23
- ii. Negligence of tithes for the priests and Levites - Mal. 3:8-10
Neh. 13:10-14
- iii. The need to fear the name of Yahweh - Mal. 3:16; Neh. 5:9, 15
- iv. The Temple had been rebuilt - Mal. 1:7;10.
- v. A Persian "pekah" resided at Jerusalem - Mal. 1:8

2. CHRONOLOGY

Although it is probably not of great importance to know the identity of the titles "Artaxerxes" of Nehemiah and the "Ahasuerus" of Esther and the "Darius" of Ezra, it is noteworthy that two kings have been suggested: Darius Hystaspes (B.C. 521-485) and Longimanus (B.C. 464-424). The following shows why the evidence favours Darius Hystaspes:

"Artaxerxes"; "Ahasuerus"; "Darius" identified with Darius Hystaspes

- a) According to the chronology of Neh. 5:14; 13:6 "Artaxerxes" reigned at least 36 years. Darius Hystaspes is the only Persian king before Longimanus to reign for this number of years.
- b) The Apocryphal Book, "The Book of Esdras" identifies Darius Hystaspes with Artaxerxes.⁴
- c) The extent of Persian rule under Ahasuerus (Esth. 1:1) also agrees with that under Darius Hystaspes.⁵

⁴It may be thought that Darius and Artaxerxes are two different kings on the basis of Ezra 6:14 "the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia." However, the Hebrew word "Vav" frequently has the meaning of "even" (cf. Gen. 3:24 "Cherubim and ['even'] a flaming sword"); See also the R.V. change in 3:15 "and unto the stairs" = "even unto the stairs" R.V. The verse can be read "Darius *even* Artaxerxes". Gesenius comments as follows: "The copulative is inserted *by way of explanation* between words in apposition. I Sam. 28:3, 'in Ramah even in his own city'. Dan. 4:10, 'a watcher (i.e. an angel) even an holy one'." Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969, 1949 edit.), p.234(C).

⁵Darius Hystaspes conquered India in 508B.C.; divided the Empire into Satrapies, assigning to each its governor, and fixing the tribute which was to be paid him by the several nations. He ruled over the full extent of land indicated in Esther 1:1. Herodotus writes concerning Hystaspes: "The Indians, who were more numerous than any other nation with which we are acquainted, paid a tribute exceeding that of any other people" (see Est. 10:1). Herodotus speaks of the tribute he exacted from the nations "and the isles of the sea" (again see Esth. 10:1). Herodotus (Book 3:96), Thucydides (Book 1), and Plato, all state that Darius Hystaspes subdued all the islands of the Aegean Sea, and Diodorus Siculus (Book 12) states that they were all lost again by his son Xerxes before the 12th year of his reign. The later kings of Persia held none of these islands. In view of Esth. 1:1; 10:1, this evidence is conclusive both for the identification of Ahasuerus as Hystaspes, and against his identification with Xerxes. It is usual to identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes because of the similarity between the old Persian name Khshayarsha, the Hebrew Achashverosh (Ahasuerus), and the Greek Xerxes. But the identification is of no force, for the word in any form, and however spelt, is simply the Persian word Shah, and might be applied to any monarch who sat on the throne of Persia "Romance of Bible Chronology". Quoted in "The Story of the Bible", (May, 1963), p.29.

If the respective titles, "Ahasuerus";⁶ "Artaxerxes"⁷ and "Darius"⁸ are identified with Longimanus a number of problems arise:

a) It would make Ezra 121 yrs. old when he returned from Babylon to Jerusalem and about 143 yrs. old at the procession of dedication of the walls in the time of Nehemiah, (12:27,36). This is indicated by the following:

- i. Ezra's father, Seraiah, (Ezra 7:1) was slain during Nebuchadnezzar's invasion - B.C. 586. (See 2 Kings 25:8,18-21).
- ii. Therefore, Ezra must have been born approx. B.C. 586
- iii. But according to conventional chronology, Artaxerxes reigned from B.C. 464 - the year in which the decree was made and following which Ezra left for Jerusalem. This would make him 121 years old (586-464). The dedication of the walls took place about 22 years later, making Ezra about 143 years old.

b) Perhaps if the problems only related to the great age of Ezra, conventional chronology might still be accepted. But great ages must be allowed for 20 of the 30 priest and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel, B.C. 536, and were still alive in B.C. 444 at the time of the dedication of the walls (Neh. 10:2-10). This would make them 91 at the time of their return to Jerusalem even though at the time when they left Babylon they were already "chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Joshua" (Neh. 12:7, cf. Ezra 2:2). Their ages, therefore would have been in excess of 120 years if they became heads of their houses at 30 - the age of priestly service.

THE 70 WEEKS PROPHECY

There is a problem with the identification of "Ahasuerus"; "Artaxerxes", and "Darius" with Darius Hystaspes. Daniel's prophecy required 70 weeks (490 yrs.) to elapse from "the going forth of the commandment to restore Jerusalem" until the death of the Messiah. The decree went forth approx. B.C. 502, (cf. Neh. 2:8). To this is added the 490 years which gives 12 B.C., about 40 yrs. short of the crucifixion of Christ. How is this 40 yr. error to be accounted for? Once again the error probably rests with conventional chronology (which follows Ptolemy's Canon). Ptolemy's chronology is uncorroborated by the following:

- a) The Jewish National Traditions as preserved in the Seder Olam,
- b) The writings of Josephus,
- c) The Persian National Traditions preserved in Firdusi.

⁶"Artaxerxes" - "the great King" (Yg); "Great King, Great Warrior", (Herodotus, Vol. 3, p.552) quoted in Rawlinson: *Historical Evidences for the Truth of the Scripture Records*, (New York: John B. Alden, 1884) note (78), p.148. "Strong, powerful king", Gesenius, p. 82.

⁷"Ahasuerus" = "Lion-King" (Smith's Bible Dict.); "the venerable king", (Comp. Bible, Appendix 50 VII (5) p.67).

⁸"Darius" = "Lord", (Smith's Bible Dict.); "The Maintainer", (Comp. Bible, *ibid.*, p.67); "royal", (Gesenius, p.207).

3. CONDITIONS IN JERUSALEM

- a) The Temple foundations were completed through the earlier work of Joshua and Zerubbabel, (Ezra 3:12,13).
- b) The survivors who had escaped exile (when Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian, sacked the city, 586B.C.) were suffering "great affliction and reproach", (Neh. 1:3).
- c) The walls of Jerusalem were broken down and the gates destroyed by fire. This was done by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chronicles 36:17-19; Neh. 1:3). It is also possible that the short-lived pogroms of Haman had effected additional suffering and destruction, (Esther 3:8-11; 9:15-16).
- d) The city itself had almost no houses or inhabitants (Neh. 7:4; cf. 11:1). It was strewn with rubble and stones, (2:13-15).
- e) The towns and villages around Jerusalem to which the exiles returned were occupied by aliens who often spoke languages other than Hebrew and held abominable practices which continually provided a source of contamination of Israelitish worship, (cf. Neh. 13:13). Edomites held dominance in the south; Philistines in the west; Samaritan apostates in the north; and Moabites in the east.



Bulls from the palace at Shushan

NEHEMIAH - UNDER TRIAL

- (1) DERISION - 'THEY DERIDED & DESPISED US' (2:19)
- (2) HALF-HEARTED BRETHREN - 'THE NOBLES PUT NOT THEIR NECKS
TO THE WORK' (3:5)
- (3) CONTEMPT - JEWS RIDICULED; WORK DESPISED (4;1-3)
- (4) OPEN OPPOSITION - 'THEY PLOTTED TO FIGHT' (4:8)
- (5) DISCOURAGEMENT - 'WE ARE NOT ABLE TO WORK' (4:10)
- (6) SABOTAGE - 'WE WILL COME AND KILL THEM' (4:11)
- (7) INTERNECINE STRIFE - NOBLES EXPLOIT POOR (5:7)
- (8) FALSE FRIENDSHIP - 'COME MEET US' (6:2)
- (9) SCANDAL - AN OPEN LETTER (6:5)
- (10) FEAR - 'THEY ARE COMING TO KILL YOU' (6:13)
- (11) TREASON - MARRIAGES WITH THE ALIEN (6:18-19; 13:23-29).

**'fightings without,
fears within'**

CHAPTER ONE

NEHEMIAH'S

PRAYER FOR SUCCESS

REPORT of HANANI

SHAME, GREAT TROUBLE IN JERU-
SALEM Vv. 1-3

NEHEMIAH'S REACTION

TEARS, MOURNING, FASTING AND PRAYER V.4

PRAYER for JERUSALEM

AN APPEAL TO YAHWEH ON THE BASIS OF :-

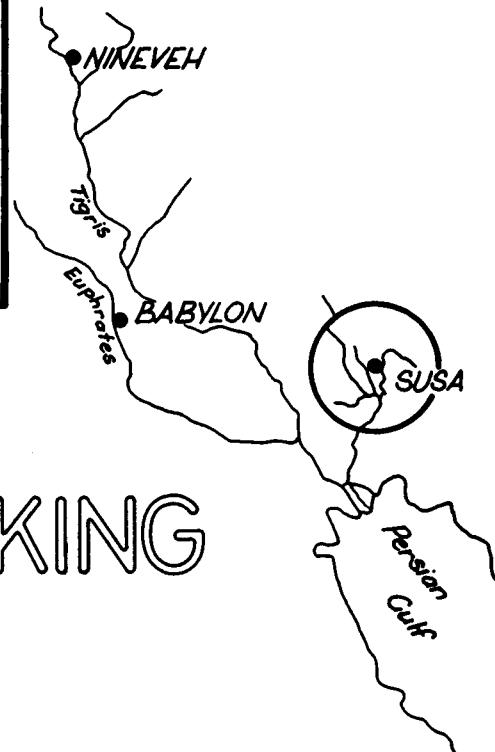
HIS INTEGRITY V.5

HIS SERVANTS' CONFESSION OF SINS Vv. 6,7

HIS FORGIVENESS Vv. 8,9

ISRAEL AS HIS BONDSERVANT AND WORK
OF REDEMPTION V.10

HIS SERVANTS' DELIGHT TO FEAR HIS
NAME V.11



BEFORE THE KING

OF PERSIA

PREPARATION FOR REBUILDING THE WALLS CH. 1-2:8

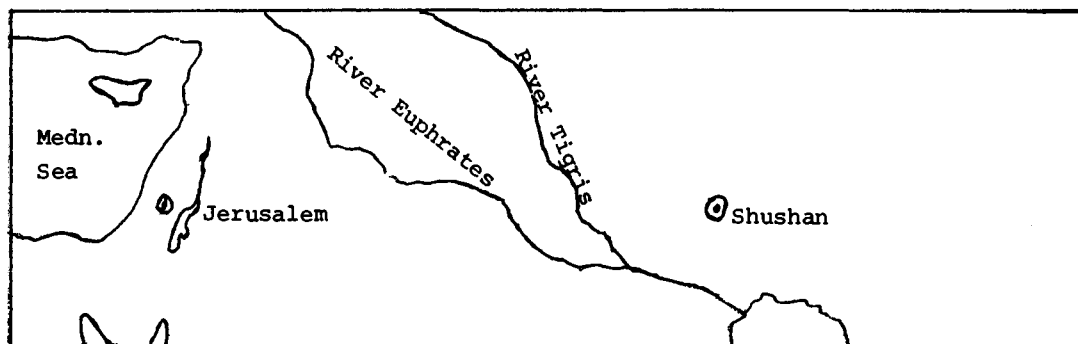
1:1-3 PLIGHT OF JERUSALEM

1:1 *Nehemiah* - "Consolation of Yah" (Yg).¹ His name was indicative of his experiences in Jerusalem. Many times he refers to God's kindly providence, (e.g., 4:15; 6:16). With Paul he could say: "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction", (2 Cor. 1:4, R.S.V.).

Hachaliah - "Yahweh is hidden" (Yg). "Son of Hachaliah" distinguished Nehemiah from other persons with the same name, (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 3:16).

the month Chisleu - 'Chislev', R.S.V. - November-December (winter) in Palestine.

Shushan - "Susa, the capital" R.S.V.



1:2 *Hanani* - "Gracious" (Yg). Nehemiah's brother (7:2).² Notice the common interest of these two brothers in Jerusalem. The Truth was their most important topic of conversation. How often do the football scores or the T.V. take priority in your conversation? Are you quick to change the topic of conversation after a Bible Class, exhortation, or lecture to one of these topics because this is where your real interest lies, and where you feel more "at home"? It is worth remembering that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh", (Matt. 12:34).

the Jews - This is used synonymously with "Israelite". See 2:10; 4:1; 5:1,8; 7:73; 12:47. It should be noted that the northern 10 tribes were represented among the returned exiles. This is proven by the fact that 12 he-goats and 12 bulls were offered for "all Israel" (Ezra 6:17; 8:35). Clearly then, the 10 tribes were not "lost" as Herbert Armstrong currently teaches.

¹ These short forms save repeating the authorities used. Here (Yg) stands for Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Holy Bible*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965).

² (7:2), this designation without a Biblical book preceding the numerals always indicates a quotation from Nehemiah.

³ For a refutation of the Anglo-Israel position see R. Abel, *Wrested Scriptures: A Christadelphian Handbook of Suggested Explanations to Difficult Passages*, (Pasadena: The Christadelphians, 1970), p.68-74; See also "U.S.A. and Britain - Are not Israel! H. Armstrong's theory tested by Scripture", *Herald of the Coming Age*, No. 4, Vol. 19, (Dec. 1968).

which were left of the captivity - The plight of the poor left in the land by Nebuchadnezzar, (2 Kings 25:8-12; 2 Chron. 36:17-21).

concerning Jerusalem - This is the city where God has chosen to place His great name, (2 Chron. 6:6).

- 1:3 *in great affliction* - God had imposed famine conditions upon the land because of the unfaithfulness of the returned exiles. They built themselves comfortable panelled houses while the Temple site lay in ruins, (Hag. 1:4-11; 2:16-19). The famine conditions were temporarily lifted (Hag. 2:19), but later imposed, (Neh. 5:2,3) and apparently existed at the time Malachi penned his prophecy, (Mal. 3:10,12).

reproach - "shame", R.S.V. i.e., that Jerusalem the dwelling place of the God of heaven, should be in ruins. The Jews, Nehemiah said were "*thy* servants" and "*thy* people" and yet the Gentiles had succeeded in stopping the restoration of true worship through the decree of Artaxerxes. The decree held in effect through the reign of Pseudo-Smerdis until the 2nd year of Darius Hystaspes. (See Ezra 4: cf. 5,6).

1:4-11 NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

- 1:4 *I* - The use of "I" indicates that "Nehemiah" is largely an autobiographical writing.

wept - and "mourned for days", R.S.V. Nehemiah was deeply moved - the work touched his heart as it had done Ezra's earlier, (Ezra 9:3). Impoverished indeed is the Christadelphian whose discipleship has not been toil, sweat, and tears, for such has been the universal experience of all the patriarchs and apostles. (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-12; 11:23-28).

and prayed - This prayer has much in common with the prayers of Daniel (Dan. 9), and Ezra (Ezra 9). Did you notice how Biblical it is? Godly men make requests framed in Biblical thoughts, and even in Biblical language. This is true for the N.T. as well, (cf. Acts 4:24-30).

ALLUSIONS AND QUOTATIONS IN NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

- (vs. 5) - "Great and terrible God....." (Deut. 7:21)
 - "that keepeth covenant....." (Deut. 7:9)
 - "observe [keep], R.S.V. his commandments" (Exod. 20:6)
 - (vs. 6) - "Let thine ear now be attentive" (quoting Solomon at the dedication of the Temple - 2 Chron. 6:40)
 - (vs. 7) - "and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments" (Deut. 5:28-31; 6:1; 7:11; 8:11-14)
 - (vs. 8) - "that thou commandest thy servant Moses" - Background here is Deut. 30.
 - "if ye transgress.....I will scatter you" (Lev. 26:39-45; Deut. 28:64; 30:1-4)
 - "but if you turn unto me" (Deut. 30:1-2)
 - (vs 10) - "thy people" - (Deut. 9:26)
- 1:5 *great and terrible* - "Terrible", Heb. "yare", "to be feared, revered", (Yg). Nehemiah's appeal recognizes the attributes of God's Person.
- 1:6 *and confess the sins of the children of Israel* - a prayer, national in character, like the High Priest confessing the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:21). Psalm 79 should be read as a commentary on this prayer. The afflictions suffered were caused by *sin*.

There was justice in the punishment, therefore, yet mercy in the hardship, as Ezra acknowledged, (Neh. 9:32-37).

which we have sinned - Nehemiah may have been born in captivity or may never have been a personal contributor to the judgments of God on the nation of Israel, but he never refers to the sins of "*them*", rather he uses "*we*". There is no cold objectivity, no stand-offish superiority of superciliousness on the part of Nehemiah. He completely associated himself with his people. When a Christadelphian speaks disparagingly of what *they* do (rather than "*we*"), it may indicate that such reformers do not share the attitude of Nehemiah.

- 1:7 *corruptly* - "we have altogether broken covenant with thee" LXX⁴
- 1:8 *servant* - Heb. "ebed", "a servant, doer, tiller, slave" (Yg). Cf. the use of "ebed" in Lev. 25:39. The same Hebrew word occurs in vs. 6,8; Nehemiah (vs.6), Israel (vs.10), and Christ (Isa. 42:1), were all regarded as having a bond-servant relationship to God.
- 1:9 *unto the place that I have chosen to place my name there* - this is in Jerusalem, (Deut. 12:5; Psalms. 132:13-14).
- 1:10 *whom thou hast redeemed* - "Redeemed", Heb. "padah", "to free, redeem" (Yg). The allusion here is almost certainly to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, (Deut. 5:15) cf. Exod. 32:11; Psalms. 136:11-12).
- 1:11 *who desire to fear thy name*⁵ - The name of God is Yahweh (see preface to the Revised Standard Version). Note Isa. 26:8, R.S.V.: "O LORD ['Yahweh'] we wait for thee; thy memorial name is the desire of our soul...For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness." God's name declares His purpose - to take out a people for His Name. (Acts 15:14).

and grant him mercy ['success', R.S.V.] *in the sight of man* - Nehemiah did not seek friendship with the king so as to "get to know him", in order to enhance his chance of a favourable reply from the king. Rather Nehemiah acknowledged the divine hand in the whole matter, and pleaded that God would direct the king. As subsequent events proved "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will", (Prov. 21:1).

cupbearer - This was an honoured position "an honour of no small account" (Herodotus). It was a trusted position since the cup-bearer would be the last person to handle the king's wine (poisoning was always a danger!). It is indicative of Nehemiah's character that a Jew should have such a position. Was he more trustworthy than his Persian contemporaries?

⁴ LXX is the short form for the Septuagint Translation (Greek) of the Hebrew O.T. Scriptures. Since 70 translators worked on this translation it is referred to as the LXX.

⁵ Rotherham translates this as, "who delight to revere"; see Mal. 3:16.

CHAPTER 2

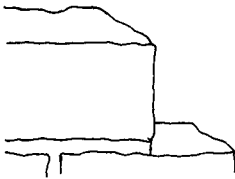
LET US RISE UP AND BUILD

DAN. 9:24
THE WORK COMMENCES

vs. 1-8

KING GRANTS
NEHEMIAH'S REQUEST

provides materials,
protection



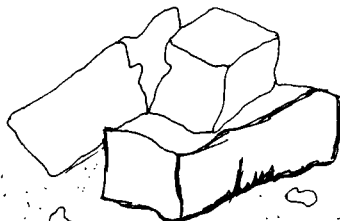
vs. 17-18

== APPEAL FOR UNITY

* Report given to officials,
Jews, priests and nobles

== * They respond

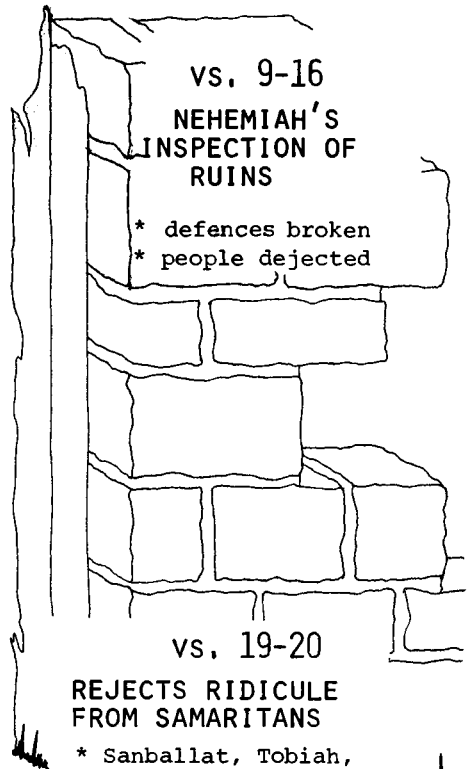
* They strengthen their
hands for the good work



vs. 9-16

NEHEMIAH'S
INSPECTION OF
RUINS

* defences broken
* people dejected



vs. 19-20

REJECTS RIDICULE
FROM SAMARITANS

* Sanballat, Tobiah,
Geshem, oppose the
work,

* Accuse Nehemiah of
rebellling against
the king

* Nehemiah rejects
their derision

CHAPTER 2

2:1-8 NEHEMIAH'S REQUEST GRANTED BY THE KING

- 2:1 *the month Nisan* - Nisan-Abib¹ (in the post-exilic calendar, i.e., after the captivity). Since it was in the same 20th year of the king Artaxerxes², (cf. vs.1), Nehemiah's prayer went unanswered for 4 months. There might have been a rotating schedule of cupbearers, and this was Nehemiah's first opportunity to come before the king.

Artaxerxes - "the great king", (Yg) - probably a title, not a name.

- 2:2 *sad in his presence* - This was regarded as an ill-omen indicating discontent or plotting,³ (cf. Esther 4:2), but with Nehemiah it was an illustration of the proverb: "by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken". (Prov. 15:13).

very sore afraid - A rejection by the king could mean death.

- 2:3 *Let the king live for ever*⁴ - This was the usual oriental salutation, (cf. Dan. 2:4; 3:9).

Gate.....consumed['destroyed', R.S.V.] with fire - Entry to a city was often gained by burning the huge wooden gates rather than by smashing through the stone walls with battering rams. The gates of the city may have been burned by fires deliberately set to prevent the rebuilding of the city, (2 Chron. 36:19).

- 2:4 *God of heaven* - This is an expression peculiar to the times of Gentile domination of Israel when God no longer could be said to "dwell between the cherubim". The expression first occurs in 2 Chron. 36:23.

¹There is a problem here in having Chisleu and Nisan both in the 20th year of the king. It would be the equivalent in our calendar year of moving from Nov. to Feb. in the *same* year. It is likely, however, that the 20th. year relates to Darius Hystaspes' reign in office and not to calendar years.

²King Artaxerxes is almost certainly Darius Hystaspes. For the chronology of the period see Background.

³*Cambridge Bible Commentary*: The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, (Herbert Ryle ed.), (Cambridge: At the Uni. Press, 1901), p.160.

⁴See also *Companion Bible*, p.634.

2:5 *That I may build it* - The plight of Jerusalem had so moved this godly man that he was personally prepared to go. His appeal to the king indicates a careful consideration and preparation on his part. Nehemiah had even calculated the material that he would need. Do you give preparation to your prayers? Nehemiah prayed as if it all depended on God, and then worked as if it all depended on himself.

2:6 *the queen* - Heb. "shegal" ("wife", A.V. Mg.); was this Esther the queen?

An artist's impression of Esther the Queen at Shushan the palace.



when will you return - after 12 years (5:14; 13:6), but Nehemiah later went back to Jerusalem (13:6).

So it pleased the king to send me - a good illustration of the proverb: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." (Prov. 3:5,6). Nehemiah did not flatter the king to obtain his end. He did not do evil that good might come, but rather acknowledged in practice that "the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." (Prov. 21:1).

⁵ This is a very probable suggestion from what is now known of Darius Hystaspes. See the evidence presented in the footnote to #2 "Chronology" and #1 "Cluster Studies" under section: "Background Information". The Heb. word, "shēgāl" can mean either wife or queen (See Yg.). In addition to this "shēgāl" is used for a foreign queen (Comp. Bible). If the queen were Esther, it would account for the unusual parenthetical inclusion in the text. Her interest and sympathy would certainly rest with Nehemiah.

This decree of the king was a fulfilment of the "commandment to restore and build Jerusalem", (Dan. 9:24). It was a prophetic 40 weeks or 490 years later to the "cutting off" of the Messiah.

- 2:7 *Let letters be given to me to the governors of the province beyond the river* - The Persian king had "pekahs" or governors across the Euphrates ("Beyond the River") in Palestine. Sanballat, the Horonite, for example, was a deputy in Samaria. Nehemiah was to become the deputy in Judah. Hostility on the part of these governors could result in armed attacks as Nehemiah passed through their areas, (cf. Ezra 4:7-10, 17, 23). Hence the need for the letters to prove the Persian king's authorization. Nehemiah would know of the earlier Samaritan opposition which had caused the work of rebuilding to cease some 30 years earlier, (B.C. 535-520).
- 2:8 *king's forest* - Heb. "pārdēs"; LXX, "paradeisos". The O.T. word for paradise indicates its association with the earth, not heaven. The king's forest was probably in Lebanon where olive trees and sycamores flourished. (1 Chron. 27:28).

gates of the palace - "the gates of the fortress of the temple", R.S.V.. The fortress was located on the N. side of the temple and commanded by an officer (7:2). It was later rebuilt by the Asmonean princes and Herod the Great. Paul was carried "into the castle" when rescued from the mob, (Acts 21:37; 22:24). Nehemiah no doubt had a sense of foreboding in the sullen resentment of the enemies and so began defence preparations.

⁶ John Thomas commented on this verse as follows:
 "Precise information was granted concerning the time when the things testified in the twenty-fourth verse of the ninth chapter, and the cutting off of Messiah, the prince, should come to pass. They were to be accomplished in a period of seventy weeks of years from the promulgation of a certain decree, that is, after 490 years. Two years after this was revealed to him, Daniel's heart was rejoiced by the proclamation of Cyrus in the first year of his reign, for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 36:22,23). But had he reckoned the 490 years from this date, they would have terminated 13 years before Messiah was born. The seventy weeks, however, were not to commence with a decree for rebuilding the temple; but "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem;" in other words, to restore the wastes of the city by setting up the wall and the gates thereof, that Israel's reproach might cease. (Neh. 2:1,5,17). This was issued by Artaxerxes on the first day of Nisan in the twentieth year of his reign, which was exactly 490 years to the crucifixion. No date of any other decree answers the demand of "the matter" therefore there is no option but to receive it as a demonstration by fact".
Elpis Israel, (London: the Maran-Atha Press, 1848), pp.352-3, (Robert Roberts' edition).

VS. 9-10 ARRIVAL AT JERUSALEM

2:9 *army and horsemen* - Note the contrast with Ezra (Ezra 8:21,22) who went unaccompanied by an armed escort 13 years earlier; Nehemiah was the king's representative and governor.

2:10 *Sanballat* - probably Assyrian, "the moon gives life". An Aramaic papyrus identifies him as the governor of Samaria.

Horonite - probably from Beth-Horon - "House of caverns", ("Place of hollows", Yg), (18 miles, N.W. of Jerusalem).

Tobiah - "Yah is good" (Yg). This is a Hebrew name and probably reflects the influence of divine teaching in the background of the Samaritans.

the servant - probably of Sanballat.

the Ammonite - Ammonites occupied present day Jordan and were inveterate enemies of Israel. (Deut. 23:3; Psa. 83:7 cf. Isa. 11:14). They were the original descendants of Lot. (Gen. 19:39).

it grieved them exceedingly - "it displeased them greatly", R.S.V.. A strong Jerusalem implied a weaker Samaria!

to seek the welfare of the children of Israel - This was Nehemiah's objective. The journey would have been about 650 miles and taken approx. 4 months. (cf. Ezra 7:9). His arrival with a military escort and more Jewish immigrants was received with malignant ill-will by Israel's enemies.

VS. 11-16 NEHEMIAH'S QUIET ASSESSMENT

2:11 *three days* - appears to have been a customary formality - an eastern courtesy (cf. Ezra 8:32).

2:12 *a beast* - probably a mule or a donkey rather than a horse since a donkey would be more sure-footed than a horse in moving through the rubble.

2:13 *Valley Gate* - See flip-over draft which indicates the probable location of the gates of the city. It is useful to place an insert in your Bible at ch. 3 to indicate the location of the gates. The Valley Gate gave access to the Valley of Hinnom on the South side of the city.

Jackal's well - it is uncertain where this was located.

Dung Gate - refuse was taken from here to the Valley of Hinnom. There were 12 gates as in Ezek. 48:31-34; Rev. 21:12.

2:14 *Fountain Gate* - located near the pool of Siloam on the East (3:15).

no place to pass - The broken debris and burned stones prevented a beast from going any further.

⁷Companion Bible, p.634.

- 2:15 *brook* - "the valley", R.S.V. Heb. "nachal", "a stream, (in a valley)", (Yg); probably the Kedron Valley on the east side of the city.
- 2:16 *the rulers knew not whither I went* - Nehemiah may have quickly discerned their collusion and friendship with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem (cf. 6:17-19) through marriage ties, and hence his secrecy and the need for his own intelligence, (cf. Ezra 9:2).

VS. 17-18 MEETING WITH THE MEN OF ISRAEL

Having discerned the conditions of the city -

- a) troublesome Gentile adversaries
- b) the city walls destroyed and gates burned Nehemiah appeals for unity and exhorts the Jews to work.

- 2:17 *distress* - "disgrace", R.S.V., cf. 1:3,10. The exhortation revealed their duty and inspired the Jews to labour.

a reproach - Gentiles were given opportunity to blaspheme the God of Israel because of the lethargy, apostasy, and indifference of the Jews. The Christadelphian today can unwittingly merit the same reproach. Consider the following:

- a) A visitor drives 20 miles to a public lecture only to find that 15% of the members are present (for whatever reason). No hymn-books are available to give to the visitor and because the steward arrived late, the speaker goes without a glass of water. The speaker, expecting only Christadelphians to be present has a half-prepared lecture which is largely a rehash of previous lectures, and so the casual, disinterested presentation might in itself merit a dismissal of our claim to have the Truth, when it is seen to be valued so lightly.
- b) Hundreds of dollars and hours are invested in special efforts and A.S.K. projects, only to discover that contacts who have already finished the postal course have never been contacted because "every-one is too busy".
- c) Notice with the ease with which the T.V. knob is turned on in the evening, despite the fact that the readings have not been done and the ecclesial Bible Class struggles for survival with "the same few in attendance".

Such obvious discrepancies between profession and performance may well be more quickly noted by the alien than by those whose spiritual sensibilities have been dulled. Perhaps you can think of many more examples of ways in which we give opportunities for enemies of the Lord to speak reproachfully of the Truth?

- 2:18 *Let us rise up and build* - This was a wholesome response but difficulties were shortly to test the durability of the enthusiasm. The fire of trial would test the quality of the building undertaken.

VS. 19-20 ADVERSARIES REACT

Geshem - "Corporeality" (Yg).

the Arab - Geshem was probably chief of an Arabian tribe (i.e., an Arab Sheik). An Arabian community had been established by Sargon to the south of Judah in B.C. 715.

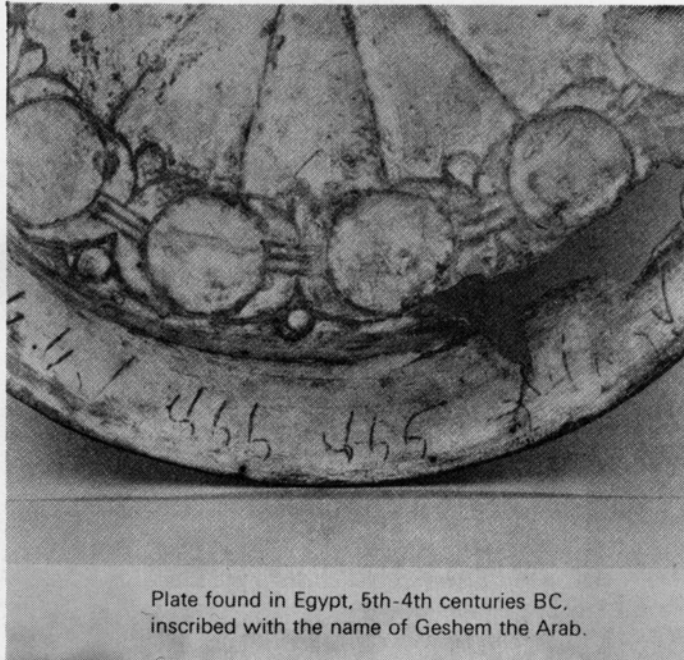


Plate found in Egypt, 5th-4th centuries BC,
inscribed with the name of Geshem the Arab.

1. DERISION - This is the first of the trials of Nehemiah while building the walls. (See the outline for Bible marking).

2:19 *laughed us to scorn and despised us* - "derided and despised us", R.S.V.;
"poured contempt upon us", Ro..

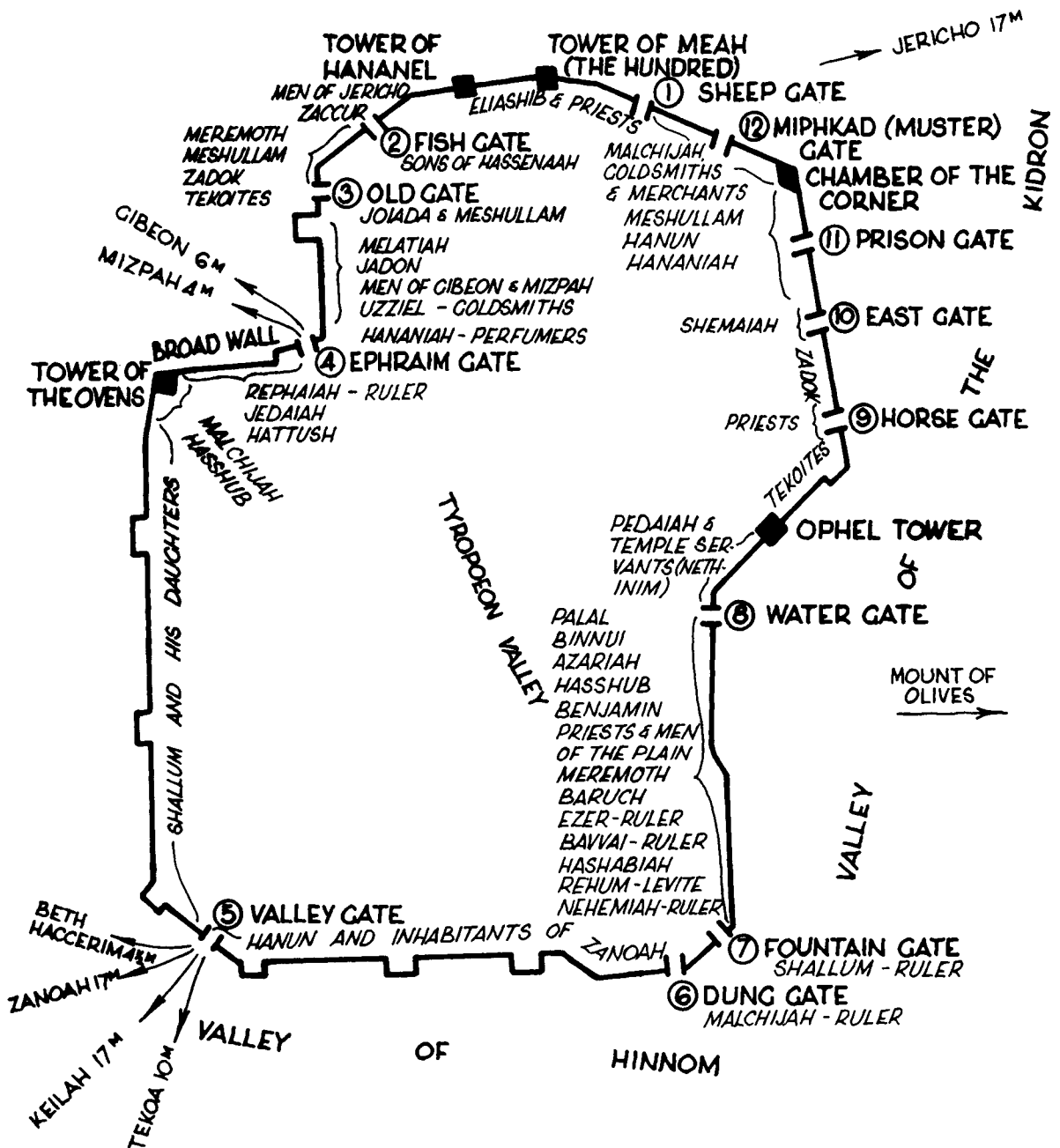
2:20 *will ye rebel against the king?* - This was a charge which had been successful in stopping the earlier work of restoration (Ezra 4:13-16). It was the same false charge raised against Christ (Lk. 23:2). Implied is the threat of appeal to the King of Persia.

ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem - This was also the reply of Zerubbabel (Ezra 4:3). Samaritan help involved apostate worship (Ezra 4:1-3). Refusal of assistance was not for the reason of Gentile backgrounds. Many who assisted in the work were Gentiles. The adversaries had already manifested themselves as wolves masquerading in sheep's clothing. Nehemiah's decision, therefore, was well-founded.

THESE PUT THEIR **NECKS TO THE WORK** of their **LORD**

1. HIGH PRIEST - ELIASHIB, vs. 1
2. MEN OF JERICO, (345); vs. 2; 7:36
3. MESHULLAM - "A FRIEND", vs. 4, 30; 6:18
4. TEKAITES - vs. 5, 27; cf. NOBLES 5:6, 9
5. NETHINIM - vs. 6, 26; Ez. 2:49; 2 CHRON. 2:17
6. PROSELYTES, vs. 7; cf. JOSH. 9:3,4,27
7. GOLDSMITHS - vs. 8,31,32
8. PERFUMERS (APOTHECARIES), vs. 8
9. RULERS vs. 9
10. FAMILY GROUPS - SHALLUM AND DAUGHTERS; vs. 12
11. RECHABITES - vs. 14
12. LEVITES vs. 17; PRIESTS, vs. 22
13. MERCHANTS, vs. 31,32

SO WE BUILT THE WALL



FOR THE PEOPLE HAD A MIND TO WORK

CHAPTER 3

WORKMAN ON THE WALLS

The rather formidable list of names in this chapter might well discourage even the most enthusiastic casual reader. For the Bible student it provides an additional insight into the Book itself, as well as a powerful illustration of the way in which social class can effect the Lord's work.

About 85 years earlier (2Kings 25:8-10) the Babylonians had smashed the walls and burned the city. Ever since that time the Jews remembered this tragic and humiliating time by keeping a fast on the 7th day of the 5th month (Zech. 7:3; 8:19).

It was by this time, summer (the wheat and barley harvest having been brought in the 3rd. and 4th. months). Grapes, olives, figs and other summer fruit were yet to be harvested. The summer months were hot, and no refreshing rains could be expected during the 5th. and 6th. months to give relief from the dust of the rubble. Many of the workers had to travel to and from their towns and villages for work on the walls, (11:1-3; 4:22), where they were divided into 44 working parties. To the human eye, the initial work gave the appearance of an harmonious whole. The reasons *why* they laboured, however, were not fully disclosed to the human observer. The fire of trial began to test the kind of building each was doing - to separate Tekoites from nobles.

It may not be readily apparent how one might become a noble or an Eliashib today, therefore a contemporary (hypothetical) example has been selected. It depicts the way in which a brother moved from a lowly, Tekoite-like social class to a half-hearted, noble-like class, and who put "not his neck to the work of the Lord". Consider the following example:

A brother who has always been a regular when it came to door-to-door preaching, leaflet distribution and even open-air speaking, obtained a number of job promotions to a position of some social prominence. The resulting financial gain provided new avenues for recreation like skiing in the winter and golfing in the summer (required for relief from the more comprehensive demands on his time and energies). Later a summer cottage, more expensive house and car were purchased.

Having climbed the social class scale, his fellow Christadelphians noted the following changes which occurred in his attitude to the Truth:

a) Open-air preaching with its heckling and personal abuse was now more difficult to bear with the "improved" station in life. Once zealously supported, the open-air work lapsed into disfavour on the grounds that "it was ineffective anyway" and "I don't have the personality or the time for that sort of thing". It was a short step to move from this position to outright support of those who had insisted that it was "casting pearls before swine". It was very inconvenient to be in the "hot and dirty concrete jungle" on a Sunday for park-work, when it required leaving the cottage and the lake on a Saturday. A division of loyalties was becoming apparent, and as Jesus put it: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also", (Matt. 6:21).

b) The lectures were now only receiving a spasmodic attendance, since "the lecture technique is now out-moded" and "people aren't interested any more", (an untruth!). His attendance was limited to when he was the speaker, (with vocabulary and non-Biblical matter which reflected his changed status in life) or when an internationally-famed lecturer took the platform. His attitudes to lectures were conveniently borrowed by his children (and yet he complained about the generation gap and the need for more social activities to keep the young people) who grew up to think that his attitude was the Christadelphian norm - the extremists were those who saw a duty to attend the lectures and bring a friend.

c) The Bible Class became regarded as a parochial affair, since the same old few attended and the same hobby-horses were ridden. It was then argued that "one studies better at home on a Wednesday night" (a classic self-deception) which usually meant a supine posture in front of a T.V. set with the knob turned to "on".

d) Vigorous lecture titles which demarcated the Christadelphian position from other sectarians or titles which named specific religious groups were regarded as a "contravention of the love of Christ and true discipleship". Social endeavours were deemed more in keeping with the "spirit of Christ" (and the praise of men). "The Claims of the Papacy Exposed by the Bible" was regarded as particularly offensive (until it was discovered that one of his business partners was a Roman Catholic). It was only a short step to suggest that perhaps good living, sincere Baptists, Evangelicals, and even Pentecostals "might be in the kingdom of God".

His ecclesial office was retained - his social position having accrued sufficient status to ensure this. He "worked" in the ecclesia, but his policies had long since become ones of expediency rather than of a Biblical outlook.

Perhaps you recognise yourself in some of these descriptions. The symptoms characterize a Christadelphian beguiled by the deceitfulness of riches and the "cares of this life". Such have become nobles and Eliashibs in the ecclesias of God.

At one time the Christadelphians were known as the "lowest strata of the proletariat" (working class), "a particularly low-class sect",¹ but this is not true of our community today. A newspaper in 1890 commented as follows:

"There is nothing in the appearance of these people..... to distinguish them from their fellows; they are a little more gaunt perhaps, have just a touch more fire in their eyes, as if the struggle for life had been harder for them than for others.....they rejoice that they, simple craftsmen as they are, are on the one side,² while the wealth, dignity and culture are on the other....."

¹Werner Stark, *The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p.35.

²Macmillan's Magazine, (August 1890) quoted in Bryan Wilson, *Sects and Society*, (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1961), p.301.

The general change in the social class composition of the ecclesias throughout the world has been recognised in the *Christadelphian*. One writer commented:

"Nearly all the brethren worked as labourers or artisans and none belonged to what are known as the "professional" classes...What a change the succeeding years have wrought amongst us in the sphere of education! The present generation offers a striking contrast with the situation a century ago....university training for the children of Christadelphians was virtually unheard of".³

An older generation of Christadelphians made a distinguished contribution to the advancement of the Truth and its literature. Most of these were Tekoites, not nobles. To which class do you belong? Those building two sections of the wall, or those half-hearted allies "who put not their necks to the work of their Lord?"

3:1-32 WORKMEN ON THE WALLS

Those who worked on the northern section of the walls had to rebuild it, but other sections of the wall were "repaired", (vs.4).¹ Persons especially noteworthy in the list include: Eliashib, vs. 1, Meremoth, vs. 4; Meshullam, vs. 4; Shallum, vs. 12;

Notice the occupational backgrounds:

priests (vs 1)
apothecaries ("perfumers", R.S.V.), (vs. 8),
administrators (rulers), (vs. 12),
Levites (vs. 17)
goldsmiths (vs. 31)
merchants (vs 32)

It is apparent that the workmen would be unaccustomed to the heavy² manual work of wall-building in a hot and dry Palestinian summer, amidst the dust and trying conditions of burnt stones and rubble. The famine conditions provided an additional severe test for the poor who were exploited by the rich (5:1-18); others collapsed under the arduous nature of the work (4:10). God was not as concerned with the walls (these were smashed a few years later by Antiochus) as with the kind of characters being fashioned by the trials of the times. From the divine point-of-view the wall-builders were in a divine university, and trial was the examination for passing or failing.

³Cyril Cooper, "The Household Today", *100 Years of the Christadelphian 1864-1964*, (Birmingham: The Christadelphian, 1964, p.34.)

¹This may be due to earlier rebuilding attempts in the northern sections of the wall (cf. Ezra 5:8 - "and timber is laid in the walls, and this work goeth fast on, and prospereth in their hands") or to the greater devastation in that area from the Babylonian attack under Nebuchadnezzar.

²Since the wall was finished in 52 days (25th day of the month Elul), it must have commenced the 3rd day of the 5th month - a time when ordinarily rains are not expected in Palestine.

3:1 *Eliashib* - Heb. "God is requiter", (Yg). He was prepared to work with his hands, but was, in effect, a traitor to the cause. His grandson married Sanballat's daughter (12:10-11). He had an apparent enthusiasm, but he did not even finish the wall outside his own house (3:20-21). Every other priest laboured to build the wall outside his own house (vs. 28) as well as his section of the wall, but not Eliashib. This is indicated by the fact that "Baruch.....repaired another section from the Angle to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him Meremoth.....[Heb. "strong; firm" Yg] repaired... from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of the house of Eliashib. After him the priests....repair!" (vs20-22).

The reason for his disaffection is indicated in his close ties with Tobiah. Eliashib was *related* to Tobiah ("allied unto Tobiah", A.V.; "connected with Tobiah", R.S.V.³ (Neh. 13:4-9).

It is hardly credible that Nehemiah could labour to build a wall to separate the Truth from apostasy, (esp. Samaritan apostasy), and the very High Priest of Israel allows the arch enemy to walk right through an *open gate* without shooting an arrow or slinging a stone. This was the tragic end of marriage with the alien. Wise Christadelphians indeed are those who have rejected such conduct as a defiance of the commandments of Christ. Laxity⁴ in this respect cannot be tolerated by those enlightened by the Truth.

the tower of Meah - "the Tower of the Hundred", R.S.V.. It is uncertain why it is a tower of the hundred - it may refer to a hundred men stationed there for defence, or it may relate to a dimension, (the Vulgate renders this "100 cubits").

Sheep Gate - Sheep would be brought through here from the sheep-raising areas of Moab and Eastern Palestine. The Gates of the wall are mentioned in 3 places:

- a) Nehemiah's nocturnal inspection (2:12-15)
- b) The diary account of the rebuilding (ch.3)
- c) The account of the dedication of the walls (12:31-43)

tower of Hananeel - Heb. "God is gracious", (Yg). Apparently this was the most northerly section of the wall, (Zech. 14:10; Jer. 31:38).

³The Heb. word "garoub" translated "allied", A.V.; "connected", R.S.V.; means "near" (Yg) and indicates a close connection cf. 13:28; 6:17-19. See flip-over draft which sets out the family connections.

⁴Did you notice how eager Eliashib was to build? He receives first mention. The ephemeral character of his work is reminiscent of the seed which fell into stony places, "the same is he that heareth the word, anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for awhile; for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended," (Matt. 13:20,21). The Christadelphian prepared only to give dollars to preaching work, but not his heart and soul is like Eliashib prepared to work, but not to grow spiritually.

3:2 *men of Jericho* - 345 returned under Zerubbabel (cf. Neh. 7:36; Ezra 2:34). Jericho had been given to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:21).

3:3 *the fish gate* - Fish would enter this gate from Tyre (13:16) and probably Joppa.

sons of Hassenaah - 3,930 (Neh. 7:38; Ezra 2:35).

the locks - Heb. "manul", "bolt", R.S.V.. Ancient gates turned upon pivots in sockets, instead of upon hinges.

3:4 *repaired* - Notice the shift from "build", Heb. "banah", "to build up", (Yg), to "repair", Heb. "chazaq", "to strengthen", (Yg).

Meremoth - Heb. "strong, firm", (Yg). He was a priest who repaired two sections of the wall (vs. 21). He returned with Zerubbabel (12:3), and weighed and registered the gold and silver for Ezra, (Ezra 8:33). He later sealed the covenant with Nehemiah (10:5).

Meshullam - Heb. "a friend, associate", (Yg). Meshullam was a son of Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:19). Perhaps this explains why Tobiah sought a marriage alliance through Meshullam's daughter. He was a notable priest who repaired two sections (3:4,30). He was prepared to work with his hands but lacked spiritual insight. He allowed his daughter to marry Johanan the son of Tobiah (6:18). Meshullam was in the very forefront of the work, even to the point of being one of the 13 priests and Levites to accompany Ezra on the raised wooden platform for the reading of the Law of Moses (8:4). His double-minded instability is indicated, however, by the fact that he could speak of the good deeds of Tobiah! (6:17-19). Meshullam only saw the sheep's clothing. He failed to discern the wolf-like claws and teeth of Tobiah which tore apart God's flock, (13:4-11; 28,29). Those who love righteousness must also *hate* iniquity.

3:5 *Tekoites repaired* - Tekoite, Heb. "firm, settlement" (Yg). These were workers from Tekoa, birthplace of Amos, 6 miles south of Bethlehem near Hebron. They laboured to build two sections of the wall (vs. 27). These common labourers set a notable example of dedication for their overseers. They did not use the lethargy and apathy of their nobles as an excuse to quit the work. The Truth's work was far greater than imperfect vessels used in its advancement.

but their nobles - Heb. "adderim", "honourable", (Yg) - "the great exalted upper class". The word is the same here as in 10:29; 2 Chron. 23:20, but differs from Heb. "chorim", "freemen, nobles", (Yg) which occurs in 2:16; 4:14; 5:7; 6:17; 7:5; 13:17. These nobles came from Tekoa which lay on the outskirts of the wilderness and so they may have sympathised with the Arabians represented by Geshem. There is no mention of Jews coming from Tekoa to assist the work in the time of Ezra. Perhaps Gentiles had held complete dominance there prior to the arrival of Nehemiah.

2. HALF-HEARTED BRETHREN - This is the 2nd. trial of Nehemiah. See outline suggested for Bible marking.

put not their necks to the work - The allusion is to yoked oxen. The nobles were allied to the enemy through marriage (6:17-19).

Wise ecclesias indeed are those which make separateness and purity of life in the Truth a foundation point of instruction for the young.

The nobles were like armchair Christadelphians who seemed to see all the problems, and a few of the solutions, but were unprepared to soil their hands or bend their backs in altruistic enterprizes to assist the actual work. They were too occupied in exploiting the poor by lending money to fellow Jews at interest rates. When the Jews were unable to repay the debts, their farms were mortgaged and their children taken as securities, (see ch. 5).

- 3:7 *Melatiah the Gibeonite* - probably a descendant of Gibeonites made "hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, even unto this day", (Josh. 9:27).

Gibeon - 4 miles N. of Jerusalem.

Mizpah - in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, (Josh. 18:26), 5½ miles north of Jerusalem.

governor - Heb. "pechah", "captain, viceroy" (Yg). The Persian king's representative in the province Beyond the River (Euphrates).

- 3:8 *goldsmiths* - These were priests whose hereditary office it was to repair or make sacred vessels for the Temple. Such could have stood on their dignity saying "such common labouring work is not for us".

apothecaries - "perfumers", R.S.V. These were expert mixers of ointment, (Ex. 30:25; 37:29). In hot countries the anointing of the head and/or feet with ointment or perfume was a recognized courtesy offered a distinguished guest,⁵ (Lk. 7:38, 46; Jn. 12:3). They were now involved in the arduous physical work. A good practical example of Rom. 15:1-3.

broad wall - It was doubly fortified but pulled down by Joash, (2 Kings 14:13; 2 Chron. 25:23), to render Jerusalem defenceless on the north. Hezekiah took special steps to strengthen the section, (2 Chron. 32:5).

- 3:9 *the half part of Jerusalem* - Shallum was the ruler of the other half of the city (vs. 12).

- 3:11 *tower of the furnaces* - "Tower of the Ovens", R.S.V. Heb. "tannur", "an oven", (Yg). These were used for baking bread.

- 3:12 *Shallum.....ruler of half the district of Jerusalem* - There was no social class distinction on the part of Shallum. He was probably the Shallum who put away his Gentile wife (Ezra 10:24).

Even daughters did the work of sons, a true family group! As the Apostle Paul put it: "Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary:....For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body.....", (1 Cor. 12:22; 12).

⁵Cambridge, *ibid.*, p.178.

3:13 *The Valley Gate* - Near the S.E. corner. Towers had been built here by Uzziah, (2 Chron. 26:9).

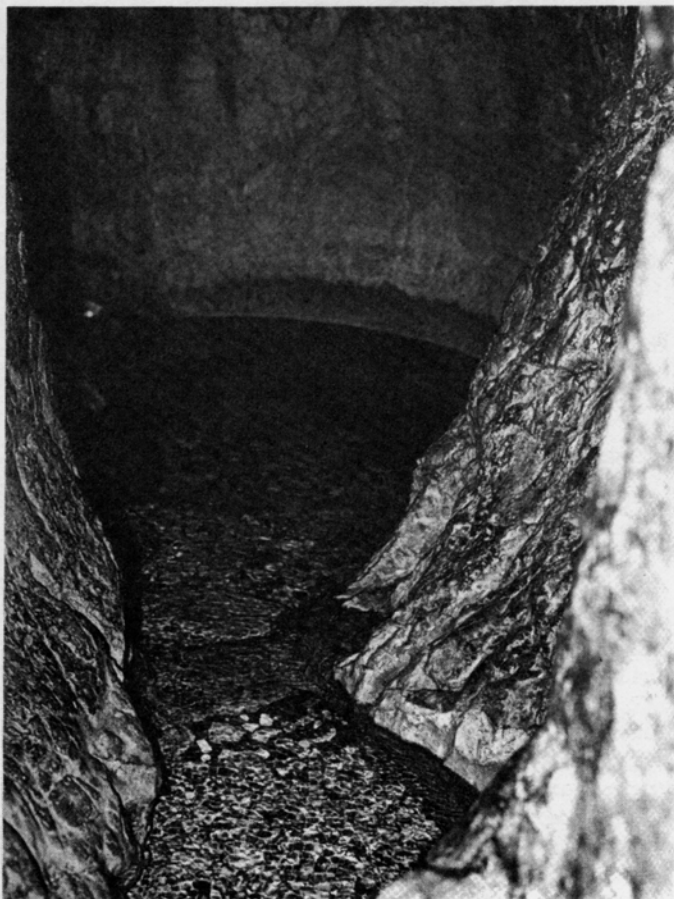
Zanoah - in the low country of Judah, 10 miles west of Jerusalem, (cf. Josh. 15:34).

3:14 *Malchiah* - "Yah is king", (Yg).

the son of Rechab - the Rechabites abstained from wine and lived apart from other Israelites, (Jer. 35:1-9). Yet Malchiah was ruler of part of Beth-haccerim, "place house of the vineyards", (Yg)!

3:15 *Pool of Siloah* - This was built by Hezekiah when beseiged by the Assyrian, Sennacherib, (2 Chron. 32:2-4 cf. Isa. 8:6). It was fed by a 1708' channel from the Virgin Spring.

the stairs that go down - i.e., Mt. Zion. The probably remains of these stairs have been found a little to the east of the Pool of Siloam.⁶ It provided access up the eastern slope of Zion and ended not very far from the square in front of the Valley Gate.



The Pool of Siloah

⁶See Cambridge, *ibid.*, p.182.

3:16 *sepulchre of David* - these were in Zion and on the S.E. side of Mt. Ophel, (2 Chron. 32:33).

3:17 *Hashabiah* - "Yah is associated", (Yg); chief of the Levites (12:24) who subscribed to the covenant, (10:11).

Keilah - in the plain of Judah, 8 miles N.W. of Hebron, (about 15 miles S.E. of Jerusalem).

3:19 *the armoury* - "at the turning of the wall", A.V. "at the Angle", R.S.V.. This was probably the house of armour that Hezekiah showed to the Babylonian ambassadors, (Isa. 39:2).

3:20 *Eliashib* - see note on 3:1.

3:22 *the priests, the men of the plain* - Priests and Temple workers, especially the singers (12:28) lived in the plain near Jerusalem.

3:23 *over against their house* - "repaired opposite their house", R.S.V.. The priests would have a special interest in building the wall next to their houses.

3:25 *the king's high house* - The wall here was found to be 14' thick at the base of the tower.

court of the prison - Jeremiah had been imprisoned there (Jer. 32:2; 33:1; 38:7,13).

3:26 *Ophel* - cf. 2 Chron. 27:3. According to Josephus it adjoined the Kidron Valley and the Temple Mount near Mt. Moriah.

the Water Gate - The gate bordered the Kidron Valley and was used by the Nethinim, (Temple servants taken from the conquered peoples) to bring the water into the city for use in the king's palace and the Temple.

3:27 *the great tower that lieth out* - "the projecting tower", R.S.V..

the wall of Ophel - Heb. "ophel", "the high place", (Yg).

3:28 *the Horse Gate* - This gate was S.E. of the Temple close to the House of David (2 Kings 11:16; 2 Chron. 23:15; Jer. 31:40).

3:29 *the East Gate* - East of the Temple.

⁷ The findings of Sir Charles Warren in Harper, *The Bible and Modern Discoveries*, p.509, quoted in *Cambridge Bible Commentary: The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, (Herbert Ryle, ed.), (Cambridge: At the Uni Press, 1901), p.186.

⁸ The Nethinim, Heb. "dedicated", (Yg). They were employed as servants or assistants to the Levites. The word first occurs in I Chron. 9:2. 612 Nethinim returned from Babylon (392 with Zerubbabel, Ezra 2:58; Neh. 7:60, and 220 with Ezra, Ezra 8:20). The Nethinim (like the Gibeonites, Josh. 9:17-27), appear to have been proselytes, (see Exod. 12:48; Deut. 29:11; Neh. 10:28).

3:30 *his chamber* - Heb. "nishkah", "lodging place", (Yg). It is the same word used for the store room provided for the tithes of fruit etc. for the Levites (12:44). These chambers were attached to the Temple building itself (13:4-5).

3:31 *Miphkad* - "Muster Gate", R.S.V.; "Registry Gate", Comp. Bible. Heb. "miphkad" is translated "appointed place" in Ezek. 43:21 which suggests that the sin offering might have been burned here.

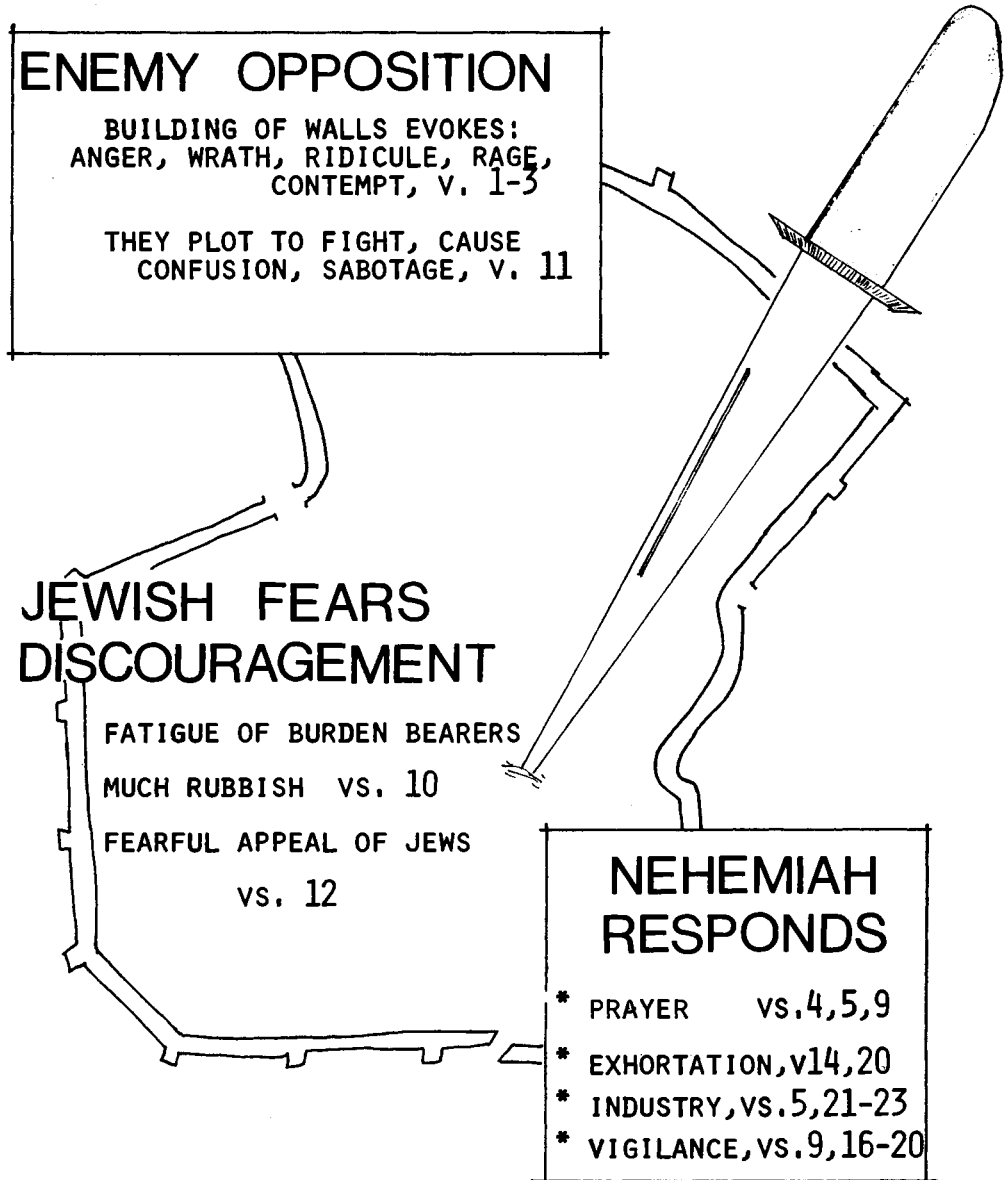
3:32 *unto the Sheep Gate* - Only 10 gates have been listed. The 2 others were the Gate of Ephraim (8:16) and the Prison Gate, or Gate of the Guard (12:39 cf. 3:25).

"I went out

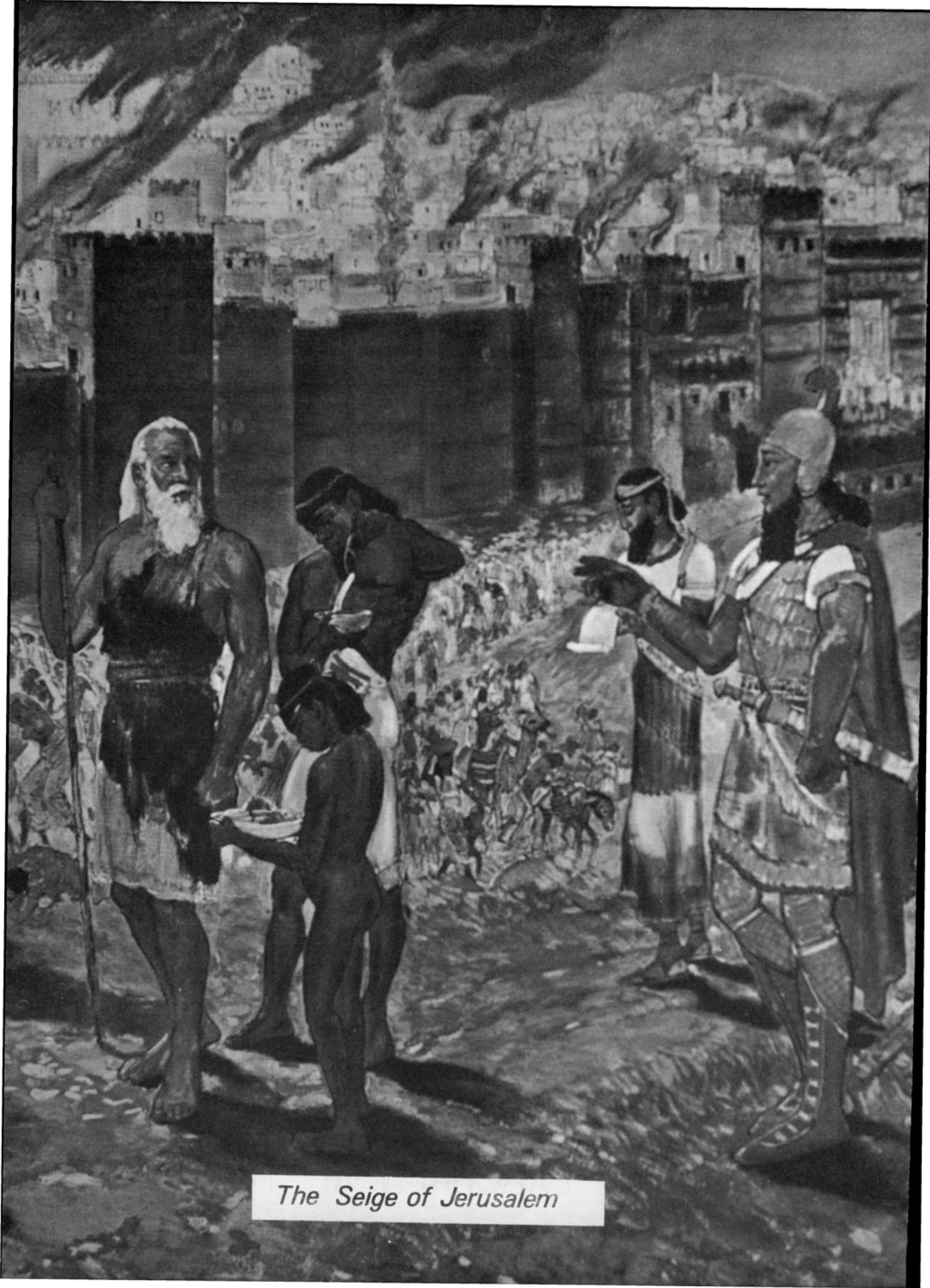


"I went out by night... and viewed the walls which were broken down" (2:13)

OUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US



SO WE LABOURED AT THE WORK



The Seige of Jerusalem

CHAPTER 4

"OUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US: SO WE LABOURED AT THE WORK"

This chapter portrays the most trying conditions imaginable for Nehemiah and his wall-builders. Many a lesser disciple would have thrown up his hands in despair and headed for the comforts of the Persian palace. To the immense problems of morale weakening derision, half-hearted brethren "who put not their necks to the work of their Lord", contempt, open opposition, discouragement and sabotage, was to be added the pressing matter of defence. Burden-bearers weakened by fatigue and disheartened by the huge amounts of rubbish were giving up in despair. To add to their plight, they were now required to carry a weapon in one hand and labour with the other. God did not lessen the difficulties merely because Nehemiah was engaged in God's work. Trial was to have its place in fashioning character.

There are few Christadelphians today prepared to leave the comforts of their Persian palace for the hardships and difficulties of the wall-building in the Jerusalem of the West Indies and South America (in this part of the world). All too often, family ties, job possibilities and the amenities of the American way of life are more appealing than the open door of preaching in the mission fields. Nehemiah was not only a man of faith and prayer, he was a man of action, prepared to do. Let us emulate his example! Many a Jerusalem awaits the Nehemiahs.

4:1-21 GENTILE OPPOSITION

3. CONTEMPT - This was Nehemiah's 3rd trial as indicated in the outline for Bible marking.

4:1 *Sanballat....was wroth, and took great indignation and mocked the Jews* - "he was angry and greatly enraged, and he ridiculed the Jews", R.S.V.. Nehemiah now faces his third trial - Contempt. Sanballat made his fiery speech before his fellow Samaritans and the *army* of Samaria, making it quite clear that anyone who harmed the Jews would find favour with him- a move that was sure to spell trouble for Nehemiah.

4:2 *what do these feeble Jews?* - To put it in contemporary terms - "Your ideas are too big!"

will they make an end ['finish up', R.S.V.] in a day? - "You won't be able to finish!".

stones out of the heaps of rubbish¹ that are burned² - The rubbish had to be removed, which weakened the burden-bearers (vs.10). The burnt stones were probably remains of the fires during Nebuchadnezzar's sack-ing of Jerusalem (See 2 Chron. 36:19).

¹Reviving the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish" is an appropriate description of the way in which God worked through John Thomas in the revival of the Truth 100 yrs. ago. The "feeble" effort of John Thomas was derided by Alexander Campbell and other religionists who were adversaries to the good work.

²"We....found that the old wall exists to the enormous depth of 125' below the rubbish, with stones of very great size", Sir. C. Warren, "The site of the Temple of the Jews", (Trans. Bibl. Arch. Vol.7), p.320.

if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall - Look at the results! (when the work had just begun). This disparaging comment really amounted to saying that their wall was so poorly built that a fox would break it down as easily as it would a vineyard fence (cf. Song of Solomon 2:15). It is easy to be a Sanballat or a Tobiah and treat good work with contempt in these days of small things. Oft-times unwittingly the same spirit is manifested when preaching work is opposed on the grounds that "people won't listen anyway", or "open-air work only draws the argumentative" and "if converts are made they'll be bigger problems in the Truth than if left alone".³

4:4-6 NEHEMIAH'S RESPONSE - PRAYER AND WORK

4:5 *cover not their iniquity* - This language is parallel to the imprecatory Psalms (139:19-24). This is not merely a vindictive spirit being uttered by Nehemiah. "They have provoked *thee* to anger" is the point of stress. Nehemiah's enemies were God's enemies.⁴

4:6 *So we built the wall*⁵ - It has been estimated that these had a height of 200' at the towers. The wall encircled the city to half its height, for the people "had a mind ['heart', Ro.] to work". This is the result when "the whole body is joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love", (Eph. 4:16, R.S.V.).

4:7-8 ENEMIES PLOT TO FIGHT

4:7 *Ashdodites* - Ashdod was one of the principal cities of the Philistines with Gaza, Gath, Ekron and Ashkelon. These were bitter enemies of the Jews. When apostasy set in through alien marriages, the children spoke the language of the Ashdodites rather than Hebrew, (13:23-25).

4. OPEN OPPOSITION - This was the fourth trial Nehemiah faced.

4:8 *And conspired ['plotted', R.S.V.] all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem* - Nehemiah now faced open opposition - opposition united by hatred. What was Nehemiah's reaction? "We made our prayer unto our God and set a watch ['a guard', R.S.V.] against them."⁶ Jesus similarly instructed his disciples to "watch and pray", (Matt. 26:41).

³Over 200 converts have been made through open-air preaching in the Sydney Domain, Australia, and a number of baptisms have resulted in Adelaide through similar work in Elder Park.

⁴The words of Ezekiel regarding Mt. Seir are a fitting description of Sanballat and his cohorts: "And thou shalt know that I am the LORD, and that I have heard all thy blasphemies which thou hast spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they are given us to consume. Thus with your mouth ye have boasted against me, and have multiplied your words against me: I have heard them". (Ezek. 35:12,13).

⁵Sir Charles Warren, "Trans. Bibl. Archaeology", vol. 7, p.320.

⁶Notice how relevant are the sentiments expressed by Asaph in Ps. 83.

to cause confusion - "confusion", Heb. "toah", "to make an injury", (Yg); "cause a miscarriage", Comp. Bible. Probably to encourage those who were already disaffected, and terrify the timid. Some of the workers would have to abandon the building for defence, and no doubt there would be unwilling workers who would gladly avail themselves of the pretext to be relieved from the exhausting nature of the work.

4:10-12 INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES

5. DISCOURAGEMENT - This was the fifth trial Nehemiah faced.

*The strength of the burden-bearers is failing (R.S.V.)*¹ - Lion-like Judah began to crumble under the belligerent opposition and heavy work. The fire of trial was discerning the durability of the builders. In this trial of discouragement Nehemiah was facing the weakening faith of fellow labourers. At such a crucial time in the rebuilding, think of how the words "we are not able to work on the walls" must have cut through Nehemiah! There was obviously a loss of faith on the part of Judah as they faced outright sabotage by infiltration. Nehemiah's trial of "fighting without and fear within" (2 Cor. 7:5, R.S.V.) serves to point out the fact that it is only through "much tribulation" that the kingdom is to be entered (cf. Acts 14:22).

6. SABOTAGE

4:11 *we will come in the midst among them and slay them* - This was Nehemiah's 6th trial - sabotage. There were few people on the wall and the scattered workers would be an easy target for Sanballat's army.

4:12 *Ten times* - probably figurative for constant repetition, (cf. Dan. 1:20). The Jews journeying daily to the work sites reported enemy preparations. Nearly all the workers lived in towns so that they had to commute daily to work, (cf. 7:4).

4:13-14 THE DEFENCE ORGANISED

4:13 *in the lower places behind the wall* - The defence preparations were not made to appear aggressive in intent (or was the design to disguise the paucity of the army to the enemy?).

4:14 *remember the Lord*² *which is great and terrible and fight* - Nehemiah assumes the role of the priest in exhorting the army before war, (See Deut. 20:1-4).

¹The labourers not only faced the rubbish and hostile adversaries "without", they now were discouraged "within", ("we are not able"). Such 2-fold pressure is characteristic of trial.

Those who attain the kingdom will "all have attained to it on the principle of voluntary obedience, motivated by faith, and maintained in opposition to incitements within, and encitements and pressure from without" John Thomas, *Eureka: An Exposition of the Apocalypse*, Vol. 1, (1963 ed. reset, reprinted in 1959), (Sparkhill: 1861, "The Christadelphian",) p.88.

²According to the Comp. Bible this should read "LORD" i.e. "Yahweh". It is one of the 134 Sopherim changes.

4:15-20 ENEMY PLANS THWARTED

4:15 *that God had brought their counsel to nought* - Nehemiah never failed to attribute his success to God's grace. This an example worthy of emulation today when affluence tends to weaken faith and encourage self-reliance.

my servants - Heb. "naar", "young person, youth, servant" (Yg): "a boy from infancy to adolescence", (Stg). These were the young men who constituted Nehemiah's personal servants.

Spears, Heb. "romach", "javelin, lance", (Yg).

habergeons - "coats of mail", R.S.V.

4:20 *Our God shall fight for us* - Nehemiah was alluding to the words of Moses in Deut. 1:30; 3:22 - "Ye shall not fear them: for the LORD your God he shall fight for you".

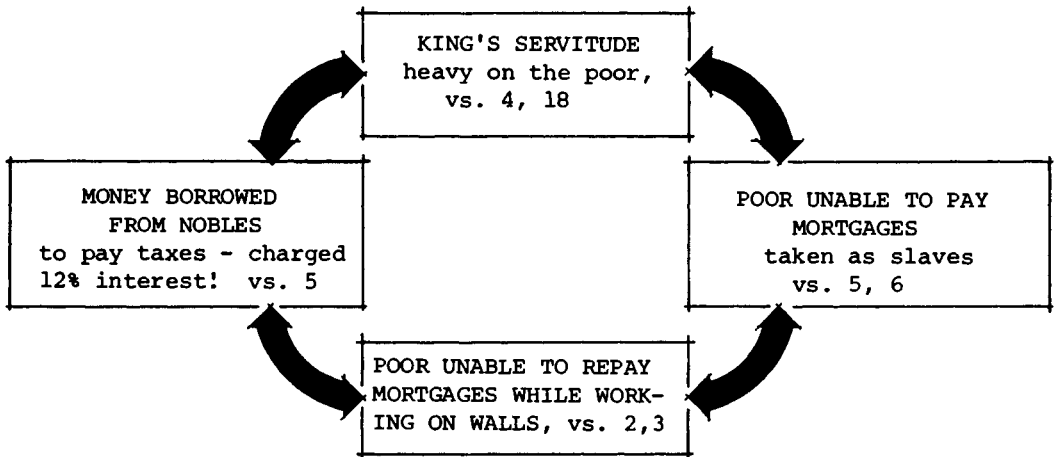
4:21-23 GOD BLESSES THE FAITH, PRAYER, VIGILANCE AND INDUSTRY OF THE WORKERS

4:22 *Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem* - This decision might also have had the purpose of stopping the intrigue of the disaffected (e.g. some of the nobles with the enemy). It placed all under surveillance, and hence better control for starting on time in the morning!

that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day - This was arduous work indeed - from "the break of dawn until the stars appeared" and then guard duty at night! (cf. vs21). Previous to this those who lived outside the city returned home nightly (cf. 11:1). But now, with armed attack imminent, Nehemiah never seemed to sleep! Often the work of the Truth deprived saints of their sleep. The Master continued all night in prayer and often rose "a great while before day" (Mk. 1:35). The Apostle Paul commented that often he had experienced sleepless nights. (2 Cor. 11:27 R.S.V.). Such were enduring "hardness as good soldiers". (2 Tim. 2:3). Perhaps today we should do a little redefining of hardness - chronic lateness for 9.45 a.m. Sunday School, and "hard done-by" attitudes to an occasional late-night for the Truth's work are in marked contrast to the spirit of Nehemiah. "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober". (1 Thess. 5:5-8).

4:23 *none of us put off our clothes saving that everyone put them off for washing* - The A.V. is interpretive (and is supported by Rotherham: "No one leaving them off, even for washing himself"). The sense seems to be that "No one took off his clothes (and none left the site of the wall) except to take his weapon (in the event of sudden attack) and take a drink of water."

NOBLES EXPLOIT POOR



A GREAT ASSEMBLY HELD:

1. Nobles indicted for exacting interest, vs. 7.
2. Acted like the nations, vs. 8.
3. Lacked the fear of God, vs. 9.
4. Restoration demanded, vs. 10-12.

NEHEMIAH AND PAUL (1 COR. 9) EXAMPLES OF INTEGRITY:

- * Both had rights.
- * Both refused to exercise them.
- * Precedents had been set by others.
- * Personally provided for others at own expense
- * Agapē conduct not appreciated or ignored by others.

THEY WALKED NOT
IN THE FEAR of GOD

CHAPTER 5

NOBLES EXPLOIT POOR

When the exiles arrived from Babylon 34 years earlier, they brought with them sufficient wealth to make a sizeable contribution of silver and gold for the building of the Temple (Neh. 7:71-72 cf. vs. 5).

These resources were drained by the excessive demands of former governors, the tax of the Persian King, and the famine conditions imposed by God because of the lethargy of the Jews in rebuilding the Temple (Hag. 1:9; Zech. 8:10). Relief was given by God (Hag. 2:19), but later drought conditions were reimposed (Neh. 5:3; cf. also Mal. 3:9-10) and were evident during the rebuilding of the walls. Poor Jews borrowed money from wealthier nobles at interest rates, (forbidden under the Law) on the security of their lands, vineyards, sons and daughters. While working a 12 hour shift on the walls, the poor were unable to earn money by attending to their farms. The nobles therefore, took their securities and a great outcry arose. (See flip-over draft on chapter 5).

It is fascinating to see the parallels between the experiences of Paul and Nehemiah:

1. *Both had "rights"* - Nehemiah had the right of a food allowance as the governor (5:18).

Paul had the rights of an apostle to be maintained by those to whom he ministered (1 Cor. 9).

2. *Both refused to exercise their rights out of principle* - Nehemiah saw that the servitude was heavy upon the people. He did not exercise his rights "because of the fear of God" (5:18,15).

Paul refused to be a burden ("chargeable") to any. He would give no opportunity for adversaries to the Truth to argue that he preached for money (1 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 11:7-12).

3. *Their fellow-workers acted in the same spirit* - The servants of the former governors, "lorded it over the people" (5:15, R.S.V.) but Nehemiah recounted, "neither I nor my brethren ate the food allowance of the governors" (5:14, R.S.V.)....and all my servants were gathered there (the wall) for the work".

The travel companions of Paul followed his example (e.g. Barnabas 1 Cor. 9:6) - See 2 Cor. 12:18: "Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?"

4. *Precedents had been set by others* - Former governors to Nehemiah had laid heavy burdens on the people (5:15).

The other apostles and brothers of the Lord had exercised their rights (1 Cor. 9:6,5).

5. *Provided for others* - Nehemiah had an open house which provided for 150 Jews and officials besides: "those who came to see us from the nations which were about us."

Paul likewise provided for his travel companions: "I have coveted no man's silver, gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." (Acts 20:33,34).

6. Their adversaries ignored their exemplary conduct - The nobles who "walked not in the fear of the Lord" sold Jews to the heathen (vs. 5:8 - dreadful conduct) while Nehemiah and his brethren were attempting to buy back their Jewish brethren from bondage. (5:8).

Paul, it was argued, could not be a real apostle since, unlike the other apostles, he engaged in manual work. The Judaisers however, were quite adept at seeking monetary advantage. (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-17, R.S.V.; 13:3; 11:6-9, 20, R.S.V.)

5:1-13 INTERNECINE STRIFE

7. INTERNECINE STRIFE - The exploitation of the poor by the wealthier nobles is the 7th trial faced by Nehemiah (See suggested Bible marking outline).

- 5:1 *There was a great outcry of the people* - See the relevant language of Isa. 5:7; Jas. 5:1-4.
- 5:2 *That we may eat and live* - This was a terrible indictment that the Jews delivered from *Gentile* bondage were now slaves of fellow *Jews*. The Law taught: "If thy brother be waxen poor, and ['his hand faileth', mg.] with thee; then thou shalt relieve him....Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase." (Lev. 25:35-38, cf also Exod. 22:25-27; Lk. 6:34-36).

It is evident that there was an immense spiritual regeneration required among the people that such a situation as this could arise at a time of great national crisis.

- 5:3 *we have mortgaged our lands* - in order to meet the King's tax levied by the Persian monarch. Conquest and control by Gentile powers was the punishment for disobedience prophesied in the Law (Lev. 26:17-18; Deut. 28:47-48). Ezra acknowledged this when he said, "Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that thou gavest to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins; they have power also over our bodies and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress", (Neh. 9:36-37, R.S.V.). The poor unable to work for money while labouring all day on the wall were losing their farms and their children which were taken as securities when mortgage payments could not be met. The securities were taken by the nobles - fellow Jews. Nehemiah was rightly, "very angry".
- 5:7 *Then I consulted with myself* - It is not always that men are as wise as Nehemiah to take counsel with oneself before taking action when warm with anger,¹ (cf Jas. 1:19; Eph. 4:26).

¹"Angry", Heb. "charah", "to burn, be heated", (Yg).

I rebuked the nobles - "I brought charges against the nobles" R.S.V. "Rebuked", Heb. "rib", "to strive, plead" (Yg); "contend, strive", (Gesenius, p. 767). In the defence of God's Law, Nehemiah was prepared to "earnestly contend", Christadelphians have a similar obligation today (Jude 3).

5:9 *because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies* - Not only was it in itself a dreadful sin to sell a fellow Jew into Gentile bondage, such conduct was reprehensible for the additional reason that it gave opportunity for the enemies of God to blaspheme. Israel had been commanded: "Keep them the statutes and ordinances and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people!' For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us,....And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law....?" (Deut. 4:6-8). The callous attitude of the nobles was the same attitude which profaned God's name among the nations and had earlier brought the terrible judgments of God on the nation through the Babylonian armies (cf. Ezek. 36:20-23).

ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God - It is only "by the fear of the LORD that men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6). Nehemiah was alluding to Deut. 10:12; Lev. 25:36. Human nature being what it is, requires the fear of failure or punishment as well as the offer of blessing and rewards. The fear of God enhances reverence - a godly attribute befitting the relationship of weak, sinful mortals before their Creator. The circumspection in Nehemiah's godly conduct is said to be "because of the fear of God." (5:15). Of what value was it to build a wall to keep the alien and the world outside and then to act like the alien inside the wall?

5:10 *leave off this usury* - Usury, not the lending of money was condemned. The nobles had evidently planned to make a gain out of the loans to the poor whether by demanding interest upon loans or seizing the pledge which had been the security for the loans.

5:11 *the hundreth part of the money....corn, wine and oil* - The nobles were required to return both principal and interest. It is probable that³ the interest was charged monthly, which would make it 12% per annum. Nehemiah was careful to bring a great assembly against the nobles. He was well aware of their half-hearted support (3:5) and no doubt knew of their 5th columnist activities with Tobiah (6:17-19). The exorbitant rate of interest was exacted in kind ("grain, wine and oil"), if cash was not forthcoming. The great assembly endorsed his position of authority and his standards of integrity. It would also work to prevent the formation of a rich and influential clique against himself. The public assembly would bring to bear the whole weight of the aggrieved community. In sad circumstances others would fear as they witnessed the indictment of the nobles (cf. Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding the elders: "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear". (1 Tim. 5:20)).

³"The hundreth part. Paid at one percent, per month, as was the custom: it was twelve percent, per annum". *Comp. Bible*, p. 639.

5:12 *Then I called the priests* - These were probably selected as witnesses to see that the matter was finalized properly.

5:13 *I shook my lap* - This symbolic act invoked a curse on the dishonest and those who disregarded the instruction.

Amen - "so be it, firm, faithful and sure" cf. Deut. 7:9; Isa. 65:16; Psa. 19:17. The people did as they had promised and so unity on the basis of purity was once again manifest in the congregation.

5:14-19 NEHEMIAH'S EXAMPLE OF INTEGRITY

5:14 *Governor* - Heb. "pechah", "captain, viceroy" (Yg). Bread, wine and other food were to be supplied for the Governor by the people under his jurisdiction.

two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the King - Nehemiah refused to the provisions which were his right, nor did his brethren eat the food allowance of the governor.

5:15 *the former governors* - Precedents had been set by former governors - those who followed Zerubbabel the 1st governor after the exile, (Ezra 2:1-2; Hag. 1:1) and these had even taken an additional 40 shekels of silver. But not so Nehemiah, nor his servants. All his house was in order.

5:16 *neither bought we any land* - Nehemiah refused to profiteer like the nobles. He did not buy up cheap land because of the crisis conditions, nor did he operate in disguise through his servants. All his servants were gathered there for the work.

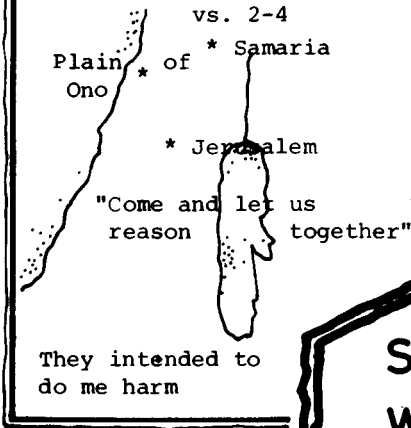
5:17 *beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us* - Nehemiah kept an "open-house" at his own expense. He was "distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality", (Rom. 12:13).

5:18 *Yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor* - "yet with all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor" R.S.V. Nehemiah saw that the servitude was already heavy upon the people, but this fact meant little to the spiritually impoverished, money-grabbing nobles. Nehemiah gave in the spirit of Luke 6:33,35: "And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same, but.....do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again....."

5:19 *Think upon me, my God* - "Remember for my good, O my God", R.S.V. Nehemiah did not desire reward from man.

I AM DOING A GREAT WORK

FALSE FRIENDSHIP



SCANDAL

v. 5-9

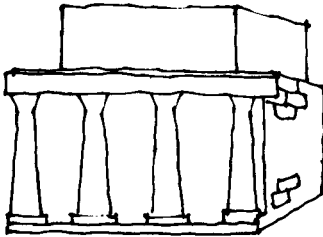
'You intend to rebel and become king'

"No such things have been done"

SO THE WALL
WAS FINISHED
IN
52 DAYS!
v 15 - 16

FEAR

vs. 10-14



FALSE PROPHECIES:

- They are coming to kill you; let us meet in the house of God.
"Should such a man as I flee?
I will not go in!"

TREASON

vs. 17-19

SAMARIA

JERUSALEM

Tobiah ----- daughter of Shecaniah

Jehohanan ----- daughter of Meshullam

NOBLES OF JUDAH
"ALLIED UNTO TOBIAH"

"O GOD STRENGTHEN THOU MY HANDS"

CHAPTER 6

"I AM DOING A GREAT WORK"

By this time the wall of Jerusalem was looking impressive. The valleys of Jerusalem would have echoed to the ring of hammers, shouts of instruction and the chatter of thousands in their working parties. Such success was regarded with malicious ill-will by the confederate adversaries outside, and by disaffected workers inside. Some of the original workers had defected (6:18-19) finding no scope for financial gain or present glory in the pursuit of the project. As the breaches in the wall were filled, the rubbish cleared and the huge beams set in place for the gates, collusion between certain nobles and Tobiah became unequivocal. Conspiracy and corruption were exposed and Nehemiah, clad in the armour of faith, continued his great work unabated until the wall was completed in an amazing 52 days!

In times of trial it is sometimes difficult to see that victory may be just ahead. You may have 52 days of determined and dedicated building left in your life and God may only have given you 53 days in which to accomplish it. There is an urgency about our work in the Truth: "I am doing a great work and I cannot stop!"

6:1-4 SANBALLAT DESIRES A CONFERENCE - NEHEMIAH REFUSES TO LEAVE THE WORK

8. FALSE FRIENDSHIP - This is the 8th trial faced by Nehemiah as suggested in the Bible marking outline.

6:2 *Come, let us meet together in....the plain of Ono* - Contempt, threatened open opposition and sabotage having failed, the adversaries now with the guise of friendship, desire to have a conference in the plain of Ono (a village in Benjamin S.E. of Joppa).

they thought to do me mischief [harm, R.S.V.] - Once Nehemiah left Jerusalem, he might be either murdered or kidnapped by the adversaries. Their "friendly" approach was only pretence.

6:3 *I am doing a great work so that I cannot stop* - What a response! If only we could answer the call to play the fool or dabble with the world with Nehemiah's response!

This was a tactful response, carefully worded so as not to impute a motive which might have brought on an armed attack. There was no assumed arrogance on the part of Nehemiah despite his astounding successes.

6:4 *Yet they sent unto me four times* - Nehemiah refused to be swayed or pressured.

6:5-9 THE SCANDALOUS OPEN LETTER

9. SCANDAL - AN OPEN LETTER - Nehemiah now faced his 9th trial.

6:5 *an open letter* - The etiquette of the time required a letter to a governor to be presented in a silken bag and sealed. The very fact that the letter was open was an insult to Nehemiah. The fact that it was unsealed was obviously aimed at making the contents public. If it influenced enough of the Jews, it might *force* Nehemiah to a meeting.

*Gashmu*¹ saith it - "Geshem also says it", R.S.V. The point here is that the report is no rumour since even Geshem says that you intend to rebel and so set yourself up as king. This was an old charge successfully invented earlier (Ezra 4:12-16) to stop the work. It was later invoked against Christ. (Luke 23:2).

- 6:7 *thou hast also appointed prophets* - This was exactly what the adversaries did (vs. 12,13) - hired false prophets to defame Nehemiah. There may also have been the misrepresentation of Zechariah's earlier prophecy: "Behold thy King cometh!" (Zech. 9:9). (This Messianic prophecy referring to Christ may have been wrested to allege that Nehemiah was teaching that it applied to himself.)

and shall it be reported to the King according to these words - This was intimidation of the highest order: "Either come to terms with us or we'll report this information to the Persian King."

- 6:8 *There are no such things done as thou sayest* - Such a slanderous intimidation now meets an abrupt dismissal by Nehemiah: "You are inventing them out of your own mind." R.S.V.
- 6:9 *For they all made us afraid* - R.S.V. is better: "For they all *wanted* to [supported by R.V.] frighten us." Nehemiah wisely discerned their true intention and placed his confidence in his God: "But now, O God, strengthen thou my hands". R.S.V.

Their hands shall be weakened - This had been the intention of the earlier adversaries to the work of Zerubbabel and Joshua "Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah and troubled them in building" (Ezra 4:4). Nehemiah "encouraged himself in the LORD his God" and prayed: "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands". His experiences parallel those of David (Psa. 56:1-4).

6:10-14 APPEAL TO FEAR

10. FEAR - Nehemiah faced his 10th trial. The appeal to fear was part of a smear campaign directed against his character.

- 6:10 *Shemaiah* - "Yah is fame" (Yg). He was only of a group of false prophets (vs. 14) who were evidently disaffected at the success of Nehemiah in restoring Jerusalem.

Methetabel - "God is doing good" (Yg).

was shut up - It is not definitely known what is meant by this. It appears that he was confined to his home. (See Jer. 36:5 - perhaps a parallel).

let us shut the doors of the temple - It is important to note that the Temple at this time had been erected proving that chronologically Nehemiah comes *after* Ezra, and not before Ezra as some commentators allege (e.g. Bullinger, *Companion Bible*).

¹See A.V. mg. "Geshem", the same person as 2:19.

6:11 *Should such a man as I flee?* - As the leader in the rebuilding work, with confidence in God to strengthen his hand, how could he flee to save his own skin? It was probably the design of the enemy that Nehemiah would be assassinated when caught without his guard in the Temple. Not being a priest he had no right to enter the temple (cf. Num. 18:7; 2 Chron. 26:16-20), yet Shemaiah implied that the advice he was giving as a prophet was sufficient sanction to absolve the act of profanation. In other words the safety of the Governor is of more importance than a tenet of divine instruction! (Consider parallel examples in 1 Kings 22:11; Jer. 28:10).

6:12 *I perceived that God had not sent him* - "By their fruits ye shall know them". (Matt. 7:15-20). The Law had set out the criterion by which to evaluate the claims of a prophet (Deut. 13:1-4). (Note the relevant parallels in Ezek. 13:22; Jer. 23:16).

for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him - That such a situation could arise indicates the amount of collusion which existed between the nobles and the enemy. Their marriage ties would provide a pretext to report to Tobiah (vs. 17-19) and arrange such a treacherous manoeuvre. Methetabel was a Judas (Jn. 3:19,20) evidently hostile to Nehemiah's restoration of Jerusalem. He was a successor to the hired counsellors by the adversaries in the time of Zerubbabel (Ezra 4:1-5).

6:13 *for an evil report* - objective here seems to have been to at least salvage defamation of Nehemiah's character in the eyes of those loyal to him within the walls by his illicit entering of the Temple.

that they might reproach me - "Reproach", Heb. "charaph", "taunt", R.S.V.; "to expose as by stripping" (Stg). Such a malicious intent suggests an aggrieved group within the nobles who were still smarting from their exposure and indictment in the great assembly (Ch. 5) and their restricted profiteering. In a vindictive spirit they would be more than willing (for a few shekels!) to defame and disgrace Nehemiah.

6:15-16 THE WALL COMPLETE

Elul - August - September; the work was begun therefore, on the 3rd day of the 5th month. This was the same month in which Nebuchadnezzar had sacked the city and destroyed its wall about 85 years earlier, (2 Kings 25:8-10).

52 days - When it is realized that the wall was $2\frac{1}{2}$ - 3 miles in length, requiring huge scaffolding and using many burned stones (which probably required chipping to make the mortar adhere), the immense significance of the accomplishment can be appreciated. How many times the position must have appeared hopeless to the builders. If there were approximately 40 building sections (ch. 3) then each building party would have averaged about 80 yards apiece, (allowing 2 miles of wall).

6:16 *they were much cast down in their own eyes* - "and fell greatly in their own esteem" - i.e. "they lost face".



Excavations at Jerusalem that show
a section of the wall of Nehemiah.

this work was wrought of our God - cf. Psa. 126:1,2: "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them'". Those who sowed in tears reaped in joy. It was a vivid illustration of the principle - "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain". (Psa. 127:1).

6:17-19 TREASON: MARRIAGES WITH THE ALIEN

11. TREASON - This was the 11th trial faced by Nehemiah, See Bible marking outline.

- 6:17 *the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah* - These were the 5th columnists who should have been examples to the others. There had been many marriages with the alien (Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:23) as a result many were bound by an oath to Tobiah. At this stage in the work Sanballat's opposition goes unmentioned except by indirect reference in 13:28 and Tobiah assumes the prominence in the remaining chapters.
- 6:18 *Meshullam* - See note on 3:4. Although apparently a prominent priest throughout the rebuilding work, he lacked spiritual discernment of the true intentions of Tobiah, and bound himself with an oath to Tobiah through the marriage of his daughter to Jehohanan the son of Tobiah.
- 6:19 *They reported his good deeds before me* - Once marriage with the alien and oaths with the adversary had been undertaken, it was a short step to see good in Tobiah. Prov. 28:4 is appropriate: "They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them". All the while Nehemiah was probably reproved for being too harsh, too unyielding and too severe.

CHAPTER 7

THE REGISTER OF RETURNED EXILES

Although the wall was complete and the principle of separateness from the world established physically, all was still not well. Stones, timber and iron cannot regenerate hearts given to intrigue, disaffection and worldliness. There lay ahead the difficult task of education in the Law of God. Separateness from the world had to be accompanied by purity - sanctification to the things of God. The register of those who returned could establish family genealogy and hence qualification for the priesthood. Then, too, many a man who has shown himself a genius in mastering a crisis has been a failure in the follow-up work. Could those who worked so assiduously be educated in divine matters? Consolidation was now urgently required.

PART 11

SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

7:1-4 SECURITY REGULATIONS

7:1 *porters* ['gatekeepers', R.S.V.] *and the singers and the Levites* - They had to do double service - guard the city as well as serve the Temple. This was necessitated because of the scanty population (7:4), (and the unreliability of others? cf. 7:2).

my brother Hanani - Heb. "gracious" (Yg). Nehemiah's brother brought him information about conditions in Jerusalem. He probably returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem. See note on 1:2. It was essential that Nehemiah have men of proven integrity and loyalty in high administrative posts.

Hananiah - "Jah is gracious". He was probably the son of one of the perfumers (3:8) or possibly a son of Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:19). He was a "more faithful and God-fearing man than many" - the "truth's own man" (Comp. Bible)¹. This is a further indication of the spiritual wickedness in high places manifested in the assembly.

7:3 *and appoint watches* - cf. Ezek. 33 for their responsibilities.

7:4 *Now the city was large and great* - "wide and large", R.S.V.

the people within it were few - Most exiles would have little inclination to build amidst the rubble. They would prefer the towns and villages where agriculture could be undertaken (7:73). Nearly all of the workers therefore, were commuters.

¹The Companion Bible, p.640. An interesting point is made in the Comp. Bible that "Hanani, and Hananiah" should be read "Hanani, *even* Hananiah". The Heb. word "Vav", "ו" sometimes has the force of "even". See note on point 2 in "Chronology", "Artaxerxes = Ahasuerus". This identification is further suggested by the fact that Hananiah is not listed among those who signed the covenant in Ch. 10. Would such a notable person fail to sign the covenant?



RELEASE OF JEWS FROM PERSIA

and the houses were not builded - "no houses had been built" R.S.V. - Nebuchadnezzar had burned the city with fire (2 Kings 25:9). Apparently a building program had not yet been initiated in the city, although rebuilding had been undertaken in the surrounding towns, sometimes to the point of extravagance (Hag. 1:4) with cedar panelling.

7:5-73 THE REGISTER OF RETURNED EXILES

7:5 *And my God put into mine heart* - In all his ways Nehemiah acknowledged God. Probably the work was undertaken through prophetic instruction. God said he would "do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets". (Amos 3:7).

a register.....of them which came up at the first - i.e. those who returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1). (A register of the genealogies had been kept - 1 Chron. 9:1; Matt. 1).

7:7 *Azariah* - Seraiah in Ezra 2:2.

7:39-42 THE REGISTER OF THE PRIESTS

7:43-45 THE REGISTER OF THE LEVITES

7:46-56 THE REGISTER OF THE TEMPLE SERVANTS (NETHINIM)¹

7:57-60 THE SONS OF SOLOMON'S SERVANTS

7:61-65 PRIESTS WITH UNPROVEN DESCENT

7:62 *Tobiah* - Possibly "Tobiah the Ammonite" (2:10). If this identity could be established it might explain the hostility of Tobiah, an inveterate enemy of the work. As a debarred priest, he sought Nehemiah's ruin. Tobiah's sons could not prove their father's house, nor descent, whether they belonged to Israel.²

7:63 *was called after their name* - Barzillai was a wealthy and honoured prince of Gilead (2 Sam. 17:27). They chose a Gentile relationship rather than delighting in their selection as priests in Israel. They thereby disgraced the priesthood and were debarred from serving as priests.

the Tirshatha - "the governor" A.V. mg.; R.S.V.. A title of Persian origin - "the fear, the reverence" (Yg). The title was also given to Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:63).

¹See 3:26 footnote. To hold an official position in the Temple, even although a menial one was to be exempt from the Persian tax (Ezra 7:24).

²Against this connection consider the following: Tobiah was certainly in the land when Nehemiah arrived (2:9-10). He did not come up from areas of captivity in Babylon, why then should his sons? It would also be very unlikely that the priesthood would be sought by Tobiah's sons while he was such an inveterate enemy of the work. Further why would one of the "priestly" station be "the servant" of Sanballat? How could an *Ammonite* be both an Ammonite and a Levite? (The latter being a prerequisite for the priesthood).

the most holy things - "the most holy food" R.S.V.; i.e. tithes for the Levites (cf. 10:32-39).

Urim - "Lights" (Yg).¹

Thummim - "perfection" (Yg) See Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21. Nehemiah's decision to let the matter (the purity of the priests with unproven descent) rest with God through a priest with Urim and Thummim would take much of the personal sting out of the decision.

7:66-69 THE STATISTICS OF THE ASSEMBLY

A comparison of the register with Ezra 2 indicates the following:

42,360; same total as in Ezra 2:64. But Ezra gives 494 not listed by Nehemiah and Nehemiah gives 1,765 not listed by Ezra. The comparison might be summarised as follows:

Ezra's Register

29,818
1,765 (named in Nehemiah, but not in Ezra)
<hr/>
31,583

Nehemiah's Register

31,089
494 (named in Ezra, but not in Nehemiah)
<hr/>
31,583

The total 31,583 leaves a deficiency of 10,777 from the total in Ezra and Nehemiah (42,360). Probably these were mixtures of the 10 tribes. The Register only recorded those from Judah and Benjamin. Exiles returned from all Israel. (cf. Ezra 2:70; 6:17; 8:35; Neh. 7:73).

7:70-73 GIFTS TO THE PRIESTS

gave to the treasure - A comparison with Ezra 2:68-69 indicates that different values are given. The difference is Nehemiah's inclusion of the Governor's gift and "the rest of the people" not included in Ezra's evaluation of what only *one* portion gave. The great wealth amassed indicates that God had blessed the exiles while in Babylon. (cf. Deut. 8:17-18).

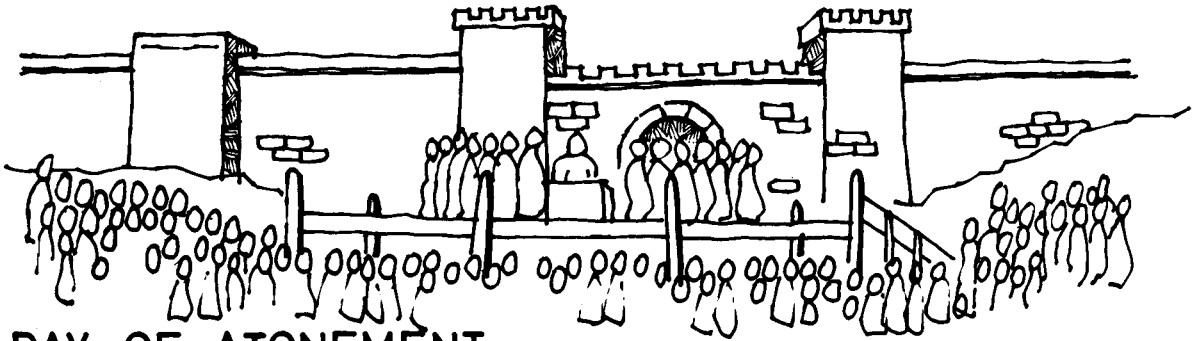
¹Two views have been presented on how Urim and Thummim operated. Urim - innocence; Thummim - guilt. It has been conjectured that 2 stones, black on one side and white on the other were kept in a pouch in the ephod. 2 black stones when cast indicated a negative response; 2 white stones, a positive response. 1 white and 1 black indicated no response. See "Urim & Thummim", James Hasting (ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), p.1020. Another view is that Urim relates to the individual glistening of the 12 stones on the breast plate of the High Priest and the Thummim, a combined brightness of all 12 stones. This view is set out by John Thomas, *Eureka* Vol. 2 pp.313-314. The following Bible passages should be checked: Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; 1 Sam. 14:41; 23:3; 30:7; 2 Sam. 2:1.

The JERUSALEM BIBLE SCHOOL.

BLOWING OF TRUMPETS.

- * They gathered as one man
- * Law read morning - midday

- * people mourn, rejoice
- * send portions, feast



DAY OF ATONEMENT.

"ALL THE PEOPLE WENT THEIR WAY REJOICING BECAUSE
THEY HAD UNDERSTOOD THE WORDS DECLARED UNTO THEM"

FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

- A SABBATH

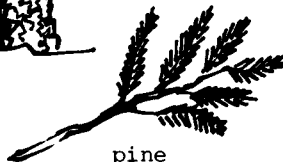
- 7 days in booths of olive, pine,
myrtle - a memorial of deliverance
from Egypt



olive



pine



myrtle



palm



SOLEMN ASSEMBLY.

- A SABBATH

"THERE WAS VERY GREAT REJOICING"

CHAPTER 8

THE JERUSALEM BIBLE SCHOOL

The 7th month was the most important month in the Jewish calendar. Note the following:

- 1st day - the Feast of Trumpets (See Lev. 23)
- 10th day - the Day of Atonement
- 15th day - the Feast of Tabernacles
- 22nd day - the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles
- 24th day - Solemn Assembly

The free giving of self was now required in things spiritual. Separation from the aliens and giving of possessions (7:70-72) must be followed by sanctification to the things of God. In the great square before the Water Gate, all Israel gathered as "one man" to initiate a glorious spiritual revival within God's people. The Study of the Law evoked such a moving response in the Jews that the whole month has been called the "Jerusalem Bible School".

8:1 *Ezra* - It is noteworthy that the High Priest, Eliashib goes unmentioned in this chapter. His defection was probably obvious by this time that he was clearly in the camp of the adversary with little interest in a spiritual revival. What better substitute than Ezra? He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:6) and distinguished by the fact that he "had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel". (Ezra 7:6,10, R.S.V.). It is not certain whether Ezra had returned to Persia before Nehemiah's arrival. The immense apostasy evident on Nehemiah's arrival suggests that he was in Persia and returned to Jerusalem after the wall was completed. (It appears that he might have left Jerusalem to submit a report to the king Ezra 7:14).¹

8:2 *Ezra the priest* - the priest was the respected teacher in Israel: ".... the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the LORD of hosts". (Mal. 2:7 cf. 2 Chron. 17:7-10).

congregation - "assembly" R.S.V.; LXX, "ecclesia". This was the ecclesia of God in the Old Testament period.

all that could hear with understanding - Note also this stress in vs. 3 - Hence "all the people were attentive". Imagine the stillness of the great multitude for the aged Ezra to be heard (without amplification!).

the first day of the seventh month - This month commenced with the Feast of Trumpets. The Day of Atonement followed 10 days after. It called the nation to awake!

8:3 *the street* - "the square", R.S.V.

from the morning - A.V. mg: Heb. "from the light"; "from early morning until midday". Some study was this - at least 3 hrs! (cf. 9:3).

¹There was a 13 yr. interval from Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem until Nehemiah arrived. (cf. Ezra 7:7; Neh. 2:1).

- 8:4 *pulpit of wood* - A.V. mg: "Heb. tower of wood"; a raised wooden platform to elevate Ezra above all the people (vs.5). Obvious, thoughtful planning, had gone into this special effort to ensure that everything was done to facilitate the instruction.

Meshullam - See comment on 3:4

- 8:5 *and when he opened it all the people stood up* - A respectful posture (Job 29:8). This was also done when Solomon blessed the congregation of Israel at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:14). There were no carpets, or heat fans or comfortable pews to pamper these Jews.

- 8:6 *Amen, Amen* - See note on (5:13).

with lifting up their hands - Like the incense ascending (cf. Psal. 141:2). Probably the same association in 1 Tim. 2:8. (Notice the association of prayer and incense in Rev. 5:8; 8:3,4).

- 8:8 *to understand the law* - The reading was almost certainly in Hebrew. Probably many would not be able to understand this language and hence the Levites would be employed as translators as well as expounders. No doubt Hebrew would have lapsed into disfavour during the 70 yr. captivity.

distinctly - Heb. "parash", "clearly" R.S.V., "with an interpretation" R.S.V. mg; R.V. mg.

sense - Heb. "sekel" "understanding, wisdom", (Yg); "intelligence, prudence" (Gesenius).

understand - Heb. "bin", "to understand, consider", (Yg). The whole assembly emphasized right understanding.

8:9-12 PEOPLE MOURN, BUT TOLD TO REJOICE

- 8:9 *For all the people wept* - The reading and exposition of the law deeply moved the people. No doubt, the remorse would be evident in all but those whose hearts were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The Word "mixed with faith" was able to work effectually in those who believed. The result - they came back the next day for more Scripture reading and study! (vs. 13). Those who sorrowed because they had not kept the Law, now rejoiced because they understood it.

- 8:10 *fat* - Heb. "mashmannim", "a rich dish" (Yg); "fat, oily substances" (Ges.); not Heb. "cheleb", "best part, marrow" (Yg) in Lev. 7 which refers to animal fat. This was forbidden to be eaten by Israelites since it belonged to God.

send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared - i.e., especially the Levite who depended upon tithes (Deut. 15:7-11; 26:11-13) but also the poor. The joy had a practical focus! Note the instruction of Jesus in Lk. 1 6:32-36. This is a true giving - not expecting to receive again.

¹One of the most notable examples of giving in Scripture was that of the Philippians. See 2 Cor. 8:9; 11:8,9.

How often do you invite those with "no portion" only back to a Sunday dinner? Is your table open to a clique - those who share your social class background? There are those in our ecclesias with few close friendships perhaps because of their own idiosyncracies - do you have time for these? Unwittingly, we can neglect "the least of these" - "Christ's brethren", and fail to give a portion. Those who have their senses exercised by reason of use will not miss such opportunities. As the Master said "it is more blessed to give than to receive".

for the joy of the LORD is your strength - In times of sadness when "the heart knows its own bitterness" (Prov. 14:10), it is only the joy and comfort of the Truth that can sustain a man. It is the wise indeed who prepare their hearts to study God's Law to renew the inner man daily.

8:12 *mirth* - "rejoicing", R.S.V. Those who sowed in tears, reaped in joy. Israel was instructed to "rejoice in thy feast" (Deut. 16:13,14).

because they had understood the words that were declared unto them - What a contrast the giving to those "for whom nothing is prepared" presented to the earlier conduct of the nobles (Chpt. 5). The power of the Word of God once inscribed upon the fleshy tablets of the heart can move mortal men to do what under ordinary circumstances would have been unthinkable.

8:13-18 THE 2ND DAY OF STUDY: THE KEEPING OF THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

8:14 *dwell in booths* - This feast began on the 15th day of the 7th month and lasted 7 days. Its purpose was to recall the wilderness wanderings and deliverance from Egypt. (Lev. 23:34-42; Deut. 16:13,15; Num. 29:12-40). It was an appropriate occasion since it was a time of thanksgiving for God's overshadowing providence in delivering the workers from their enemies.

Go forth.....as it is written - This was the principle of implementation - following Ezra's example who "had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it". This must be the objective in all study - to do! - otherwise the student is a myrtle tree growing in the desert. He helps no one else.

8:16 *upon the roof of his house* - Flat roofs probably were designed as a place of prayer. (cf. Deut. 22:8).

8:17 *Israel had not done so* - Joshua and Zerubbabel kept the Feast (Ezra 3:4) as did Solomon (2 Chron. 8:13) but there was no mention in those passages of living in booths. The uniqueness of the Feast held by Nehemiah and Ezra might relate to the strictness in obeying the Law.

there was very great gladness ["rejoicing", R.S.V.] - The rejoicing intended in this Feast (8:9) was a marked contrast to the affliction of the Day of Atonement, (Lev. 23:32,40).

8:18 *He read in the book of the law of God* - There was no specific command to read the law at the Feast of Tabernacles. This was either spontaneous or a sabbatical year (see Deut. 31:10,11) - the year of release or Jubilee.¹

The daily reading and study was just like a Bible School.

a solemn assembly - No servile work was permitted (Num. 29:35-39). Full attention was required for the occasion.

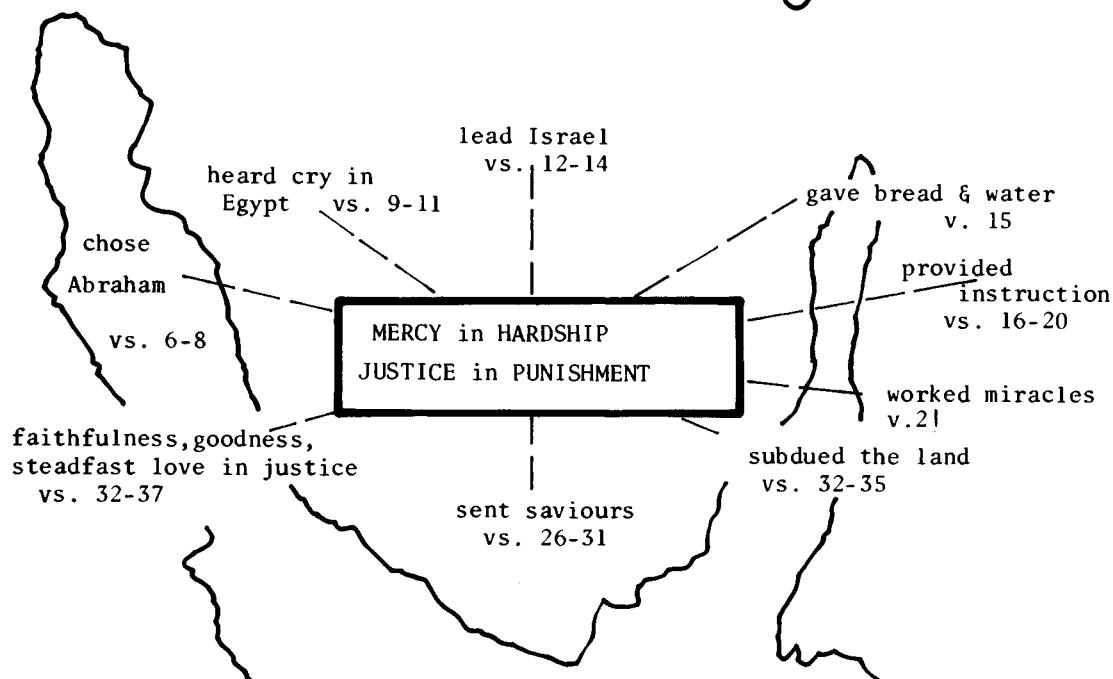
¹The fact that children were not present at the solemn assembly (Neh. 8:2) suggests it was not the year of release when children would have been present (see Deut. 31:9-13).

THOU HAST BEEN JUST.

SPIRITUAL REVIVAL — v1-5

- * REPENTANCE - FASTING, SACKCLOTH, EARTH ON HEAD
- * SEPARATION FROM ALIENS
- * CONFESSION OF SINS
- * BIBLE READING AND STUDY 3 HOURS
- * WORSHIP - 3 HOURS

EZRA'S PRAYER — v6 -37



"LET NOT ALL THIS HARSHIP SEEM LITTLE TO THEE"

CHAPTER 9

CONSECRATION OF THE PEOPLE

The Jews listened attentively to the reading and exposition of the Law. To those who returned from captivity, to towns and villages occupied and controlled by Gentiles,¹ it was a time of solemn reflection. They had married Gentile wives and generally forsaken divine worship. King Sin had made many converts for the world. It was not enough merely to delight in God's Law, practical implementation was required. Ezra set the example: He not only "set his heart to study the law of the LORD" but also "*to do it*", (Ezra 7:10).

The great assembly was led by Ezra in a national confession of sin. Note the way in which separation and dedication were emphasized:

1. fasting - self denial
2. sackcloth - recognition of unworthiness
3. earth on heads - humility
4. foreigners removed - separation
5. confession of sins - remorse and repentance
6. Law of Moses read - study and reflection
7. Sealing of the covenant - dedication

9:1-3 SEPARATION AND DEDICATION OF THE PEOPLE

- 9:1 *the twenty and fourth day* - at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles, (on the 8th day), a solemn assembly was convened "according to the ordinance" (8:18).

this month - the 7th, Tisri

fasting - a denial of self to concentrate on divine things.

with sackcloth - another token of self-denial. (It was a rough cloth sometimes made with hair cf. Rev. 6:12).

earth upon them - indicative of great humiliation (Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12).

- 9:2 *Israel separated themselves from all strangers* ['foreigners', R.S.V.] - The divine instruction has always been the same: "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquityor what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Cor. 6: 14-18, R.S.V.). The Jews had now to cleanse themselves from every defilement of body and spirit, and make holiness perfect in the fear of God. (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1).
- 9:3 *one fourth part of the day* - probably 3 hrs. (6.00 a.m. - 9.00 a.m.?). This was a 6 hr. meeting, the remaining 3 hrs. (9.00 a.m. - 12 p.m.) was occupied with confession of sins and worship (cf. 8:3).

¹For example, the Edomites had seized cities and villages in the south of Israel once the Babylonians had taken Jerusalem in B.C. 586, (Ezek. 35). In the north, part of Benjamin's territory had been annexed by the Samaritans.

they confessed - was this desposition of mind the result of reading Lev. 26:40-42?

and worshipped - Heb. "shachah", "to bow self down" (Yg).

9:4-37 EZRA'S PRAYER²

This great prayer recounted Israel's history showing the forgiveness, kindness, mercy and longsuffering of God toward a rebellious and wicked nation. The prayer summarizes God's punishments on the nation as:

MERCY in HARSHIP
JUSTICE in PUNISHMENT

9:4 *a loud voice* - in order to be heard by the whole assembly - but also indicative of their fervour.

9:5 *stand up* - they had been prostrate confessing their sins and worshipping.

thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise - this is the name Yahweh which declares God's purpose to be manifested in a host of mighty ones. (cf. Deut. 28:58; Isa. 26:8: "O LORD, we wait for thee; thy memorial name is the desire of our soul" R.S.V.). So great is God's name that nothing mortal man can do - praise or otherwise can add to it.

9:7-8 ABRAHAM - AN EXAMPLE OF DIVINE SELECTION AND KINDNESS

who didst choose Abram - the principle of separation was evident in the commencement of the nation of Israel. God's kindness was manifested to Abraham who had no rights or privileges above other humans. He was given a covenant and God fulfilled His promise.

9:8 *and hast performed thy words* - The Church of Christ uses this passage in an attempt to prove that the Abrahamic covenant of land inheritance (Gen 13:15) was fulfilled when the land of Canaan was possessed by Israel under Joshua. But note that the promise refers to the *seed* of Abraham. Abraham was *personally* promised the land forever (Gen. 13:15). Stephen argued that God gave him "none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on; yet he promised that he would give it to him...." (Acts 7:5). The words of Nehemiah cannot, therefore, be interpreted to infer that the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled in Israel's possession of the land under Joshua. Also note that God promised to give to Abraham's descendants all the land "from the river of Egypt unto the great river; the river Euphrates". Israel never inherited this entire land area. Its fulfilment awaits the future return of the Messiah to bring the first dominion to Zion (Micah 4:8).

² The R.S.V. renders vs. 6: "And Ezra said", indicating that Ezra uttered the prayer. Appended is a footnote, however: "Gk; Heb. lacks 'and Ezra said'".

9:9-11 DELIVERANCE OF EGYPT - GOD'S MERCY

The mercy of God was evident in that He -

- a) saw the affliction of the Israelites
- b) heard their cry by the Red Sea
- c) destroyed the Egyptian persecutors

9:11 *as a stone* - an allusion to the Song of Moses (Exod. 15:5).

9:12 WILDERNESS GUIDANCE - GOD'S CARE

God led Israel by the cloud and fire, as a shepherd his sheep (cf. Psalms 80:1; 78:52: "But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock").

9:13-14 DIVINE THEOPHANIES - GOD'S INSTRUCTION

God came down (through the angel of His Presence) upon Mt. Sinai to provide Israel with "right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments".

9:15 FOOD AND WATER IN THE WILDERNESS - GOD'S PROVISION

The food was manna from heaven - "angels' food" (Exod. 16 cf. John 6).

9:16-31 FORGIVENESS AND BLESSING DESPITE PERVERSENESS AND INSOLENCE

God's mercy and longsuffering were evident in the following:

- a) 9:19 - the pillar of cloud and fire were not withdrawn
- b) 9:20 - God continued to give His "good Spirit" to instruct them
- c) - manna and water were not withheld
- d) 9:21 - They were sustained for 40 years in the wilderness and lacked nothing, (clothes did not wear out; feet did not swell).
- e) 9:22 - God gave them the land
- f) 9:23 - He multiplied their descendants
- g) 9:24 - He vanquished their enemies
- h) 9:25 - God gave them a "rich land"

Did you notice how Israel fell? "So they ate, and were filled and became fat, and delighted themselves in thy great goodness". (9:25, R.S.V.). Many a disciple who stood with his Lord in the days of adversity could not withstand the days of prosperity. Hezekiah is a notable example. He "prospered in all his works" and was "exalted in the sight of all nations" but when "God left him to himself, in order to try him and to know all that was in his heart", he "did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud". (2 Chron. 32:23,25,30,31 R.S.V.) Hezekiah who had suffered the taunts of others, fell with the praise of men. Human nature is tragically forgetful (cf. Judges 3:7; 1 Sam. 12:9; Psalm 78:9,10,11; 106:13,21; Hosea 2:13).

It is a matter of serious introspection for well-fed - (overly well-fed?) Christadelphians with the stultifying effects of worldly materialism to review the plea of Agur: "Lest I be full and deny thee". (Prov. 30:9) Where do you stand?

9:27-31 SAVIOURS SENT - GOD'S ABOUNDING COMPASSION

- a) 9:27 - Judges were given to deliver Israel from their oppressors
- b) 9:28 - Their cry was heard and deliverance given
- c) 9:30 - God's spirit rested on His prophets to nourish and warn Israel
- d) 9:31 - God did not make an end of Israel nor did He forsake them despite stubborn disobedience (cf. Acts 7:51).

9:29 *which if a man do, he shall live in them* - This is a clear allusion to Lev. 18:5. Paul quotes this passage too, to prove that confidence in Law - keeping produced pride, not faith (Gal. 3:12). Law-keeping apart from faith was a profitless exercise. (See Paul's argument in Rom. 10:5-7).

The Law could *not* give eternal life to anyone for the following reasons:

1. The Law was weak through the flesh - Human nature with its proneness to sin could not keep it perfectly (Rom. 8:3). For this reason it was a "ministration of death" (2 Cor. 3:6-11).

2. Even if a Jew could keep the Law, (as did Christ), it did not have the capability to confer life eternal. This could only come on the basis of faith. (cf. Gal. 3:10-12; Heb. 8:6; Rom. 4:4; Gal. 3:18,21). A Jew who rejoiced in God's gracious provision of wise and holy commands, would enjoy a harmonious relationship with his Creator and long life on the land. This was "living in them" - the precepts of the Law.

9:32-37 EZRA'S PLEA TO GOD

Ezra acknowledged God's righteous judgments and sought his kindness toward the nation of His choosing in the hardships they were experiencing.

9:32 *mighty* - Heb. "gibbor", "mighty one" (Yg).

terrible - Heb. "yare", "to be feared, revered" (Yg). The allusion is to Deut. 7:21; 10:17.

since the time of the kings of Assyria - Menahem and Pekah (2 Kings 15:19,29) suffered under the Assyrian Kings, Pul and Tiglath-pileser. (Probably Jehu as well, according to the inscription on the Black Obelisk). Hoshea became a vassal to Shalmaneser and later followed the captivity of the northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs 15:17). The Assyrian Lion was the rod of God's anger and the staff of His fury (Isa. 10:5).

9:33 GOD'S JUSTICE EVIDENT IN THE PUNISHMENT

Ezra acknowledged God's righteous judgments and the wickedness of the nation. This disposition of mind helped to create a resolute determination to put things right in the future for all those who signed the covenant of dedication (Chpt. 10).

³ Nehemiah makes a powerful comparison with a beast of burden to illustrate this point; "and withdrew the shoulder, and hardened their necks" (9:29) - a beast of burden which draws back and refuses to accept the yoke or to go forth with the burden.

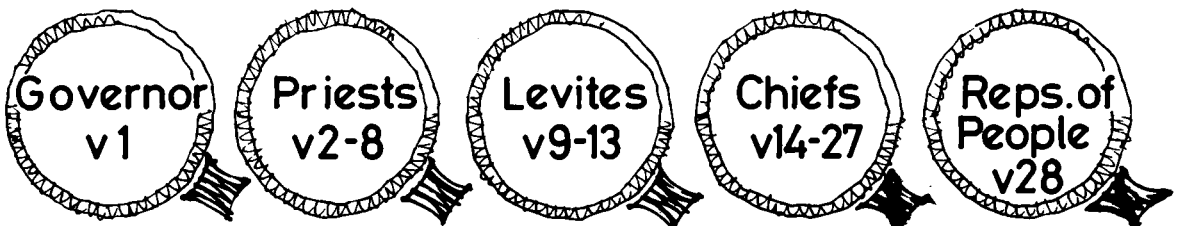
- 9:36 *we are servants* ['*slaves*', R.S.V.] - Besides money, each province (in the Persian Empire) was required to furnish commodities for which the area was noted. The Satraps made exactions beyond the requirements of Persia for their own pockets. "They took care to pay themselves highly".⁴
- 9:38 *we make a sure covenant* - "makes", Heb. "karath" "to cut or prepare" (Yg). The allusion here is to the ancient method of making a covenant. Animals were slain and representatives of the contractual parties passed between the pieces. (cf. Gen. 15:9-10; Jer. 34:19).

⁴Rawlinson, *Ancient Monarchies*, (Vol. 3), pp. 421-423.

The Covenant Sealed...

A CURSE AND AN OATH TO WALK IN GOD'S LAW.

1. Alien marriages forbidden. v 30
2. Sabbath and Holy day observance. v 31
3. Implementation of year of release. v 31
4. 1/3 Shekel yearly tax for House of God. v 32
5. Wood offering, by lot. v 34
6. Firstfruit of ground and tree. v 35
7. First-born of sons and cattle. v 36
8. Tithes for the Levites. v 37-38
9. Provision for chambers. v 39



"WE WILL NOT NEGLECT THE HOUSE OF OUR GOD"

CHAPTER 10

THE COVENANT SEALED

Those sealing the covenant were as follows:

1. The governor - Nehemiah (10:1)
2. The priests (10:2-8)
3. The Levites (10:9-13). Jeshua, Binnui and Kadmiel were the 3 chief families of the Levites who returned.
4. The heads of the people (10:14-27)
5. The rest of the people probably through representatives (10:28)

10:28 *all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God* - The clear implication is that there were some who still had not separated themselves. This element was probably all too ready to support Tobiah once Nehemiah returned to Persia. For "Israelites indeed", the separation was *from the world to God*.

their wives - The wife is required by God to be submissive to her husband "in everything" (Eph. 5:24, R.S.V.) and to occupy an ecclesial role of "ministering to the saints". She is forbidden to teach,¹ (1 Cor. 14:34-37; 1 Tim. 2:11-15) but it is nonetheless essential that she see her personal accountability before God. It was *wives* of the Jewish brethren who also sealed the covenant. It is unlikely today for many wives to be regarded as mere moveable chattels by their husbands. The danger rests, not with an exclusive preoccupation of sisters with the domestic realm, but rather its *neglect*. The world preaches a powerful and enticing gospel to our youth through pop records, school peers and T.V. programs. When parental control is eroded through working, and career-oriented mothers with little time for the children, the readings, Bible study or the mid-week Bible Class - the handwriting of the spiritual disaster is on the wall. Let us remember that wives signed the covenant of dedication and were bound by an oath and a curse to walk in God's laws. Are you abiding in *your* oath of dedication and separateness made at baptism?

10:29 *a curse and an oath* - The Law of Moses promised both, (Deut. 27:11-28,68; cf. also Deut. 29:10-14).

¹ See Titus 2:3-5 cf. the example of Phebe "a servant of the ecclesia which is at Cenchrea....she hath been a succourer of many...." (Rom. 16:1,2).

² There is, of course, a teaching role for the older women: "they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the Word of God may not be discredited". (Titus 2:3-5, R.S.V.).

TERMS OF THE COVENANT

10:30 1. MARRIAGE WITH THE ALIEN FORBIDDEN

10:31 2. OBSERVANCE OF SABBATH AND SABBATICAL YEAR

see Exod. 20:10; Isa. 58:13-14.

on the holy day - special feast days (e.g. Exod. 12:16; Lev. 16:29).

we would leave the seventh year - "we will forego the crops of the seventh year" R.S.V. In a sabbatical year (once in 7) the land went untilled, (Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25:2-7).

exaction of every debt - see Deut. 15:1-2.

10:32-33 3. VOLUNTARY YEARLY TAX

the third part of a shekel - The Law of Moses required $\frac{1}{4}$ shekel. (Exod. 30:11-16). A number of explanations might account for the difference.³

10:34 4. WOOD OFFERING

This was the wood required for the burning of the sacrifices. It had been the duty of the Gibeonites (the Nethinims) (Josh. 9:21). The forests had probably been depleted by the abuse of the land and the sieges of the cities by invaders, (requiring batteringrams, scaffolding etc.). Certain forests had been set aside by the Persian monarchs (cf. Neh. 2:8) to secure resources for building enterprises.

cast lots - This was regarded as a "fair" way of deciding between contending parties. "The lot puts an end to disputes⁴ and decides between powerful contenders" (Prov. 18:18, R.S.V.). Its purpose was to allow chance factors to operate. This would give a "fair" selection. Areas would contribute in order "selected" by the lot. There were occasions when God providentially revealed his will through the casting of lots. (cf. Acts 1:21-26, probably Josh. 7:14-18; Jonah 1:7).

³These are as follows:

- a) the $\frac{1}{3}$ shekel may have been additional to the $\frac{1}{4}$ shekel paid when Israel was numbered. (Exod. 30:12-16).
- b) Because of the poverty of many of the common people, a lesser tax was accepted as a yearly, voluntary offering for the work of the Temple. Circumstances sometimes allowed the "bending" of the Law. (See 2 Chron. 30:16-20).

⁴Lots were used to decide land allocation for the 12 tribes (Josh. 14:1,2); the goat for a sin offering on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:8); priestly service (1 Chron. 24:5) cf. also 1 Chron. 25:8; 26:13; Luke 1:9.

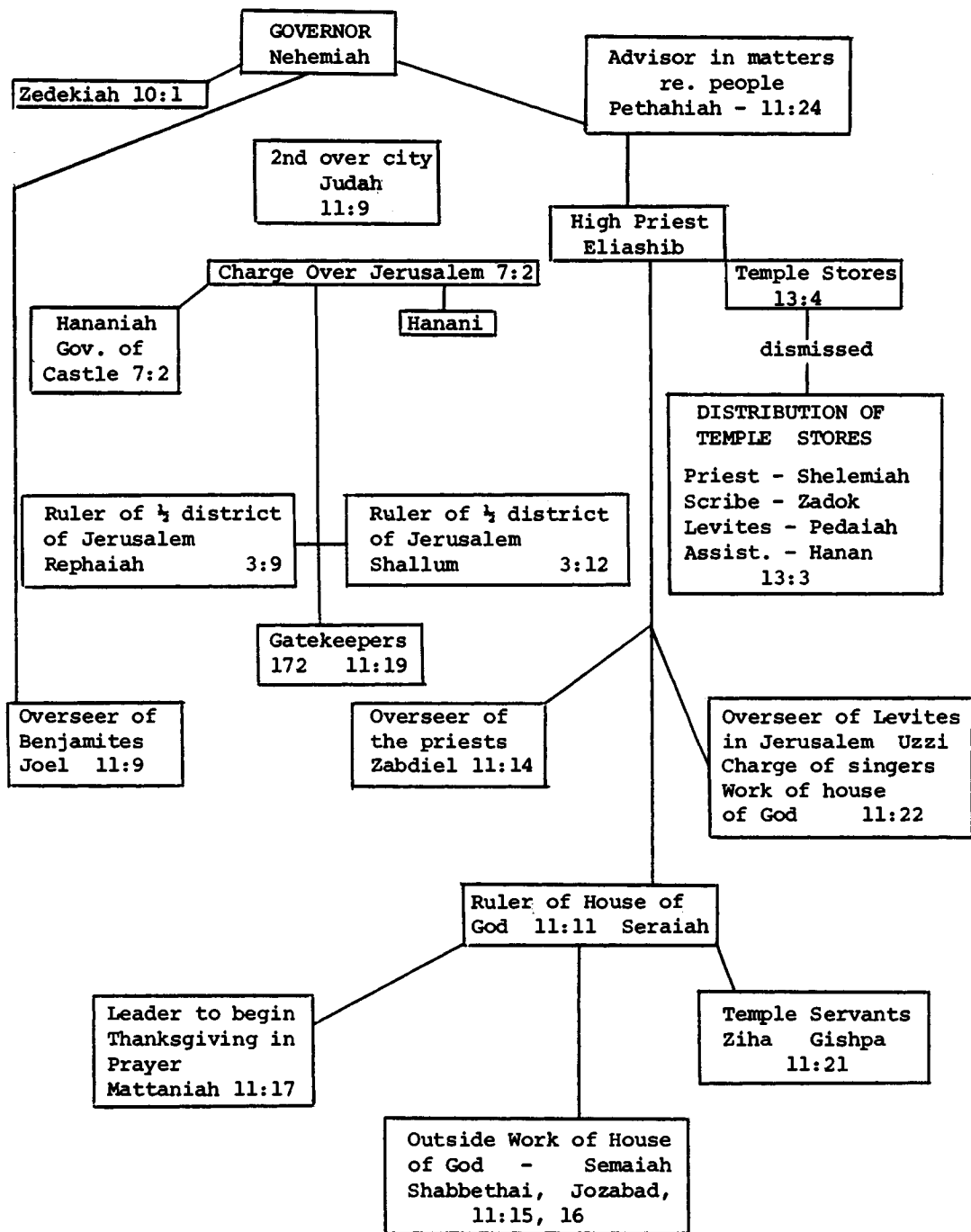
10:35-39 5. OBSERVANCE OF FIRSTFRUITS AND FIRSTBORN

priest - a son of Aaron distinguished from the Levites who were sons of Levi (one of the 12 sons of Jacob).

the tithe of the tithe - 1/10th of 1/10th - the provision which the Levites gave to the priests. (Num. 18:26-28). This was their "reward for service in the tabernacle of the congregation".

we will not forsake ['neglect', R.S.V.] the house of our God - Worship in the Temple was of fundamental importance to the Law of Moses. The Law depended on the priesthood. When the House of God was neglected, the priests and Levites were unable to minister since they were totally dependent on the tithes of the people. In times of adversity, drought, siege or in threatened invasion, an Israelite was sorely tempted to preserve his own food, live-stock and wood at the expense of the House of God. When this was done, the neglected, "forsaken" dwelling place of God soon ceased to be a centre of divine worship. It was then only a matter of time until Gentile ways were completely absorbed by Jews living in the villages around Jerusalem.

ADMINISTRATION OF JERUSALEM



CHAPTER 11

THE ADMINISTRATION OF JERUSALEM

11:1-2 REPOPULATION OF THE CITY

The city of Jerusalem appears to have been a most unattractive place in which to live. The city was described as "wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been built" (7:4 R.S.V.). The protection of the city and its administration required more than the stop-gap measures temporarily effected by Nehemiah during the threatened attack on the city (4:21-23). There appears to have been a consensus among the people that the population of the city should be increased by a 1/10th tithe (one out of ten) to be selected by lot. (See note on 10:34).

It would, no doubt, require considerable adjustment for those selected by lot to leave behind close friendships and perhaps ambitious plans for farms and family homesteads, for life in the city. The natural man seeks his own, looking after his own interests, not those of others (cf. Phil. 2:21,4). It must have required considerable self-sacrifice for these Jews to leave behind their towns and villages. The people blessed all those who *willingly* offered to live in Jerusalem, (11:2). God has always loved the cheerful giver rather than the man who acts only from compulsion and a sense of exaction (2 Cor. 8:5-8, R.S.V.).

Repeated pleas from small ecclesias in St. John's, Newfoundland; Moncton, New Brunswick; Strathroy and London, Ontario, are the Jerusalems in our ecclesial world. It may well impose sacrifice to go. Christadelphians have less and less the appearance of strangers, pilgrims and sojourners in the land with the flexibility to assist these Jerusalems. All too often the flesh is pampered by our current standards of living and affluence, so that we cannot even spare the time to assist in a campaign to preach the Truth in one of these areas. We need to recapture the spirit of those who "willing offered", and looked not on their "own interests" but on "those of others" - those of Jesus Christ, (Phil. 2:4, 21).

11:4-36 THE POPULATION CENSUS

11:4-6 CHILDREN OF JUDAH
 11:7-9 CHILDREN OF BENJAMIN
 11:10-14 PRIESTS

These men, who *served* in the House of God, were called "mighty men of valor" (11:14). What a glorious description! This was the *divine* appraisal.

11:15-24 LEVITES

There were some who did "outside work" (11:16), i.e., they probably worked in the civil administration of the Temple area, but not within the Temple precincts. This would involve the handling of the animals for sacrifice and food.

The singers had a special provision from the Persian King (11:23; cf. Ezra 6:10; 7:20,24). The sons of Asaph were appointed by David to preside over the Temple choral services, (1 Chron. 16:5 cf. 25:1-2).

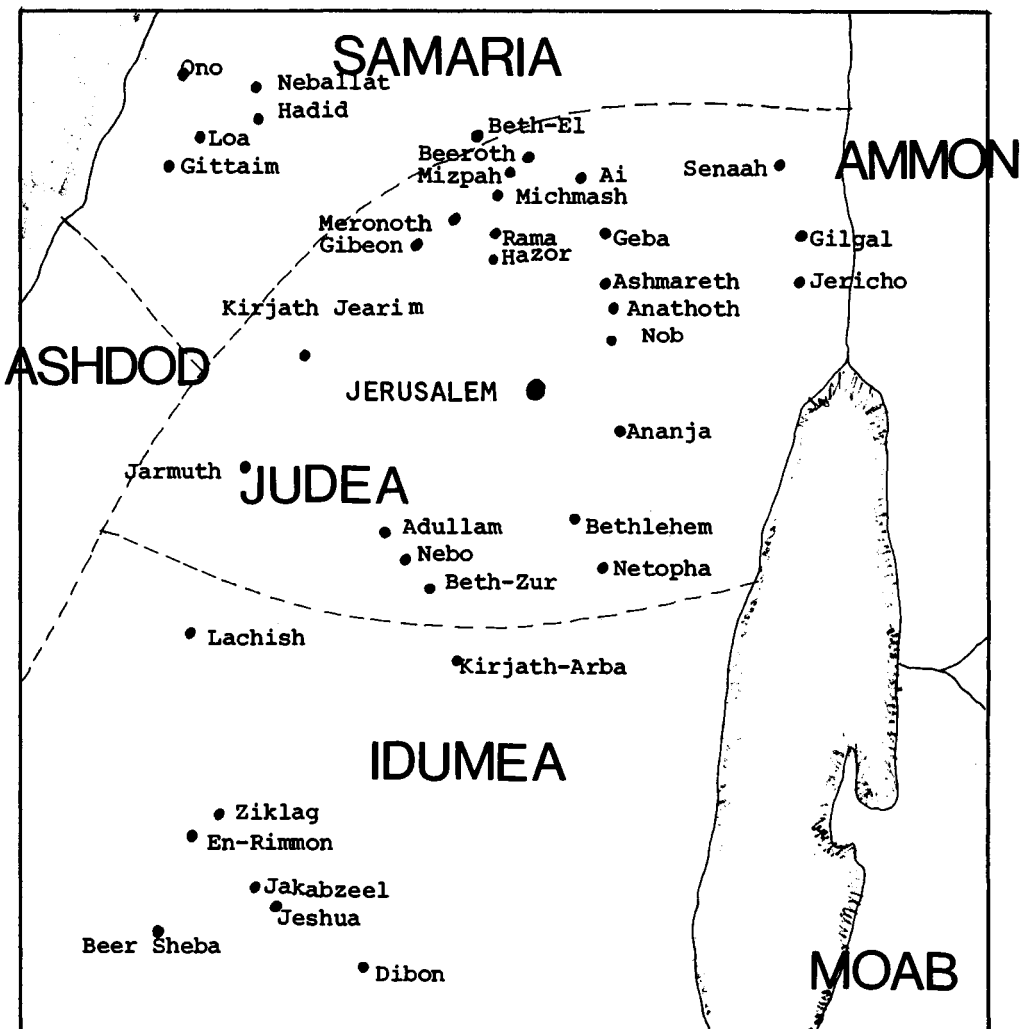
11:25-30 VILLAGES OF THE CHILDREN OF JUDAH

Many of these villages were south of Jerusalem and probably dominated by the Edomites who seized them after Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem - B.C. 586. (See Ezek. 35).

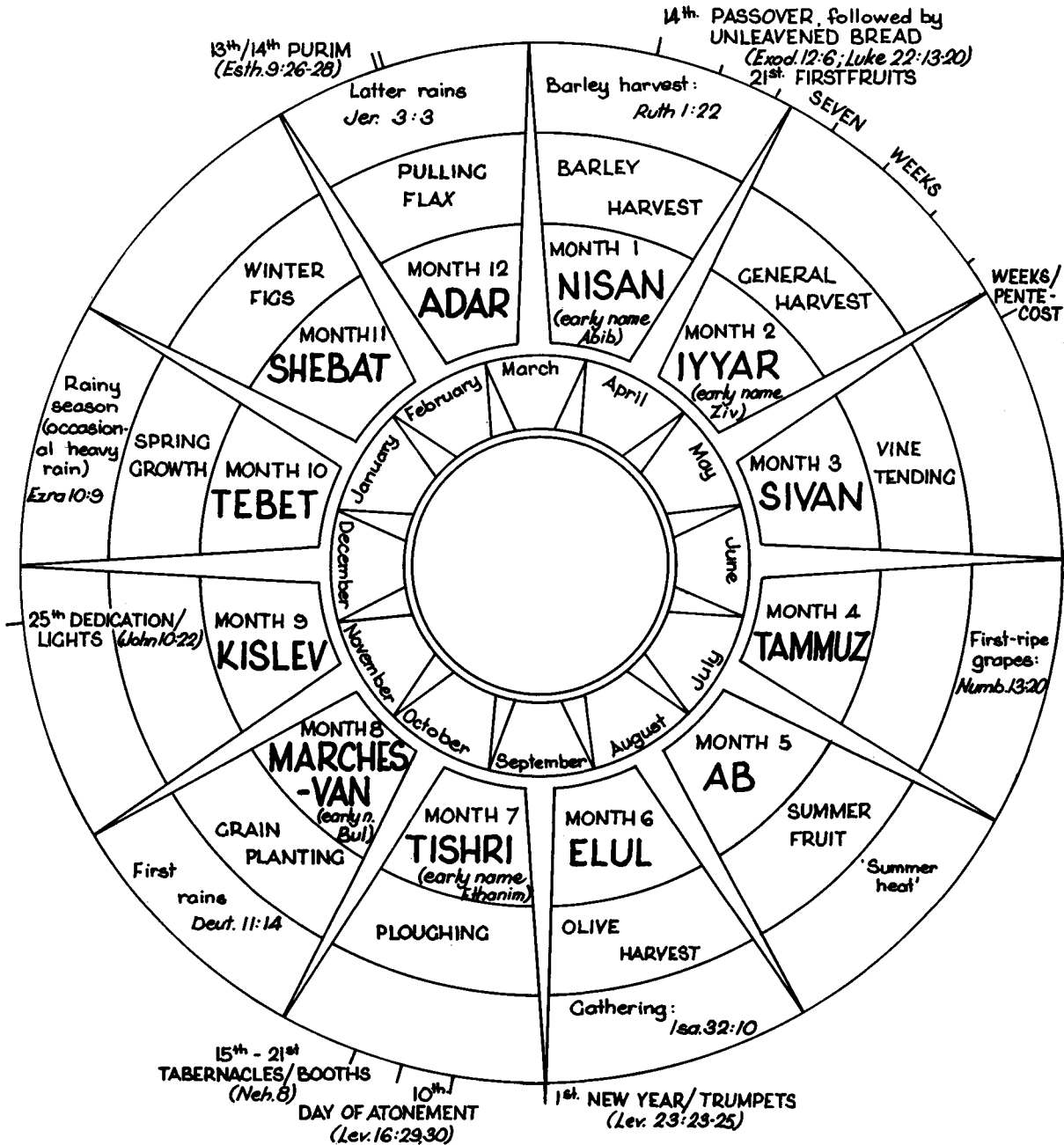
11:31-36 VILLAGES OF BENJAMIN

Some were situated in areas of Samaritan domination (e.g.: Lod, Hadid, Gittaim, Ono etc.)

JEWISH TERRITORY IN THE TIME OF NEHEMIAH



CALENDAR IN ANCIENT ISRAEL



CHAPTER 12

THE DEDICATION OF THE WALL: THE JOY OF JERUSALEM HEARD AFAR OFF

12:1-7 HEADS OF THE PRIESTS WHO RETURNED WITH ZERUBBABEL

The priests held hereditary office, hence the need for comprehensive genealogies. Originally, these were 24 courses established by David (1 Chron. 24:1-18). Sixteen were descendants of Eleazar and 8 from Ithamar.

12:8-9 LEVITES

12:9 *over against them in their watches* - i.e., relieved them in their watches - shift-work.

12:10-21 PRIESTLY COURSES

12:22 RECORDS OF LEADING PRIESTS AND LEVITES

12:27-43 PROCESSION AND DEDICATION SERVICE

The singing might well have included Psa. 48, 122, 127, 147, 150.

12:28 *round about Jerusalem* - the singers lived here so as to have ready access to the Temple.

12:30 *purified themselves* - probably with water (cf. Exod. 19:10; 2 Chron. 29:5, 15). Notice the contrast with 2 Chron. 29:34.

the people - They were probably purified by sprinkling (Num. 13:19).

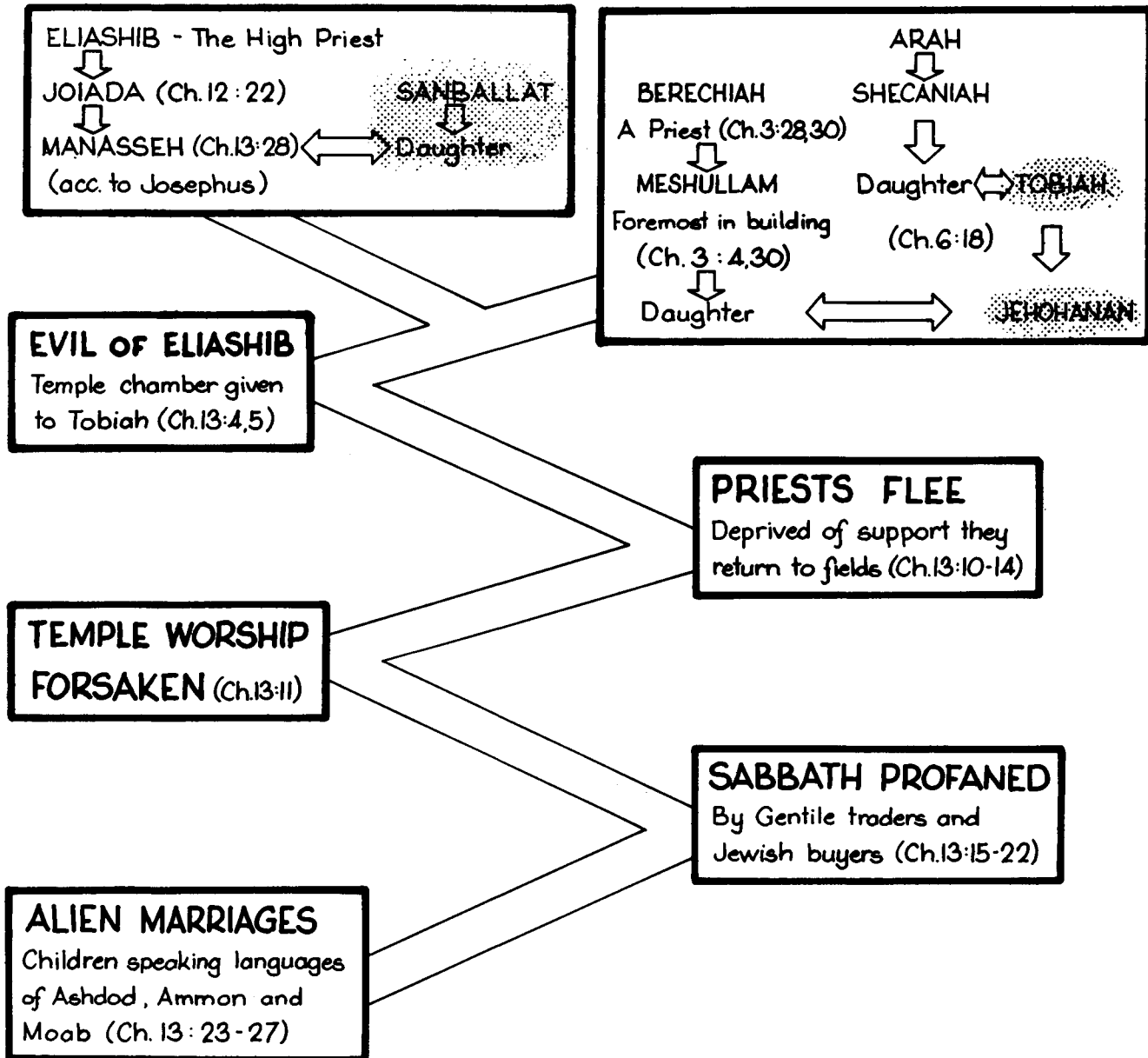
the gates, and the wall - Inanimate things could contract defilement (Lev. 14:34-53; e.g. Num. 19:10,15).

12:31 *two great companies.....upon the wall* - The fact that they could walk on the wall (cf. also 12:38) indicates the great job of rebuilding which had been completed in 52 days. The companies, one under Ezra, and the other under Nehemiah met nearly midway along the eastern wall, between the Water and Prison Gates outside the Temple, (12:37-40).

12:44-47 THE TERMS OF THE COVENANT IMPLEMENTED

ALIEN MARRIAGES:

THIS GREAT EVIL AND TREACHERY



I CONTENDED, CURSED AND BEAT THEM

CHAPTER 13

APOSTASY AND REFORMATION

Nehemiah had returned to the palace of the Persian King (5:14; 2:6) and then subsequently travelled back to Jerusalem. He might have done this because of the prophet Malachi's exposure of conditions in Judea. Note the similarities between Malachi's prophecy and conditions which Nehemiah described as existing in Jerusalem when he returned:

1. Non-payment of tithes, (Nehemiah 13:9,10 cf. Mal. 3:8).
2. The Temple services would, therefore, largely cease, (Neh. 13:10 cf. Mal. 1:7, 12, 13).
3. Violation of the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15 cf. Mal. 3:14; 4:4).
4. Marriage with the alien, (Neh. 13:23; Mal. 2:11-16).

Upon his arrival, Nehemiah found that every item of the covenant had been violated. Note the following:

1. Marriage with aliens (10:30 cf. 13:23).
2. Sabbath observance (10:31 cf. 13:15).
3. Voluntary yearly tax (10:32 cf. 13:11).
4. Wood offering (10:34 cf. 13:31).
5. Observance of firstfruits and firstborn (10:35-36 cf. 13:11).

13:1-3 NEHEMIAH'S RETURN TO JERUSALEM

13:4-10 ELIASHIB CONFRONTED

Eliashib had permitted Tobiah the Ammonite [it was written that "no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God: (13:1 cf. Deut. 23:3-5)], his relative (13:4), to place his furniture in a large store chamber for the priests of the Lord. He walked right through the gates of Jerusalem without slinging a stone or shooting an arrow! This was the end result of marriage with the alien.

Nehemiah had received intelligence of Eliashib's treachery, and so hastily left for Jerusalem. Upon his arrival, Nehemiah promptly threw out all Tobiah's household furniture (13:8). This was swift and decisive action, essential for the occasion.

13:11-12 FURTHER INVESTIGATION AND RESTORATION

13:13-14 THE FAITHFUL APPOINTED TO RESPONSIBLE OFFICES

13:15-22 SABBATH-KEEPING REINTRODUCED

13:16 *Men of Tyre (R.S.V.)* - Nehemiah saw that Gentile Sabbath breakers were inducing Jewish disobedience. The Law of Moses required Gentiles who dwelt with Israel to keep the Law. (Exod. 23:12).

13:19 *the gates should be shut* - Hence the difficulty for Jews who might attempt to flee on the Sabbath - the gates would be closed, (cf. Matt. 24:20).

13:23 ALIEN MARRIAGES CONDEMNED

This was treacherous (13:27) and treasonous conduct. When Nehemiah walked through the streets of Jerusalem and its villages, he found Jewish children speaking the languages of the Ashdodites, Moabites and Ammonites. He confronted the apostates and severely disciplined them (13:25). Their conduct was a flagrant defiance of the instruction of the Law (13:25 cf. Exod. 34: 11-16; Deut. 7:1-6) and the example preserved of the notorious sin of Solomon (13:26 cf. 1 Kings 11:1-40).

13:28 THE REFORMATION EFFECTED

As so often happens, sons and grandsons follow the examples set by their elders. Eliashib's grandson was son-in-law to Sanballat, (13:28).

The treachery of Eliashib is evident in the following:

1. He was allied to Israel's bitterest foe - Sanballat the Horonite.
2. He violated the rule of Ezra against mixed marriages.
3. He compromised the purity of the High Priestly office (cf. Lev. 21:6).
4. He was related by marriage to Tobiah (13:4), the other arch enemy to God's work.

May it be our lot to so follow Nehemiah's example that when we give an "answer of the deeds done in the body" our God may remember us for good.

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