

The Story of the Bible

A Magazine Designed to Instruct Children
in the Word of God.

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of

Volume Seven



from RE-BUILDING OF THE
TEMPLE to the Period of HEROD THE GREAT

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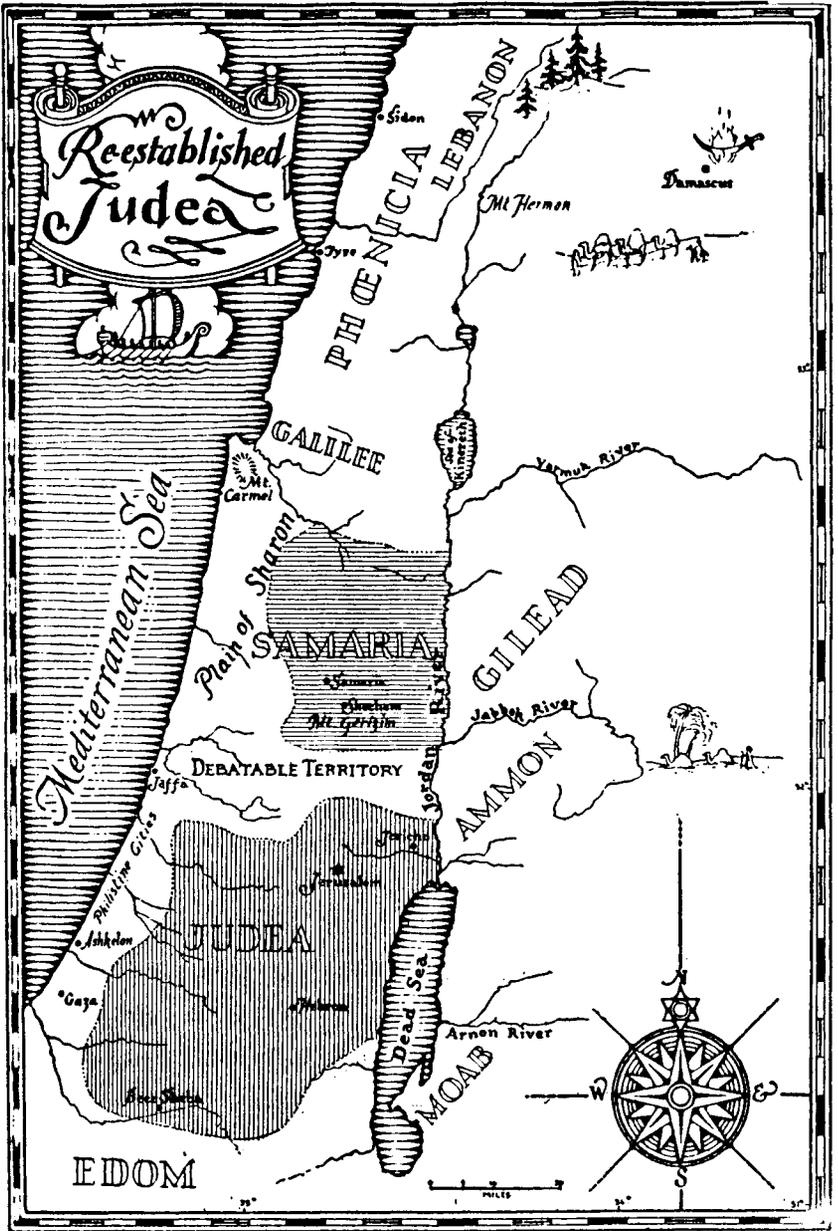
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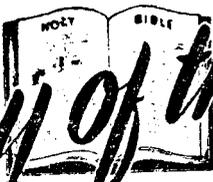


After Bendemann

“BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON, THERE WE SAT DOWN, YEA, WE WEPT”

Psalm 137.

The Story of the Bible



VOL. 7

APRIL, 1963

No. 1

Introduction to Volume Seven



This Seventh Volume of our "Story of the Bible" is commenced at sea, during the course of a world tour. Our ship, My "Neptunia", is ploughing its way through the calm, blue waters of the Bay of Bengal, as I take up my pen to commence it. And what a joy it is, to stand aside from the pleasure-loving, worldly passengers on board, and devote time to the wonderful and satisfying Word of God. How much greater pleasure and profit is derived in that, than is found in the time-wasting, fleeting follies that occupy the attention of most of the other passengers.

As Bible prophecy is so intimately concerned with world events, a tour of this nature reveals many incidents that indicate its fulfilment. For example, there is on board this ship, a member of the British Diplomatic Service, with whom I have had several talks. He told me that he was once stationed in Israel, and was greatly impressed with all that he had seen there. He had developed a great admiration for the Jewish people because of the determination with which they tackled the problems confronting them, and the skill with which they adapted themselves to the needs of the moment.

Because of that, he believed, great success had attended their labors. He told me that he had been so impressed with all that he had seen, that he had written a book on his experiences, entitled: "THE LAND OF PROMISE".

But with all his knowledge, he little knew to what extent, and in what direction, Israel is really a Land of Promise.

Israel is such to all who truly understand the purpose of God. The return of the Jews to their homeland is a wonderful symbol of hope, telling us that Christ is coming, and that we should be preparing for that great event. This is impressed upon us the more we come to understand the Bible, even in its historical outline. This is why the story of the Bible is so important.

A Dramatic Period

Our new volume commences with the dramatic story of the return of the Exiles from Babylon. They returned to rebuild again the nation that had been overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar, and in doing so, they established the background upon which the ministry of the Lord was ultimately conducted.

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther provide the source of our story. They tell of the mercy and goodness of Yahweh towards a people who had earlier despised His word. They show how He was behind the restoration, the reconstruction, and the preservation of His people.

These three words epitomise the story that unfolds. As an aid to memory, we can look upon Ezra as the book of RESTORATION; Nehemiah as the book of RECONSTRUCTION; Esther as the book of PRESERVATION.

These three words also epitomise the purpose of Yahweh with His people. In the modern restoration of the Jewish State of Israel, there is revealed a foreshadowing of what will be accomplished in a more perfect way at Christ's coming. It is almost a repetition of what is revealed in the three books of the Bible before us. "Almost" but not quite, for there is much more of God in the regathering as recorded by Ezra, than what is seen in the modern restoration of the Jews to their land.

One Continuous Account

In the Hebrew Bible, the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are joined as one. This is more natural than the present division into two books, for they tell the continuous story of one epoch. The two books are mostly compilations, and are made up of extracts from the personal diaries of Ezra and Nehemiah, records from the archives of nations, and quotations from official documents.

But, wonderful to relate, in these dry governmental documents is revealed the hand of God in world affairs, moving on the behalf of His people.

It is all welded together into a most dramatic story.

Ezra signifies "Help". The book that bears his name shows how Yahweh helped His people. If a phrase were to be chosen to illustrate the basic message of the book, perhaps no better one could be selected than that found in Psalm 94:17: "Unless Yahweh had been my help, my soul had quickly dwelt in silence".

The word "help" in this sentence is "ezrah" in the Hebrew. The same word is found frequently in other places, including Psalm 40:17. 60:11. 71:12. 108:12.

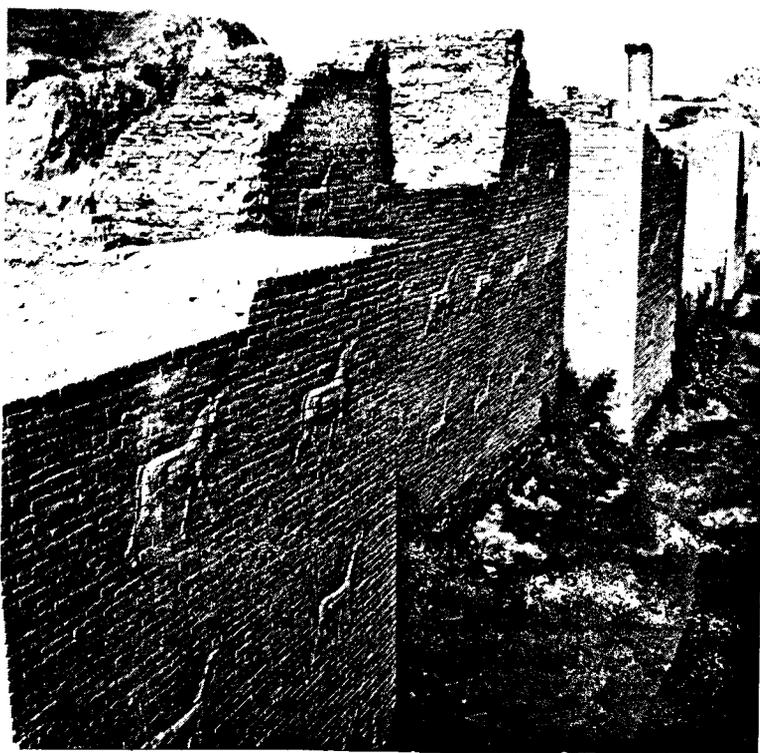
This volume of our Story will show how Yahweh helped His people in a wonderful way, and laid the foundation for the coming of the Redeemer whose wondrous act of love in providing a covering for sin, so greatly helps those who approach God through him.

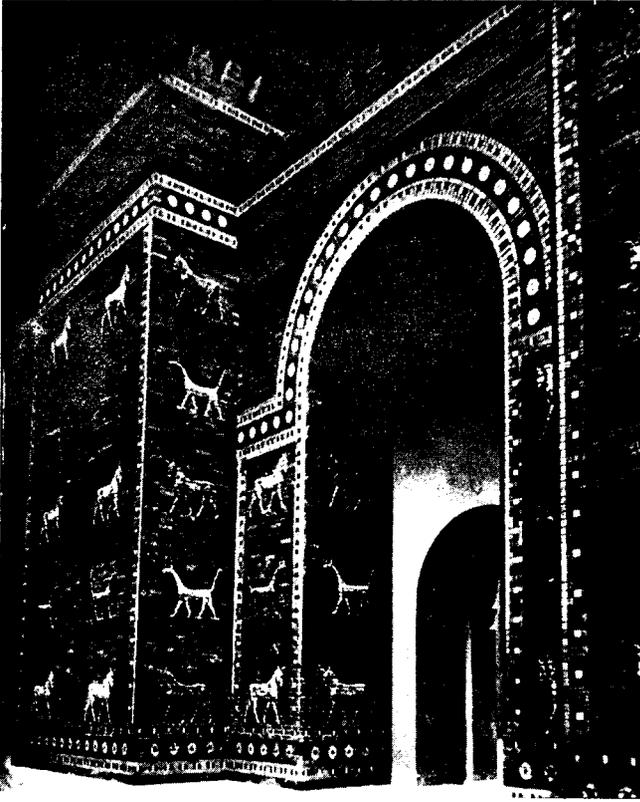
May Yahweh bless our studies of His glorious, life-giving Word.

--The Editor.



The walls of Babylon





Reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate

Zerubbabel and Joshua : Rebuilders of Israel

There is little in the Bible upon which to assess the characters of Zerubbabel and Joshua. The mere historical facts of their work are set forth without much personal detail. They performed a valuable service among the exiles, and then faded from the scene without even their deaths being recorded. During their ministry, they not only organized the return to the Land, but when there, they supervised the work of building the altar, and restoring the Temple of Yahweh.

They are described as "men of sign" (Zech. 3:8 -mg). By this is meant that they were types of the Lord Jesus Christ. Zerubbabel was a descendant of Jehoiachin, the wicked king of Judah, and a predecessor of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 3). He was a prince and a ruler in Israel, and was set up as Governor in the land. He thus represented the Lord Jesus as Ruler. On the other hand, Joshua was a descendant of Aaron, and held the position of high priest. He represented the Lord Jesus as priest.

Combined, these two men represented the Lord Jesus as King-Priest of the Age to come. They were proclaimed "men of sign" in order that faithful Jews of those days and since might meditate upon the work they performed, and see foreshadowed in it, the work to be performed by the great Restorer of Israel (Rom. 11:26), the governor promised through Jeremiah (Jer. 30:21) and the Branch promised through Zechariah who shall combine the offices of both king and high priest (Zech. 6:12-13).

Their names were significant. Zerubbabel means "Shoot of Babylon". It is a fitting name to describe Jesus, for he is likened to a "root out of a dry ground" (Isa. 53:2), to a "branch" or shoot springing forth from out of the withered stem of Jesse (Isa. 11:1). But Zerubbabel was also known as Sheshbazzar*, a name which means "Joy in affliction". Zerubbabel, during the period of the captivity, was doubtless sustained by the knowledge that Yahweh would move for the release of His people. Thus, like the Lord Jesus, there was a "joy set before him" which enabled him to see beyond the immediate affliction (see Heb. 12:2).

Joshua, of course, is the Hebrew form of Jesus, and means "Yahweh will save". He is described as the son of Josedech (Hag. 1:1), which signifies "Yahweh has cleansed". Thus his name expressed to the people of his day, the wonderful message that Yahweh will save because Yahweh has cleansed!

These two men were set before their contemporaries as "men of sign". Those who thought deeply upon this fact, would be led to consider the purpose of God in Christ Jesus. There were six major incidents in their joint labors that illustrated this. They were:

1. The return to the land—Ezra Chps. 1 & 2.
2. The altar built — Ezra 3:1-6.
3. The new Temple commenced—Ezra 3:8-13.

*See Ezra 1:8. Sheshbazzar is identified with Zerubbabel because of the following reason: he is said to have built the foundation of the Temple in Ezra 5:16, a work assigned to Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:9. It was not unusual for people to have two names in those times.

4. **The opposition of their adversaries—Ezra 4.**
5. **The exhortation of the prophets to work—Ezra 5:1-6, 14.**
6. **The Temple completed—Ezra 6:15-22.**

The counterpart, in the work of the Lord Jesus, is as follows:

1. **The call to return to God through the ministry of Jesus.**
2. **The setting up of the Altar of sacrifice—the Lord Himself (Heb. 13:10).**
3. **The foundation of a spiritual Temple laid through the Apostles (Eph. 2:10).**
4. **The manifestation of the adversary (2 Thess. 2:7-10).**
5. **The continued witness of the Word throughout the ages.**
6. **The ultimate completion of the spiritual Temple (1 Pet. 2:5-12).**

Many other types and shadows are presented in the labors of Zerubbabel and Joshua. Zechariah exhorted: "Who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel. . ." (Zech. 4:9).

Today is a day of small things as far as the work of Christ is concerned. So small, indeed, that the world despises it as it did that of Zerubbabel. But if we "despise not" these things, and seek to serve Christ in faith, we shall ultimately rejoice as we "see the plummet in the hands of Zerubbabel" (the typical Lord Jesus), see him complete the spiritual Temple whose foundations were laid so long ago, see it in all its glory with the headstone in place, and thus will rejoice in the consummation of the Divine purpose. Let us study, with the greatest concentration, the dramatic and significant events that are unfolded in the book of Ezra.

THE DECREE OF CYRUS

Babylon had fallen. Belshazzar the blasphemous, Babylonian king had been slain after elevating Daniel to the position of third ruler in the Empire (Dan. 5). Darius had entered the mighty city as king, to reign jointly for two years with Cyrus, who was extending his conquests elsewhere.

And now Cyrus reigned alone. In pomp he had entered Babylon as conqueror.

Immediately he instituted a policy of religious tolerance. He invited those people who had been taken into captivity by Babylon,

to return to their respective countries if they desired to do so.

But he gave special attention, and greater help to one group of captives.

They were the Jewish people.

His great interest in them was probably induced through the influence of Daniel. He had enjoyed a position of the greatest prominence under Darius (Dan. 6: 2), and must have come immediately before the notice of Cyrus when he assumed sole control.

He took the opportunity of directing the Persian king to the remarkable prophecy of Isaiah.*

*This is according to Josephus who states that in consequence Cyrus was "seized with an earnest desire and ambition to fulfil what was so written."



CYRUS RESTORING THE VESSELS OF THE TEMPLE

Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar... had put... in the house of his gods... (Ezra 1: 7)



After Schnorr

THE RETURN FROM THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

Over 200 years earlier, Isaiah had predicted:

"Thus saith Yahweh, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him . . . I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways: he shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives . . ." (Isa. 45:1, 13).

"He saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform My pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem: thou shalt be built, and to the Temple, thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28).

How amazed Cyrus must have been to see in this ancient prophecy, his own name mentioned and his work clearly revealed. Immediately he realised that the God of heaven ruled in the kingdom of men, and it was through His influence that he had risen to such power. He felt that he must carry out to the letter the work he had been appointed to do.

Meanwhile, many Jews throughout Babylonia had been roused to the highest pitch of excitement by the events of the times, and awaited impatiently for the restoration to the Land that they knew would come.

And, at last, Cyrus issued his decree, proclaiming the restoration of the Jewish people.

It was couched in remarkable language. Cyrus declared:

"Yahweh, the God of heaven, hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He hath charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let

the men of his place help him with silver, gold, goods and beasts, besides the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2-4).

Thus Cyrus decreed that the Jews should return to their own land, the Temple should be built, and those Jews who did not return home should, at least, help the work with their wealth.**

The year was B.C. 536: a most significant year. It was exactly 70 years since Nebuchadnezzar had proudly entered the city of Jerusalem as conqueror. Thus was partially fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah that the captivity would last for seventy years (Jer. 25:11-12).

SHESHBAZZAR AND JOSHUA ORGANISE THE RETURN (Ezra 1)

The reaction of the Jews to the decree of Cyrus was immediate. The Godly among them, who had been waiting for the restoration, could hardly believe their ears for joy. Their previous despondency now gave way to anticipations of the greatest pleasure.

Psalms 137 expresses their earlier feelings. It speaks of how they sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered the fallen state of Zion. When some of the Babylonians asked them to sing one of the songs of Zion, their reply was: "How shall we sing Yahweh's song in a strange land!" (v.3).

But now there was joyous activity among them. Psalm 126 declares:

**He even incorporated in his decree details of how the foundations should be laid, the height of the walls etc., and other features, and commanded this should be a charge on the state (Ezra. 6:4). An indication, doubtless, of the influence of Daniel.

"When Yahweh turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, Yahweh hath done great things for them, whereof we are glad" (Psalm 126:1-3).

Unfortunately, the number of those who desired to return was comparatively small. They were those who were moved by the things of God, and sought to do His will (Ezra 1:5). They were supported with wealth by those who preferred to remain behind, and Cyrus himself assisted by commanding that the vessels of the Temple, that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon, should be delivered into the hands of the Jews to again grace the Temple that they hoped to build, and also providing the exiles with a grant of money to enable them to commence the work.

And in this was fulfilled another prophecy of Jeremiah. He had declared:

"Thus saith Yahweh concerning the vessels that remain in the house of Yahweh. They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be until the day that I visit them, saith Yahweh. Then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place" (Jer. 27:22. See also Jer. 50:28).

But who was to organise the return? The obvious choice was a man named Sheshbazzar, a descendant of David, and a notable prince among the Jews. Cyrus appointed him Governor, and set him the task of organising the work. He immediately set about doing this with the aid of Joshua the high priest.

THE EXILES GATHER TOGETHER (Ezra 2)

It was decided that the nation

should be restored on a similar basis to that existing in the time of David.

No obstacle to this was anticipated, for the Persian Government had given its support to the venture, and had specifically directed that the city and Temple should be rebuilt.

It was decided to take a Register of all those who desired to return to the Land. From the genealogies thus revealed, priests and levites would be given their duties in the worship to be re-established, and common Jews would be appointed their places of residence, according to their family inheritance, set down in the Law of Moses.

In addition, the Register would prevent any undesirable migrants entering the Land, would ensure that only those of Israel, or Gentiles interested in the welfare of Israel would return (Ezra 2:52).

Among those gathered to Zerubbabel were Jews who were able to proudly show their genealogy which was then recorded.

There were others who had little to show except that they were undoubtedly of Israel (v.59). They were gladly received.

There were Jews who had acted as Gentiles, but now that the fortunes of the nation had taken a turn for the better, wished to be associated with its rebuilding. The past was forgotten and they were gathered in.

There were Gentiles who were completely Jewish in their attitude. They were more Israel-minded than those Jews who preferred to remain behind in Babylon. Of this number were

(continued on page 11)

numerous Nethinim.*

On the other hand, there were priests who had previously gloried in the flesh, but now wanted to redeem themselves. Among these were those who had married into the numerous family of Barzillai, the wealthy prince who had been greatly honored by David (2 Sam. 17:27). They had preferred to have been known as members of his family rather than that of Aaron. Now, however, they wanted to be again classed as priests.

What was to be done? When they came before Sheshbazzar the governor, he would not permit it. Such a decision was beyond him, and he determined that it should wait until direct guidance was received from God (Ezra 2:63).

But, at last, the register was complete, and it was found that 42,360 Jews, 7,337 servants, 200 singers, had decided to return. They gathered together 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, 6720 asses to convey them and their belongings to Palestine.

And, most precious possession of all, there was delivered into their hands the treasure of the Temple that remained: some 5,400 gold and silver vessels.

The number of Jews that elected to return was disappointingly

small in comparison with the large number in captivity. But it was sufficient for the purpose in hand.

HOME AGAIN!

The cavalcade of Jews, bearing their belongings, carrying the precious vessels of the Temple, left Babylon for their 800 mile journey, approximately in the Spring, filled with the greatest enthusiasm. They arrived at their destination a few months later, after a tiring journey, to almost immediately disperse into the various cities of Judah according to their family inheritance.

There was hard work aplenty for them in every direction. Cities were in ruins; farms, vineyards, and orchards had to be restored; homes had to be built.

And there was no welcome for them from the inhabitants, or the neighbouring nations. In fact, the returning exiles were viewed with growing resentment and hostility. There was no love for Israel among the Samaritans, the Moabites, the Edomites, and the remnant of other nations that remained. They hated the Jews and did not want to see the nation restored.

The growing resentment and hatred was felt by the few Jews scattered throughout the land;

*"Nethinim signifies those "given" or "dedicated." They are referred to 17 times in Ezra and Nehemiah, but only once elsewhere (1 Chr. 9:2). They are described as "those whom David appointed for the service of the Levites" (Ezra 8:20). They are closely connected with the "servants of Solomon" (Ezra 2:55-60) who seem to have been descendants of the Canaanites he used in the building of the Temple (2 Chr. 2:17), and whose duties were possibly even humbler than those of the Nethinim who performed the menial tasks of the Temple. The Midianites (Num. 31:47), the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:23), and other naturalised foreigners were used for this purpose. David organised these foreigners into the Nethinim, dedicating them for specific work associated with the Temple (Ezra 8:20). Thus Gentiles were not only brought into Israel, but closely associated with the Temple service—an honored position for them, and a symbol of hope to Gentiles of every age.

the future looked very ominous for them (Ezra 3:3).

THE ALTAR SET UP

But despite all obstacles, the two leaders, Joshua and Zerubbabel, set about their task with an enthusiasm and determination that was contagious. Calling upon their immediate followers to assist, they cleared the site of the altar, and rebuilt it once again. By the beginning of the 7th month the work was completed, and sacrifices offered thereon.

Thus amid the blackened ruins and rubble of the ancient city of Jerusalem, the smoke of sacrifices again ascended unto Yahweh, and the foundations of worship were again laid.

It was a significant month in the Jewish calendar. On the first

day of this month, the law of Moses enjoined that there should be a memorial blowing of trumpets to gather people together. This was followed, on the 10th day, by the most solemn day in the Jewish year: the Day of Atonement. On that day every Jew was called upon to humble himself before Yahweh, to remember his sins, and participate in the sacrifices that were offered that they might be forgiven. On the 15th day of the month, the seven days' Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated. At this Feast, the people were called upon to rejoice before Yahweh. They camped in the open for a week enjoying the mild, pleasant weather for which Palestine is noted that time of the year, and recalling the wonderful deliver-

AN OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF EZRA

Ezra is the book of the RESTORATION, and is divided into two parts. Chapters 1 to 6 form the first part; chapters 7 to 10 the second part. The former gives the history of the return under Zerubbabel; the latter gives that of the return under Ezra. The book shows how the work of one supplemented that of the other, as follows:

ZERUBBABEL

- Decree of Cyrus Ch. 1:1-4.
- Leader—Zerubbabel Ch. 1:8, 2:2
- Names & number of remnant Ch. 2:3-65.
- Sacred vessels & gifts Ch. 2:68-70.
- Arrival at Jerusalem Ch. 3:1.
- Prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zechariah Ch. 5:1-6,14.
- Final development: Temple rebuilt Ch. 6:15-22.

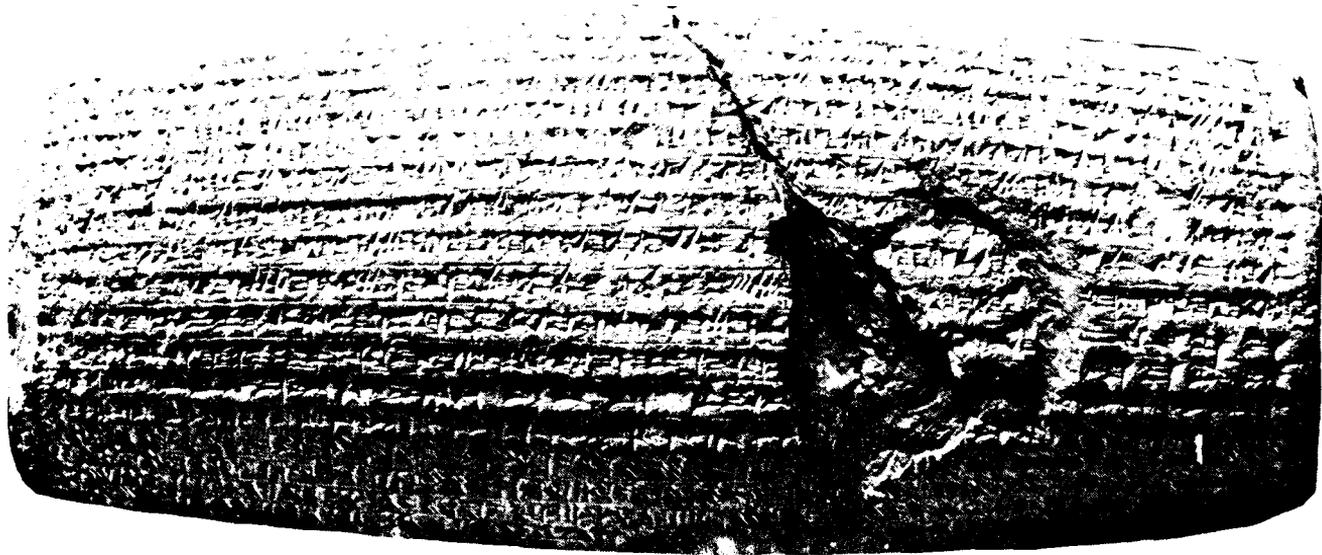
EZRA

- Decree of Artaxerxes Ch. 7:1,11-26.
- Leader—Ezra Ch. 7:1-10.
- Names & number of company Ch. 8:1-20.
- Sacred vessels & gifts ... Ch. 8:24-25.
- Arrival at Jerusalem Ch. 8:32.
- Intercessory ministry of Ezra Ch. 9:1-15.
- Final development: People rededicated Ch. 10:1-44.

The chronology of this period is important in order to get a proper grasp of the important events that took place, and this will be set out in detail later in our Story of the Bible.

We will then provide reasons for believing that the events of the Book of Esther are contemporary with the second half of the Book of Ezra.

There were three stages in the regathering. The first under Zerubbabel, the second, and smaller, under Ezra, the third (mainly his personal attendants) under Nehemiah.



The Cyrus Cylinder





CYRUS

From a bas-relief.

ance that Yahweh had effected for them in Egypt.

The returned exiles could not keep the Day of Atonement, for there was no Temple built, but they could and did keep the Feast of Tabernacles. It was given a new meaning. Previously the people had rejoiced in remembrance of the deliverance from Egypt; now they did so because of release from the Babylonish captivity.

In the ruined city, with hostile enemies surrounding them, with all the problems of the future facing them, this faithful remnant rejoiced before Yahweh because they knew that He was with them.

THE TEMPLE FOUNDATIONS LAID

The next work, as far as Joshua and Zerubbabel were concerned, was the building of the Temple. Cyrus had given them a grant of money for this purpose, and taking the pattern from Solomon, they hired craftsmen of Tyre and Sidon to assist in the work, and to bring cedar from Lebanon.

Soon the port of Joppa was a hive of activity as the materials were unloaded and carried overland to the city of Jerusalem.

And in the city, Joshua and his brethren supervised the work. They appointed the levites from 20 years old and upwards for that purpose. They labored in the dirt, clearing the site for the foundations of the Temple, or they stored the materials that were beginning to arrive from Joppa.

At last the foundations of the Temple were laid, and it was decided to hold a service of thanksgiving.

It was conducted by Joshua the high priest wearing his resplendant robes of office. The priests and levites, likewise dressed in their apparel, together with the musicians and singers, took up their appointed places in what they hoped would one day be the Temple Court, and the glorious Psalms of David were again chanted. Psalm 136, with its wonderful refrain: "O give thanks unto Yahweh; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever" echoed from the hill of Zion over the ruined city beneath (Ezra 3:11).

It was a thrilling moment for the returned exiles. The foundation laid was something accomplished, and in thought they could see the completed Temple. They entered fully in the spirit of the service of dedication, and as the Psalm came to an end, they applauded with a great shout.

But there were some old men among the returned exiles who did not shout for joy. They were old enough to have remembered the previous Temple in all its glory. They thought of the things that it contained which this new Temple would not have: the Ark of the Covenant, the Shekinah glory that Ezekiel saw depart from Solomon's Temple, the Urim that illuminated the breastplate of judgment! As they thought of the glory that had departed, they wept. It was true that Cyrus in his generosity had given a large grant of money for the building of the Temple, but it nowhere equalled that which David had stored up for Solomon's Temple, and as their eyes took in the ruined state of the city, they wept

again. But there was rejoicing in the hearts of the others, and in their excitement they shouted aloud for joy. So much so that the shout of joy drowned the sound of tears, to echo among the hills and valleys around Jerusalem (Ezra 3:13).

Though over 70 years had elapsed since the first attack of Nebuchadnezzar on Jerusalem, only 53 years had passed since the destruction of the Temple. Like the city, the Temple also had to await its 70 years circle, and events now occurred to delay the rebuilding of it.

THE SAMARITANS OPPOSE THE JEWS

North of Judah, there dwelt a mixed community of people, drawn from many nations, which had a semblance of Jewish religion.

They were known as Samaritans, because Samaria became their capital.

When the Assyrian kings took the ten tribes of Israel into captivity, they repopled the lands of the north with captives taken from other parts. These found the problems of settlement so great that they thought they were being cursed by the God of the land, and sought instruction as to how He should be worshipped. A priest of the ten tribes was sent to teach them, and he taught them in the schismatic worship set up originally by Jeroboam (2 Kings 17:28) intermixed with idolatry (vv. 29, 30, 41).

They claimed to worship the true God, but they did it in a corrupt manner.

True Israelites refused to associate with this false worship.

The faithful remnant found themselves embarrassed with the presence of this perverted form of worship, for now the Samaritans wanted to help in building the Temple:

"Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do," they declared.

But Zerubbabel would have none of that. He knew the history of Israel was a record of the true worship being overthrown by such intermixtures of truth and error as the Samaritans embraced. He did not want that to happen again, and preferred to keep separate and aloof from the false worship of the north.

"You have nothing to do with us," declared Zerubbabel and Joshua. "We ourselves, together, will build an house unto Yahweh, as king Cyrus of Persia has commanded us."

Their refusal to allow the Samaritans to join with them in such work was based on religious grounds. They were not opposed to foreign labor, for they had already engaged foreigners of Tyre and Sidon to work for them (Ezra 3:7), but they refused to identify themselves with the false worship of the Samaritans. If the Samaritans genuinely wanted to help, let them first embrace the true worship in its entirety.

That was the attitude of the Jewish leaders, and it is the attitude that faithful worshippers of God have ever adopted.

But this attitude angered the Samaritans. They did everything possible to discourage the Jews in their labors. They even corrupted the Persian officials, so that the promised help became tardy and ineffectual (Ezra 4:5). So the work of the Temple gradually slowed, until it ceased altogether

The Jews Leave Babylon



The Altar Set Up



Meanwhile, Cyrus who had assisted the Jews so much, died.

It was the death-knell of their hopes.

Cambyses, his son (called Ahasuerus in Ezra 4:6) reigned in his stead, and continued for 7 years 5 months.

The adversaries of the Jews wrote unto him an accusation against them. Though nothing appears to have been done at the time, it certainly did not help the Jewish cause at all. Much discouraged by continued reverses and opposition, the work of building the Temple ceased.

The reign of Cambyses ended in tragedy and revolution. The Magians headed the revolution, and one of their number seized

the throne, falsely claiming that he was Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses. He ruled Persia for a period of seven months with the help of his brother Patizithes.

But it was a most disastrous seven months for the Jews.

The Samaritans had bribed some of the Persian officials, and with their support again wrote the court of Persia. They reported that the work of re-building the Temple had commenced, but suggested that if it be permitted to continue, it would be bad for Persia. They recommended that search be made in the national archives, in order to prove the truth of their accusation that "this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful unto the king and provinces.

THE MINISTRY OF HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

They stood up at a crucial period to stimulate the people when it seemed that the cause of the returned Exiles was doomed to failure, and when the early enthusiasm of the Jews had become blunted.

Their names provide an index to their respective missions. Haggai signifies the Festival One, from "hag", a feast, a sacrifice, a solemnity, and thus a gathering to rejoice before Yahweh. Isaiah suggests the idea in the following statement: "Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of Yahweh, to the Rock of Israel" (Isa. 30:29).

Haggai's mission was to gather the people together that they might rejoice before Yahweh. But they could only do so if they gave themselves without reserve to His work. Fourteen years had elapsed since the decree of Cyrus had been issued, and delay and disappointment had drugged the people with apathy towards the work. Haggai was sent to rouse them out of sleep, to direct them to the work, and he performed his mission effectively.

Zechariah continued the work of Haggai by promising a blessing to those who did labor. His name, too, is significant. He is described as "Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet". Zechariah signifies "Yahweh hath remembered"; Berechiah signifies "Yahweh hath blessed"; Iddo signifies "appointed time". Combined these names proclaimed the hopeful message: "Yahweh hath remembered, and Yahweh hath blessed, at the appointed time."

That was the theme of Zechariah's message to the nation. The people only had to look around them to see evidences of its truth.

one noted for sedition, for which cause it had been overthrown." They warned that if the city be allowed to be rebuilt, it would not be long before Persian power would cease south of the Euphrates.

The letter frightened Smerdis. His authority was not very secure, and he knew that any revolt would prove disastrous to his rule. He checked the historical background of Jerusalem. He learned that Jerusalem did have a reputation for insurrection and rebellion, that mighty kings such as David and Solomon had extended its power far and wide, exacting toll and tribute from conquered nations.

What had existed in the past could exist in the future: Judah could become a potential enemy

of Persia.

Smerdis, whose troubles were growing daily, did not want any further problems on his hands. He commanded that the work cease forthwith.

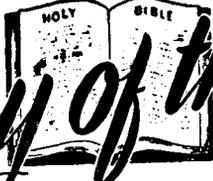
It was a sad day for the Jewish people when this news was received; it was a joyous day for the Samaritans. Armed with this prohibition, they compelled the Jews to cease by "force and power," probably bringing an army against the city, and breaking down any part of the wall that may have been erected (Ezra 4:23).

Thus the work of God in Judah ceased for a time.

The Jewish remnant turned from it to look after its own welfare.

(to be continued)

The Story of the Bible



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The Temple Completed

THE WORK IS RESUMED AND COMPLETED

Darius Hystaspes Grasps Power in Persia

The Persian Empire became more and more convulsed in trouble. The usurper Gomates, who claimed to be Smerdis and who had decreed that the Jewish work must cease, found revolts against his authority starting up on all sides. He lacked the ability or the power to rule effectively, and it was obvious that in a short time, he would be overthrown.

The challenge was taken up by Hystaspes who assumed the title of Darius. He overthrew Gomates, and with energy and skill set about reviving the glory of Cyrus' empire. Eight other pretenders to the throne of Persia were defeated, and then he turned his attention to enemies further afield. In the first five or six years of his reign, he had reconquered all the provinces of the Empire that had revolted, including Elam, Susiana, Media, Babylonia, Parthia, Armenia, etc. He thus became

known as the Arta-xerxes, or Great Shah of Persia. He multiplied titles to himself, and in addition to Darius and Artaxerxes, he was known as the King of Assyria (Ezra 6:22), the king of kings (Ezra 7:12), the king of Babylon (Neh. 13:6), etc.

The enemies of Gomates (Smerdis) became the friends of Darius Hystaspes; the friends of Gomates were the enemies of Darius.

Gomates had supported the Samaritans and opposed the Jews. The enmity of Gomates was now to stand them in good stead.

But for a time the world watched the struggle for power in Persia itself. Darius came to power in B.C. 521. During the first few months, his hands were busy overthrowing the forces ranged against him. By the second year of his reign, however, he was firmly established in power.

It was the year 520 B.C.

Haggai & Zechariah Exhort The People To Work

B.C. 520 is a crucial year in Bible History, for it completes a further 70 years' circle from the

destruction of Jerusalem. Seventy years earlier, Nebuchadnezzar had advanced against Jerusalem for the third and last time, determined to destroy the city, and uproot the people.

After a protracted siege he had succeeded.

B.C. 520 brought the Jews to the very eve of the 70 years' circle of that time, and the Temple still remained in ruins.

Jeremiah had prophesied that there would be a period of 70 years captivity (Jer. 25:11-12, 29:10). The people had returned exactly 70 years after the first invasion of Nebuchadnezzar: would the Temple be rebuilt at this time?

The Jewish people had become apathetic as far as the work was concerned. Their early enthusiasm had become blunted. The unexpected opposition to the work of God, the long delay of 14 years during which the foundations lay neglected, had completely discouraged them. They could not understand why there should be any delay. Was it not the work of God? Why did not He move to clear away all opposition?

They forgot God tests His workmen, and that whilst they were building a material Temple, He was moulding their characters that they might form a part of the spiritual Temple He will ultimately erect.

They could only see the ruin of their hopes. And there was plenty to remind them of that. If any of the wall of the city had been set up as the Samaritans claimed (Ezra 4:12), it had been broken down (v.23, Neh. 2:17). Though the foundations of the Temple had been built, they,

too, had been damaged, so that they had to be restored before actual building on them could commence (Hag. 2:18). The people had dispersed to the various cities, claiming that the time had not come for the building of the Temple (Haggai 1:4). A spirit of gross materialism had replaced the early enthusiasm for the work of Yahweh. Houses were built and glamorised (Haggai 1:4), every effort was made to establish personal wealth and prestige (Haggai 1:6), but the Temple lay neglected. Yet despite their search for material gain, there was no true prosperity among the people (Zech. 8:9-11). A succession of bad seasons left them impoverished and completely dispirited (Haggai 1:10-11).

All their efforts to rebuild the nation seemed dogged by bad luck.

They did not realise that this was the punishment of God because of their lack of faith.

A spiritual revival was needed.

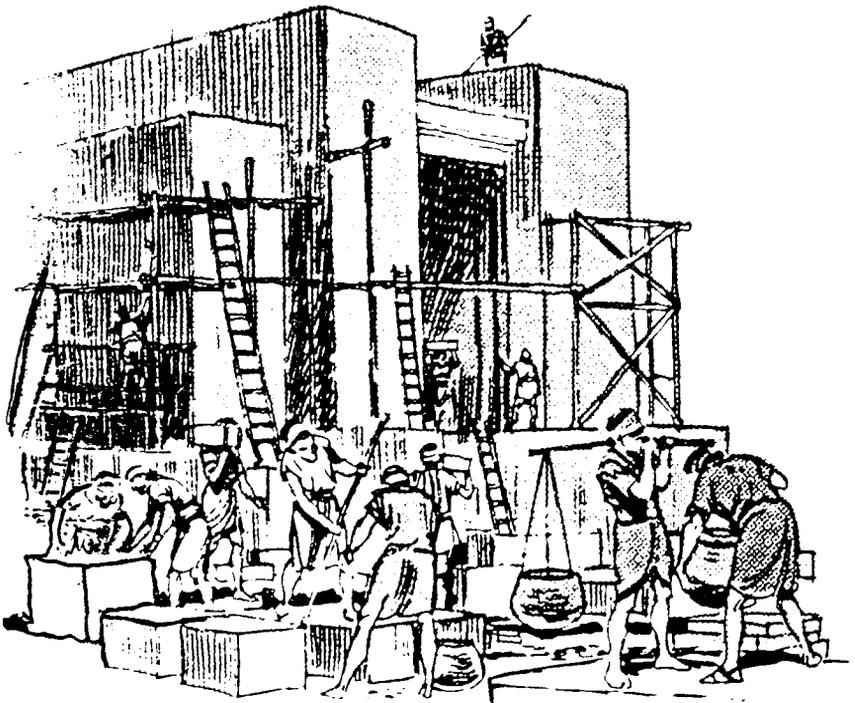
And Yahweh provided the men for the need.

Two prophets, moved by the spirit of God, stood up to rouse the people again to the work of Yahweh, to tell them that the time had come to rebuild the Temple, to remind them that if they dedicated themselves to the work of God that He would bless them.

They were the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

Haggai's voice was heard first. His message was: "Consider your ways!" He plainly told the people that they were lacking in spiritual virtues; he reminded them that despite all their seeking after material things, they did not

The Temple being Restored



The Temple Finished



really prosper (Haggai 1:5-6).

He appealed to them:

"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your panelled houses, and this House (the Temple) lie waste?" (Hag. 1:4).

"You look for much," he told them, "but you receive little because you neglect the work of God." He promised that if they set about building the Temple, that God would take pleasure in it, no matter how humble the work might appear in human eyes (Hag. 1:8).

His message stirred up Zerubbabel and Joshua. They issued a call for work. They revived the early enthusiasm. Many gathered at the site of the Temple with a desire to rebuild it (Hag. 1:14).

Haggai's message had been delivered in the 6th month of the second year of Darius. It was a very opportune time, for it just preceded the Feast of Tabernacles in the seventh month, when all the people were gathered together to celebrate the national deliverance from Egypt.

This Feast provided an ideal opportunity for further instructions. Again, stirred up by the spirit of God, Haggai called the people before him on the final day of the feast, delivered the Divine message (Haggai 2:1). He singled out those who had wept when they had seen the foundations of the new Temple laid some 14 years earlier, because they remembered the glory of Solomon's Temple.

"Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" he asked.

But he pointed out that in despising this temple, they were despising the work of God. And turning to the people who clustered

around him listening to his message, he cried:

"Be strong, O Zerubbabel! Be strong, O Joshua! Be strong, all ye people of the land, and WORK! For I am with you, saith Yahweh of hosts!" (Hag. 2:4).

He called upon them not to be despondent at reverses. Their humble acts of faith were pleasing in the eyes of Yahweh, and through faith, they would one day see the fruits of their toil. The time is coming he told them, when Yahweh will shake all the nations, destroy their power, send the Messiah with all the faithful to rule, and fill His house with glory.

"The latter-day glory of this House shall be greater than the former," cried the prophet (according to the Hebrew).

The people were stirred by his message. They returned home from the Feast of Tabernacles determined to dedicate themselves anew to the work. A month later (see Haggai 1:1, 2:1, with Zech. 1:1) Zechariah lifted up his voice to support and confirm the message of Haggai.

From thence onwards the voices of the two prophets were periodically raised to encourage the people to labor for God.

The Jews Defy Their Enemies

The people now returned to the work with vigor. They refused to be deterred by opposition or discouragement of any kind. Stimulated by the example of Zerubbabel and Joshua, they assembled at the site of the Temple to clear it of rubble, to restore the foundations, and to prepare material for building.

Their adversaries viewed this renewed activity with fear and

hostility. Shetharboznai, a leader of the Samaritans, hastened to the Governor-general of the region to lodge a complaint that the Jews were violating the express decree of Persia. They forced him to intervene, and to warn the Jewish leaders that their action could bring upon them the opposition of the Government.

"Who commanded you to build this house, and to make up this wall?" he enquired.

The Jews had an answer. They directed his attention to the decree of Cyrus, the legitimate ruler of Persia. For evidence, they pointed to the grant of money given them officially by the Government, to the wealth of gold and silver vessels from the Temple that had been delivered into their hands by command of Cyrus.

The Governor did not know what to do. He knew that Smerdis had prohibited the building of the Temple by the Jews, but Smerdis was a usurper, and it was dangerous, at that time, to show any sympathy for his policy.

The Governor was in a dilemma, and decided to appeal to the court of Persia for a decision. He wrote a report to Darius outlining the defence of the Jews, and including an appeal by the Samaritans that the work cease.

Meanwhile the work continued. The Jews, inspired by the action of their leaders, and stimulated by the fiery messages of the two

prophets, continued to labor. They cleared the site, repaired the foundations, prepared to build the wall. They felt there was a divine destiny in their work, that "the eye of their God was upon them" (Ezra 5:5).

They were greatly encouraged by a series of prophetic visions seen and recorded at this time by Zechariah in the name of Yahweh (Zech. 1:7. -6:15). He saw horsemen going forth to combat the enemies of Judah. He saw a "man with a measuring line" (Zech. 2), and heard an announcement: "Jerusalem shall be inhabited . . . I, Yahweh, will be a wall of fire around about." He saw Joshua with garments stained and filthy through laboring amidst the rubble of the Temple, and heard the command that he should change these garments for his resplendant gowns of office, that he might take his place in the completed Temple. He heard a voice proclaiming a message of encouragement for Zerubbabel, telling him that the spirit of Yahweh was with him, and the mountain of Gentile opposition that sought to frustrate the work he was engaged upon would be levelled as a plain.

"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that Yahweh of hosts has sent me unto you," cried the prophet (Zech. 4:9).*

*The historical incidents of the Book of Ezra, provide the foundation for the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah. They are shown to be typical of the glory of the future Age when the Lord Jesus, as King-priest (the antitypical Zerubbabel and Joshua) shall reign. See, for example, the remarkable prophecy of Zechariah 3, where satan (the adversary), is shown standing at the right hand to resist Joshua. The type is based on historical events of the day (Ezra, 4:1-6). The adversaries of Judah caused the work of building the Temple to temporary cease (v24). Joshua instituted a reform (Ezra, 5:2). He was opposed by satan (the adversary), but "the eye of their God" (the angel-Exod. 23:20) was upon the elders of Israel (Ezra, 5:5), and the work was advanced and completed. Though historically true, this is prophetic of the work of Christ—the true Joshua.

There were other visions not so encouraging that the people did not fully understand. But sufficient was clear to them that God was with them, and they could afford to ignore the opposition of their enemies.

They continued to labor with a will, confident that they would succeed in completing the Temple this time.

The Confidence of the Prophets Confirmed

Meanwhile the Samaritans waited expectantly, hoping for confirmation of the previous decree, certain that Darius would prevent the development of such a troublesome nation as the Jews.

At last his answer came.

What a shock for the enemies of the Jews!

Darius had discovered the decree of Cyrus, and not only confirmed it, but extended it! He not only commanded the Governor of the region and the Samaritans that they must not oppose the work, but specifically ordered that it was to be assisted out of the public revenue.

"Let the work of this house of God alone," he ordered. "Let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in its place."

He ordered that out of the tribute paid by such nations as the Samaritans, expenses be given the Jews "that they be not hindered," and that adequate animals be provided, "that they may offer sacrifices unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons." And he warned, that if any try to oppose this work, the most severe punishment would be meted out to them.

The very opposition of the

Samaritans had thus turned to the good of the Jews.

From a political point of view, the policy of Darius was a sound one. He could see that the rising power of Judah would soon be a force in the lands south of the Euphrates. In supporting them, and arranging for daily sacrifices to be offered in their Temple on his behalf, the king bound the nation to his cause, converted it into a valuable ally.

That was doubtless his policy, but in implementing it, the purpose of Yahweh was consummated. Thus are the wonderful ways of Providence revealed. He uses natural events to fulfil His plans.

The Jews now redoubled their activity. All doubt and indecision was at an end. The messages of the prophets had been thoroughly vindicated. With complete confidence the people gave themselves to the work, and as they did so they were urged on by continued words of encouragement from the prophets (Ezra 6:14).

Fasts Turned to Feasts

The whole Jewish nation: princes, priests, prophets and people were thus united in a common cause, joyful in the realisation that they were doing a good work, and that God was with them.

Until then solemn fasts had been held on certain days of the year which commemorated disastrous events in the fall of Jerusalem. Of those days the people would abstain from eating, and would lament the evils that had befallen them.

But with such evidences of God's goodness now manifested, the fasts had lost their power and

significance for the excited people.

A deputation was sent to Zechariah to seek the guidance of Yahweh as to whether these fasts should be continued.* The deputation was told to go back to the nation, and remind the people that these disasters had come upon it because they had departed from the ways of God. Therefore, they needed to take heed to the warning, by obeying the Divine law from the heart.

Zechariah reminded the deputation that before the people had set their hearts to building the Temple, there had been severe distress throughout the land; but since the time that they had given themselves wholeheartedly to the work, they had experienced the blessings of God. There was no point in celebrating fasts under such conditions; best to turn them into feasts to commemorate the blessings that were then experiencing (Zech. 7:1-3, 9. 8:18-19).

Thus the fasts were converted into feasts of thanksgiving.

The Work Completed

On the month Adar, the 6th month of the civil year, but the 12th month of the Jewish sacred year, in the 6th year of Darius (Ezra 6:15), the work was completed, and once again the Jews had a Temple at which to worship.

Adar signifies "dark, cloudy," and a dark, cloudy period of Jewish history had just come to an end. A new beginning stretched before the nation, of which the

opening year, the following month, could well be the token. The dedication of the Temple was immediately celebrated, in order that it might be ready for the Passover celebrated the following month. It was kept with the greatest joy, for the people could see about them the evidences of the Divine blessing. Not only was the Temple erected again, not only did they have a tangible centre of worship, but their material prosperity had advanced through the blessing from on high as the prophets had declared it would. Zerubbabel, Joshua, the prophets, the people, could look about them with a sense of something accomplished; with a knowledge that their captivity was at an end.*

There was no weeping on this occasion! It did not matter that the Temple lacked the glory of Solomon's; it was Yahweh's work, and in His time, He will fill it with a glory, greater than the nation has ever seen. And the people celebrated, not merely as Judah, but as Israel, as the whole united nation, for among those who had returned, were representatives of all tribes. Thus, in the course of the dedication service, 12 he-goats were sacrificed, "according to the number of tribes of Israel" (Ezra 6:17). The people viewing the scene before them, saw their Prince, Zerubbabel, rejoicing in the completed task; saw their high priest, Joshua, resplendent in his robes; saw the priests and levites in the order designed

*Notice the date that this was done: "the fourth year of Darius" (Zech. 7:1). The Temple was completed in the 6th year (Ezra. 6:15).

*The Jews are described as the "children of captivity." The word in Hebrew signifies "to strip bare." Their captivity was not merely dispersion, but a stripping bare of all the good things of life—especially in a spiritual direction.

by David about the altar; heard the singers chanting the glorious Psalms of David and the musicians accompanying their singing with the instruments; saw the sacrifices smoking upon the altar; saw the new Temple as a background to all this, awaiting the worship of the nation. It was a glorious moment of victory for the faithful in Israel.

A few days later, the Passover was kept with a deep sense of gratitude for the deliverance that

had been granted them. They kept it with the solemn realisation that God was with them. And on that day of thankfulness and rejoicing, there were present with them thoughtful Gentiles who had seen what Yahweh had done for His people, and who threw in their lot with the destiny of the holy nation (Ezra. 6:21).

The joint labors of Zerubabel and Joshua had been brought to a successful completion.

The Book of Esther

A Contrast To That Of Ruth

"It is a most interesting book that we have commenced tonight!" remarked Mr. Phillips with enthusiasm, as the family completed reading the first chapter of Esther.

"I cannot see much interest in it" grumbled Peter. "All it seems to contain are a lot of hard names, and a not very interesting story of a despotic king!"

"Peter is getting quite good at adjectives," commented Ann mischievously.

"I can supply a few for you, if you like," answered Peter cheerfully.

"I suppose you would contrast the Book of Esther with the Book of Ruth," suggested Graham, ignoring the interchange of compliments between his brother and sister.

"Indeed, yes!" replied his father. "In the Book of Ruth we have the account of a Gentile girl who married a Jew; in that of Esther we read of a Jewess who

married a Gentile. In Ruth, we are taken into the most humble circumstances of the greatest poverty; whilst in Esther we are introduced to the luxurious palace of one of the wealthiest monarchs of history. In the Book of Ruth there is dramatised the principles of individual salvation; in the Book of Esther there is enacted those of national salvation. Both Ruth and Esther had this in common, that their personal beauty was crowned with a faithful, courageous and lovable character. And both the books have this in common, that they reveal the hidden hand of God, guiding the ultimate outcome of the adventures recorded therein, to the glory of His name, and the benefit of His people."

"The Jews must find much comfort in the book," said Joan.

"Indeed, yes! They celebrate the circumstances of the great deliverance of their people recorded therein in what is called the Feast

of Purim. They have kept this Feast throughout the years to the present time. In it they rejoice at the triumph of their people over their deadly enemy, Haman, and during the centuries of persecution that they have suffered, they must have derived much encouragement by so doing. It should have taught them that Yahweh will help them if they but turn to him. During the celebration of this Feast, the Book of Esther is publicly read."

"I have read, somewhere, that the word 'God' does not appear therein," remarked Graham.

"That is true," said his father, "but in no book of the Bible is the influence of God more powerfully revealed. The book wonderfully illustrates the truth stated by Daniel 4:17 that 'God rules in the kingdom of men,' and that is beautifully expressed in Isaiah 51: 22-23. You might read it for us, Joan."

Joan turned up the place, and read:

"Thus saith Yahweh that pleadeth the cause of His people. Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of My fury; thou shalt no more drink it again; but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee; which have said to thy soul, Bow down, that we may go over; and thou hast laid thy body as the ground, and as the street, to them that went over."

"These words of Isaiah of course, relate to the future," explained Mr. Phillips, "but the principle involved is illustrated by the Book of Esther. As we shall see, Yahweh turned the curse that was pronounced by Haman against the Jewish people in the time of Esther, into a blessing, and saving His people out of their troubles,

He brought upon their enemies the evil they had conspired to bring upon the Jews."

The Chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther

"At what time did Esther live?" asked Ann.

"I believe that we should fit the book of Esther in between the 5th and 6th chapters of Ezra," replied her father.

"That cannot be," said Peter, who was looking at the chapters referred to in Ezra, "for Darius is the king referred to in Ezra, whilst Ahasuerus was reigning at the time of Esther."

"That is true," replied his father, "but Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes were titles used by several kings, and not the names of individual monarchs. Often the kings of Persia used more than one such title, and I believe that in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, they all relate to one person."

"Have the titles any significance?"

"Yes. Ahasuerus means 'the Mighty,' and is a title used by at least four different Median and Persian kings. Artaxerxes means 'Great King,' and is equivalent to the modern title of Shah. Darius means 'the Restrainer' or 'Maintainer,' and signifies King or Ruler. All these titles seemed to have been used interchangeably by different Monarchs."

"Have you any examples of that?"

"Yes. Xerxes, a monarch of ancient Persia, in an inscription that he caused to be erected at Persepolis, called himself in one sentence both 'Xerxes the great king,' and 'Darius the king.' He thus

claimed to be both "Artaxerxes" and Darius.' Remember, too, that we read tonight from Esther 1:1, that Ahasuerus was 'that Ahasuerus that reigned from India unto Ethiopia.' This statement alone, shows that other monarchs of Persia claimed the title; but the Ahasuerus of Esther was the one who ruled over the provinces thus named. Josephus calls Ahasuerus, Artaxerxes, thus, identifying the name as a title."

"And you think that the three titles as used in Ezra and Esther relate to the one king?" asked Graham.

"Yes, I believe that all three titles relate to the king historically known as Darius Hystaspes."

"Your statement sounds convincing," interrupted Peter who had been doing some rapid Bible searching whilst his father had been talking, "and I am sorry to destroy your theory, but there is a verse that explodes it!"

"What verse is that?"

"Ezra 6:14. This shows beyond doubt that Darius and Artaxerxes were two different persons. It reads: 'They (the Jews) builded and finished it (i.e. the Temple) according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.'"

"That seems to prove conclusively that Darius and Artaxerxes related to two different kings," agreed Graham.

"It does until the verse is considered more closely," said Mr. Phillips with a smile. "But the

Hebrew 'vav' rendered 'and' can also be rendered 'even.' If we read the verse that way, it identifies Darius and Artaxerxes as one: 'Darius EVEN Artaxerxes.'"

"But are we justified in so reading the verse?" asked the boys.

"Yes, for there was only one decree to build the Temple in Jerusalem, to which two kings gave their support, and not three as the verse would teach if we accepted the A.V. Cyrus originated the decree, and it was endorsed and extended by Darius as we read in Ezra 6:1. But there is nothing in the Bible about a third decree by Artaxerxes to build the Temple,* nor a confirmation of the decree of Cyrus by any other king than Darius. Therefore I believe this statement should read, 'Darius even Artaxerxes.' And I believe that the Darius in question was the king known historically as Darius Hystaspes."

"When did he reign?"

"Approximately B.C. 521. It might be useful for you to make a list of the Persian kings, for several of them played an important part in Bible history and prophecy. They are as follows:

Cyrus reigned 9 years from B.C.538.

Cambyses reigned 8 years from B.C.529.

Darius Hystaspes reigned 36 years from B.C.521.

Xerxes reigned 21 years from B.C.485.

Artaxerxes Longimanus reigned 41 years from 464.

Darius Nothus reigned 19 years from 423.

* Notice that the decree of Artaxerxes mentioned in Ezra 7 was to "beautify" that already built (Ezra 7:27), not to rebuild the Temple.

Artaxerxes Mnemon reigned 46 years from 404.

Artaxerxes Ochus reigned 21 years from 358.

Arogus reigned 2 years from 337.

Darius III reigned 4 years from 335.

Alexander the Great commenced to reign 331."

"Is it usual to identify Ahasuerus with Darius Hystaspes?" asked Graham.

"No, it is usual to identify him with Xerxes the Great, and the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7 with Artaxerxes Longimanus. This requires a break of about 60 years between the completion of the Temple as recorded in Ezra 6, and the arrival of Ezra himself at Jerusalem, as recorded in subsequent chapters."

"And why do you differ from that?"

"Because I believe that it creates too many difficulties. For example, the book of Esther states that Mordecai was taken captive with Jeconiah, King of Judah (Est. 2:6). That was in the year B.C.597. If Ahasuerus is identified with Xerxes instead of with Darius Hystaspes, Mordecai would have been at least 123 years old when he was made Prime Minister! And that would have been most unlikely. As Esther was his cousin (Est. 2:7), she must have been 'an aged beauty' to say the least, when she was brought before the king, if that king was Xerxes! I, therefore, prefer to identify the Ahasuerus of Esther with Hystaspes, whose reign agrees so well with the details contained in Esther. In the book called 1st Esdras, which was written before Christ, the Ahasuerus of Esther is identified with Darius Hystaspes (see Ch. 3:1-2).

"That seems quite sound in regard to Ahasuerus," said Graham, "but why do you think that Artaxerxes must also be identified with Darius Hystaspes?"

"I have already given you some reasons," replied his father, "and the further you look into the matter, the more it seems evident that Hystaspes is the king referred to. For example, if we identify Artaxerxes with Longimanus, we must provide a long break of 60 years between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, and I do not think the internal evidence allows for such a long break. Such a break would require that Ezra be at least 126 years of age when he left Babylon for the long and tiring journey to Jerusalem, and at least 141 years of age when he walked in procession at the dedication of the wall."

"How do you make that out?"

"Because he is said to be the son of Seraiah (Ezra 7:1) who was put to death by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:8, 18-21). He would thus, at least, have been born by the year 587 B.C. when this took place, and at least 126 years of age when he first comes under our notice. I do not think it practicable that Ezra was so old when he left Babylon, and therefore I feel we must identify Artaxerxes with an earlier king than Longimanus, and only Hystaspes provides the necessary qualifications. Further, a careful consideration of Nehemiah 10:2-10 with Ezra 2, reveals that 20 out of the 30 priests and levites who returned with Zerubbabel in the year 536 signed the covenant with Nehemiah who returned in the 20th year of Artaxerxes. If Artaxerxes is identified with Longimanus, they were all still

alive 91 years after their return under Zerubbabel. That is not very logical. So, again, for this reason, we are forced to identify the Artaxerxes of Ezra and Nehemiah with Darius Hystaspes, and do away with the long break of time usually provided between Ezra 6 and 7."

"I can follow your reasoning there," remarked Graham, "but does this king Hystaspes answer to the requirements of the book of Esther from an historical point of view?"

"Yes, even to a detailed way," answered Mr. Phillips. "Esther 1:1 states that 'this Ahasuerus reigned from India even unto Ethiopia,' and history records that Hystaspes conquered India. Further Esther 10:1 states that Ahasuerus 'laid a tribute upon the land and upon the isles of the sea,' and Herodotus records that late in the reign of Hystaspes he laid a 'tribute on the islands and nations of Europe as far as Thessaly' (Book 3:96). Historians of ancient history also add that the control of these islands was lost by Xerxes before the 12th year of his reign, which proves conclusively that he does not answer to the Ahasuerus of Esther. The only other king in Persian history that answers to the description set forth in the book of Esther is Hystaspes. Thus, all the evidence I have been able to gather together suggests that Cambyses is the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6, Smerdis is the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7-23; Darius Hystaspes is at once the Darius of Ezra 4:5, 24, 5:5-6, 6:1, 12, 13, the Artaxerxes of Ezra 6:14, 7:1,

26, Neh. 2:1, 5:14, 13:6, and the Ahasuerus of Esther. As we discovered earlier, Darius, Artaxerxes and Ahasuerus were titles which the Monarchs of Persia assumed. Sometimes one monarch claimed several of them. They were not the only titles they used. They also claimed to be King of kings, King of Assyria (Ezra 6:22), and doubtless other high-sounding titles."

"It is a little difficult for me to follow," confessed Ann.

"I agree that it is a difficult subject," answered her father, "but if we can grasp it, it will help us to understand these important books better. To that end I have written out for you a suggested chronology of the times, based upon the suggestion that Artaxerxes, Darius, Ahasuerus were titles relating to the same Monarch, namely Darius Hystaspes."

"According to this chronology, the chapter we read in Esther tonight was taking place whilst the

"Yes, I believe that to be the case," answered his father.

"I am afraid all these dates are beyond me," confessed Joan. "And I also found it somewhat difficult to understand the chapter we read. What is it all about?"

"Let us briefly review the chapter," suggested Mr. Phillips. "We can well entitle our story:

Ahasuerus' Royal Feasts

"A mighty king reigned in Persia whose name was Hystaspes. He had overthrown many pretenders to the throne*, and had grasped

*See "Story of the Bible" last issue.

★ ★

DETAILED CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA, NEHEMIAH AND ESTHER

Day	Mth.	Year	King	Reference	Event	
		2	Darius	Ezra. 4:24—	Rebuilding of Temple recommenced.	
		3	Ahasuerus	Est. 1:1-5—	Vashti deposed.	
4—	9—	4	Darius	Zech. 7:1—	Instructions regarding fasts.	
		6	Ahasuerus	Est. 2:8-16—	Esther brought to Shushan.	
3—	12—	6	Darius	Ezra 6:15—	Temple completed.	
14—	1—	6	Darius	Ezra 6:19—	Passover observed.	
		10—	Ahasuerus	Est 2:16-18—	Esther's marriage.	
1—	1—	7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:1-9—	Ezra leaves Babylon.	
9—	1—	7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:15-21—	Ezra halts 3 days at Ahava.	
12—	1—	7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:31—	Ezra leaves Ahava.	
1—	5—	7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 7:9—	Ezra arrives at Jerusalem.	
4—	5—	7	Artaxerxes	Ezra 8:33—	Vessels delivered to the Temple.	
20—	9—	-	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:9—	Assembly at Jerusalem.	
1—	10—	-	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:16—	Assize begun to assess heathen marriages.	
1—	1—	-	Artaxerxes	Ezra 10:17—	Assize finished.	
		1—	Ahasuerus	Est. 3:7—	Haman casts lots.	
13—	1—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 3:12—	Posts go out.	
15—	1—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 5:1-8—	Esther's appeal.	
16—	1—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 5:8—	Esther's banquet.	
23—	3—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 8:9-14—	Modcai's posts.	
13—	12—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:1-12—	Massacre day.	
14—	12—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:15-17—	1st Purim.	
15—	12—	12	Ahasuerus	Est. 9:18-27—	2nd Purim.	
		9—	20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 1:1—	Hanani's report.
		1—	20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 2:1—	Nehemiah leaves for Jerusalem.
25—	6—	20	Artaxerxes	Neh. 6:15—	Wall finished.	
1—	7—	-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:2—	Public reading of Law by Ezra.	
2—	7—	-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:13—	They read of dwelling in booths.	
15—	7—	-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18—	Feast of Tabernacles.	
21—	7—	-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18—	Completion of Feast.	
22—	7—	-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 8:18—	Day of solemn assembly.	
24—	7—	-	Artaxerxes	Neh. 9:1-2—	Heathen wives put away.	
		32	Artaxerxes	Neh. 13:6—	Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem after leave of absence.	

The above chronology, which gathers together most of the references to time periods in these contemporary books, is based upon the suggestion that Darius, Ahasuerus, and Artaxerxes are titles assumed by one king — Hystaspes. Sometimes a slight confusion is apparent in a few cases where months are numbered according to their position on the calendar instead of from the time when the king began to reign. For example, "Adar" of Ezra 6:15 is the 12th month of the sacred year, whereas the "first month" of Ezra 6:19, is the first month of the ensuing year. But both occurred in the 6th year of Darius, for his sixth year overlapped the Jewish sacred year. The above chronology is an attempt to synchronize the events of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, and appears the most logical and consistent when all problems are considered. It also explains some very interesting facets of this period of Bible history, as will be revealed as our Story of the period unfolds.

ed power himself. Historians tell us that the first two years of his reign were occupied in this way. He was a capable ruler, and ultimately extended the power of Persia in all directions, until he reigned from India unto Ethiopia, over 127 provinces.**

"The first two years of his reign had been troublous ones, during which many enemies had risen up against him, and had to be suppressed. But now they had all been overthrown, and he decided to consolidate his reign by two great feasts to which he commanded all the rulers of his realm to attend.

"The first feast occupied some

180 days. All the nobles and princes of the provinces were required to be present at this feast, to pay their allegiance to Ahasuerus (Est. 1:4) It was followed by a more intimate feast which lasted seven days, which the more personal princes and servants of Persia itself had to attend."

"Were his guests feasting all that time?" asked Peter as his father paused.

"No, I believe the purpose of the long feast was to give an opportunity for all princes of the realm to attend. Such a great number of guests could not be accommodated at one time, so the feast was extended over the 180 days.

**The dates and events of the Book of Esther fit in 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 (cp. Est. 1:3). Babylon revolted against him twice; once in the 1st year of his reign, and again in the 4th. On this 2nd 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 (Est. 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 organizer of the Empire who issued the decrees of Ezra 6:6-12; 7:12-26 (Romance of Bible Chronology).

The extent of Persian rule under Ahasuerus (Est. 1:1) also agrees with that under Darius Hystaspes. He conquered India in 508 BC, 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 Est. 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 Est. 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."

This allowed all to come at different times, and permitted the king to entertain different guests from all over the widespread Empire of Persia.

"The shorter feast was designed for his more intimate associates. All the people of Shushan the palace were present on that occasion. They saw the king in all his glory. They viewed with admiration the beautiful tapestries, the magnificent decorations of the palace, all of which were indicative of his outstanding wealth and power. They were invited to recline at their meals on couches covered with gold and silver cloth, standing on a vast floor of brilliant mosaics made up of costly red, blue, white and black marble. The drinking vessels were of gold, and royal wine flowed in an endless stream to the favored guests. At the same time, however, the king commanded that there was to be no compulsion in the drinking; each could take what he desired (v.8).

"Meanwhile, Queen Vashti gave a feast for the women"

"What does Vashti's name mean?" asked Graham who was taking notes.

"It means 'beautiful woman' and she was noted for her great beauty. She was looked upon as an ornament to the king. Thus, on the seventh day of the second feast, when all his local princes were gathered together, the king commanded that she should come into his presence dressed in her royal robes (v.11) that he might show her beauty unto the admiring people.

"It was a grand occasion for the king. The procession of nobles and

princes from all over his realm to pay him honor, had demonstrated the power and extent of his kingdom. A sense of well-being flooded his heart, and he looked forward to the regal appearance of Vashti as the crowning ornament and sharer of his glory.

"But she refused to come.

"Presiding over her own feast, admired of her guests, she was not prepared to submit to the king's command. She had become proud and conceited in her own glory, and too high in her self-esteem to submit to the king.

"Haughtily she told the seven chamberlains whom the king had sent to bring her, that she would not come!

"It was most embarrassing for Ahasuerus when these chamberlains returned with the Queen's message. Every other ruler, from all over his realm, had obeyed his command; but his wife, who should have been foremost in paying him honour that was due to him, had contemptuously spurned his request, and had shamed him before all his guests.

"It was a very awkward moment for the king, and he realised that some rebuke had to be made to the foolish queen, in order that he might retain his dignity.

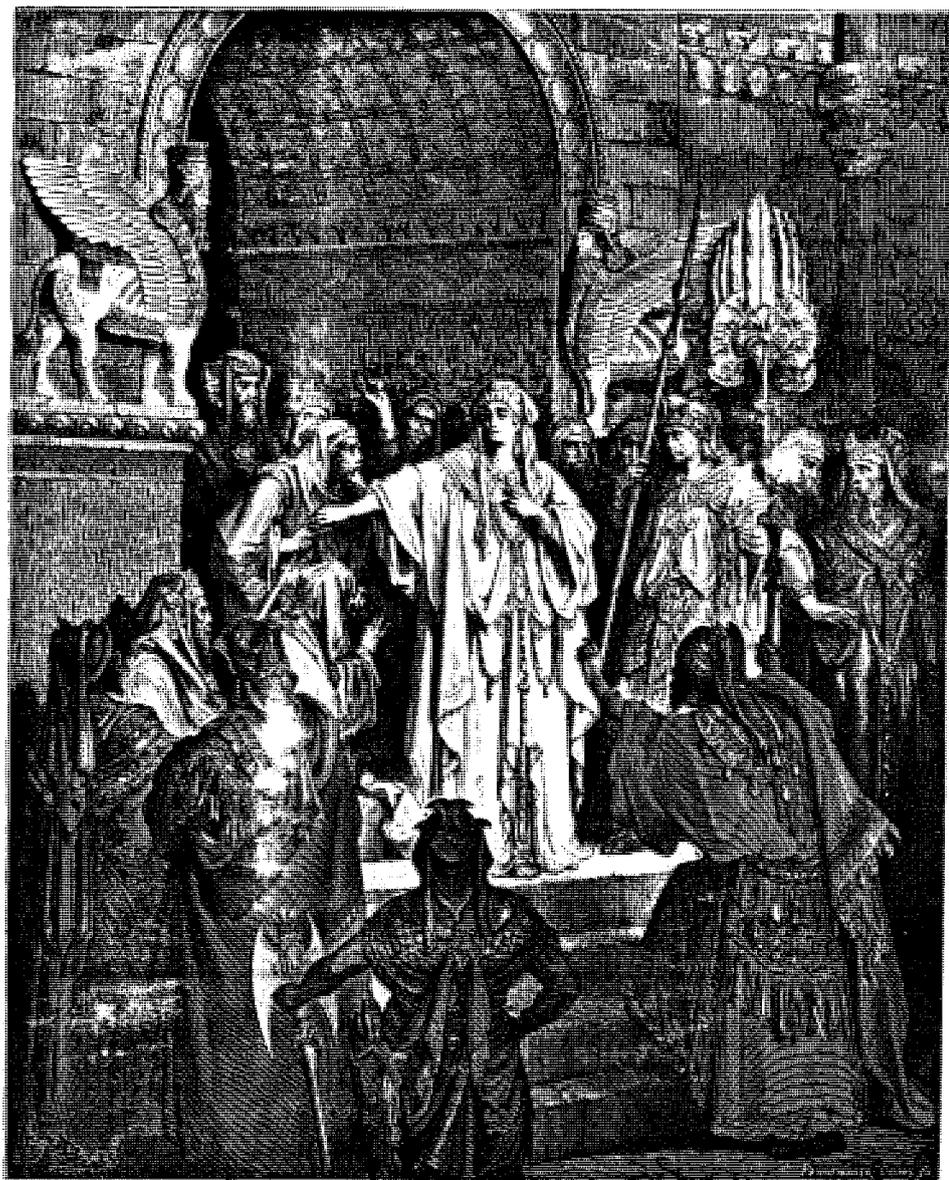
Let Vashti Be Put Away!

"But what should be done?"

"At the king's feast were the seven privy counsellors who 'saw the king's face, and sat first in his kingdom' (v.14).

"The king appealed to them for advice.

"The chief of their number, a man bearing the title of Memucan replied:



THE QUEEN VASHTI REFUSING TO OBEY THE COMMAND
OF AHASUERUS

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded
the seven chamberlains to bring Vashti the queen to shew the people and
the princes her beauty. (Esther 1: 10, 11)



ESTHER ACCUSING HAMAN

For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish . . .
Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen . . . (Esther 7: 4, 6)

"Vashti the queen has not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and all the people that are in the provinces; for her deed will come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes. Others will follow her example, so that contempt and wrath will arise. If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before king Abasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire (for it is great) all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and small."

"This action was very extreme, but the king realised that if he were to let Vashti's rebellion go unrebuked, it would show weakness on his part. before all the people of the land, and could result in many enemies arising (as they had previously done) to challenge his authority.

"He therefore ordered the decree to be sent throughout his empire, and the foolish queen was deposed from her position of authority.

Search for a New Queen

"And now the 7 privy counsellors set about seeking a new queen for the king.

"Officers were appointed in all the provinces, and ordered to gather together the most beautiful girls in all the realm, that suitable choice might be made to replace Vashti.

"But even the most beautiful was not fit for the king without undergoing a special form of puri-

fication. The king was worshipped almost as a God and therefore the bride selected for him must not only be beautiful in form and appearance, but also had to be carefully instructed and prepared in every other way, to grace the king's presence.

"Among those so selected for this possible honor was one called Esther.

Esther Finds Favor

"In Shushan the palace, there was a certain Jew named Mordecai. He had been taken captive to Babylon at the time of Jeconiah, king of Judah, nearly 80 years before. He had doubtless heard the prophecies of Daniel, and witnessed some of the marvellous things that had taken place in Babylon. He had seen Cyrus come to power, and had gradually risen to a position of authority in the service of the kings of Persia. Darius Hystaspes had shown a kindness to Jews when he had decreed that every assistance should be given to them in rebuilding the Temple, shortly after he had come to power. Perhaps Mordecai had had some influence in such a decision.

"He had a young cousin whose name was Hadassah (Myrtle), but whom we know better as Esther (or Star -- cp. Est. 2:7).^{*} Early in her life, her father and mother had died, leaving her an orphan. But Mordecai had taken her into his own home, and looked after her as his daughter.

"She grew up to be a very beautiful young lady, attractive in

^{*} Her name is also identified with the root sathar—to hide, because her identification was hidden.

every way; not only in appearance, but in manners also.

"Together with other young ladies selected as possible brides to replace Vashti, she was brought into the custody of Hegai the king's chamberlain, who had the official title of Keeper of the Women. He was attracted, not only by the beauty of her appearance, but also by the modest and pleasing manner in which she conducted herself. He sought to advance her cause in every way possible. He gave her preferential treatment, carefully selecting for her the seven maidens who were to act as her attendant virgins, and arranging that whatsoever she desired, she quickly received. Esther soon found herself promoted to the very best place in the House of the Women.

"He did not know that Esther was a Jewess, for on the instructions of Mordecai, she had not revealed that fact.

"Nor did she realize, at that time, the purpose that God had in this sudden elevation to honor. But God, in His wisdom, could foresee the crisis that was about to fall upon the Jewish people, and was preparing the means whereby they could escape the evil that their enemies would attempt to

bring upon them.. Thus, invisibly, unknown to the various parties concerned, the ways of Providence were being worked out."

"Why did Mordecai instruct her not to reveal her real identity?" asked Graham

"We are not told" replied his father, "and in the absence of anything specific, we can but suggest the reason. Mordecai was undoubtedly a man of faith. As such, though he would not be happy in the prospect of the marriage of his young cousin to a Gentile, he doubtless perceived in her sudden elevation to possible honor, the guiding hand of God in her affairs, even though he did not comprehend the purpose behind it. He doubtless decided not to precipitate matters by revealing her identity, but allow God to work the matter out according to His will. I am quite sure that he would have made it all a matter of prayer.

"Meanwhile, he was greatly concerned at the turn things had taken. This is suggested by the statement of Esther 2:11. Though he was appointed to a position at the gate of the Palace, he each day contrived somehow to visit the court of the seraglio in order to see Esther, or to obtain information concerning her.

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Esther and Ezra

Mr. Phillips is describing the wonderful experiences in the life of Esther; how she found favor in the King's Court; and the events that brought her to the highest position in the land . . .

How the King's Bride Was Selected

"So important was the position of Queen in the realm of Persia, so high was the king held in the esteem of the people, that a long course of preparation was required for each of the maidens who were selected as eligible for the honor of being his bride. They were subjected to a special course of instruction and purification. For six months they were purified with the oil of myrrh, and for another six months with sweet odors and other things.

"After this long preparation, each one of the young maidens was permitted to select whatever clothing she desired, that she might appear to the very best advantage before the king. If, however, he did not select her for the coveted position of bride, she returned, disappointed, into the 'second house of the women,' the residence of the concubines (v.14), there to remain until her death. She saw the king's face no more unless

specially called, and was never given in marriage to any other man. Thus, if she were rejected by the king, her life became a living death. We shall see, later on, how these things typify the state of true believers before God and Christ!

Esther Before The King

"At last the time came for Esther to be presented before the king. Hegai, who sought to promote the cause of the beautiful young Jewess, invited her to select whatever aids to beauty she might desire. But she put herself completely in his hands, doing those things, only that he thought necessary. She put no confidence in artificial aids, but preferred to stand before the king relying upon her natural beauty and grace of manner. As far as choice of clothing was concerned, she readily accepted the guidance of the king's chamberlain.

"And this stood her in good stead; for when she stood forth dressed ready to be presented to

the king, the beauty of her appearance brought forth a gasp of admiration from all who beheld her. The record says: "She obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her" (v.15).

"It was the month Tebeth in the 7th year of the king's realm, when Esther was presented unto the king. This answers to the 10th month in the Jewish calendar. Many beautiful women, elegantly dressed, and skilled in deportment, had already appeared before the king, but Esther excelled them all. She entered the Palace room where the king was seated on his throne, the very personification of virtue and beauty. Her modesty, simplicity, and graceful deportment instantly appealed to the king. She stood out entirely different from all those who had appeared before her. They had been sophisticated and artificial in their approach and appearance; but here was one who relied on no such aids, but stood before him in fresh, feminine beauty. The simplicity of her dress added to the loveliness of her countenance; the gracefulness of her form was emphasised by her shy, modest deportment. How completely different she was to those who had appeared before! She instantly commanded the affection of the king. He had no hesitation in placing the crown on her head. This humble, Jewish maiden was suddenly elevated into the position of the highest honor.

"What was the reason of all this. That, neither Esther nor Mordecai knew at that time. Wonderingly, they both awaited events to reveal themselves.

Esther's Marriage Feast

"The marriage of Esther to Ahasuerus was celebrated by a grand feast. The king invited all his realm to join with him in this happy time. As an aid to that end, he issued a decree, releasing the provinces from certain obligations to him, so that Esther's elevation brought real joy to all people. In Shushan itself, the marriage was celebrated in right, royal fashion. All rejoiced that the king had obtained a bride worthy to take the place of Vashti. Thus this time of happiness, stemming from the king, extended to the palace and the capital, and reached out to the utmost limits of the Empire.

"The marriage of Esther was a matter of rejoicing to all the world.

"Meanwhile, Mordecai remained in his position of trust at the gate of the king. His advice to Esther still, was not to reveal her identity, doubtless awaiting God to reveal His purpose, and Esther implicitly obeyed him, as she had been taught to do from childhood (Est. 2:20). Mordecai thus acted very unselfishly, for there is no doubt, that if the beautiful Esther had revealed that Mordecai was her cousin, the king would have been delighted to honor the Jew who already had a position of trust at the gate of the palace. However, events were to unfold which revealed the wisdom of Mordecai's action," said Mr. Phillips as he concluded this part of the story. "But we must leave the rest of the story for another occasion. In the meantime, is there any question would like to ask?"

"Yes," replied Ann who was busily taking notes. "A long time

seems to have elapsed between the putting away of Vashti, and the marriage of Esther. The former took place in the 3rd year of the king (Ch. 1:3), the latter in his 7th year (Ch. 2:16). Is there any reason for the delay?"

"There seems to be both a typical reason, and an historical one," explained her father. "It is best to await an explanation of the former, until we have considered the whole book. The historical reason is quite interesting, however, for if we identify Ahasuerus as Darius Hystaspes, the history of his reign answers exactly to this requirement. The first two years of his reign were occupied in quelling his enemies, including Babylon which revolted in the first year of his reign. His 3rd year was comparatively peaceful, however, and

could well provide the reason for the grand feast that he gave. In the 4th year, however, Babylon again revolted, and it involved a two years' siege before the revolt was suppressed (Herod 3:151). This brings us to the 6th year of Darius, and explains how it was that though Vashti was divorced in his 3rd year, he was not married to Esther until his 7th year. The typical significance we must leave for the moment, merely pointing out however, that there is a great marriage feast to be celebrated in the 7th millennium, of which this suggests a type!"

"What would the 3rd year represent then?" asked Peter.

"We will defer that until the matter is outlined properly," answered his father. "That will be all for tonight!"

EZRA: THE HELPER WHO HONORED GOD'S WORD.

Five years passed by, in Shushan the palace, without anything notable occurring as far as Esther was concerned (cp. Est. 2:16-18 with Est. 3:7). But if we accept the chronology of the times, as suggested by Mr. Phillips, an event of the greatest significance took place in the city of Babylon. Ezra, a notable scribe, a man of outstanding repute among Jewry, left Babylon for Jerusalem, under the patronage of the king of Persia. If Mr. Phillips' suggestion is accepted, that Darius and Ahasuerus were titles adopted by the same king—Darius Hystaspes—then possibly Esther could have played some influential part in causing the king to so liberally support the Jewish cause.

We therefore break off the story of Esther at this point, and turn to that of Ezra. We will first consider the man, and then the work he performed.

Ezra's name means "the Helper". He became a true help to Jewry because of his intense love, and deep devotion to the Word of God. The Bible gives him a wonderful testimony. It states:

"Ezra had prepared his heart to SEEK the law of Yahweh, and to DO it, and to TEACH in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

He was thus a deep student, an obedient worshipper, and a skillful expounder of the Word of God. He was a man who HEARD, DID, and TAUGHT, so that he earned the caption of "a ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6). He was also an able administrator.

Ezra was also a man of prayer (Ezra. 7:27-28. 10:1) and of faith. He was so convinced that Yahweh was with him, that he tells us himself, he "was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help" him and his company against the enemy in the way, for he had spoken unto the king, saying "The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him" (Ezra. 8:22). He was a man of deep piety, keenly

feeling the sins of his people, and sparing no pains to bring them to repentance (Ezra. 9:3, 10:6). He was devout, perceiving the outworking of providence in the everyday incidents of life, for he several times mentions how "the hand of Yahweh his God was upon him" for good (Ezra 7:6, 28. 8:18, 31). In temperament, he was passionate and emotional, rending his garment, and tearing his hair in his excess of grief, when the sins of the people were revealed (Ezra 9:3, 4), publicly casting himself down before the house of God, and mingling weeping with his prayers as he sought the Divine aid in times of spiritual crisis (Ezra. 10:1).

Above all, Ezra had a deep sense of the majesty of Yahweh. This is expressed in the wonderful public prayer recorded in Nehemiah 9 which almost certainly was composed by Ezra. He acknowledged the just severity of Yahweh (Ezra 9:14. 10:14), but also spake of His abounding mercy (Ezra 9:13. Neh. 9:17, 32). With this two-fold character of God before him, he not only warned and rebuked, but also encouraged with words that were hopeful and helpful (Neh. 8:9-10).

Jewish tradition makes Ezra one of the most celebrated persons in the history of the nation. It ascribes to him:

(1)—*The founding of the Great Synagogue or synod of learned Jewish scholars consisting of 120 members, the successors of the schools of the prophets. Their aim was to restore again the crown and glory of Israel, in the spiritual life of the nation. They collected the sacred writings and completed the canon of Scripture, organised the ritual of the synagogue, etc.*

(2)—*The settlement of the canon of Scripture, and its arrangement into Law, Prophets, and writings.*

(3)—*The change-over from the old Hebrew script to the new Assyrian square characters.*

(4)—*The compilation of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah.*

(5)—*The institution of local synagogues, thus tying Jews in dispersion with the Temple service.*

How much of this tradition is true, we do not know, but that Ezra exercised considerable influence upon his generation there is not the slightest doubt. His influence contributed to the Judaism of Maccabean times all that was good in it. Its zeal its fervent patriotism its passionate attachment to the law, its burning desire to keep itself unpolluted from the impure idolatries and debasing superstitions of heathenism, set it apart from the pagan idolatry that surrounded it. He gave it the stubbornness and strength to resist the persecuting Hellenism of Antiochus, and to battle for years on almost equal terms with the mighty legions of Rome. With the synagogue, and the exclusiveness of the Law, established among the Jews, Ezra's spirit remained with the nation, so that through his influence its elders "sat in Moses' seat" (Mat. 23:2), until the promised prophet like unto Moses made his appearance to take over his rightful position.

Thus the work of Ezra laid the foundation for the ministry of Christ.

If Ezra lacked the vigor of Nehemiah, it must be remembered that he was also older, being over 70 when commissioned by the King for the work before him. For he was the son of Seraiah, who had been slain by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 7:1. 2 Kings 25:8, 18-21), and therefore would have been at least 73 if Artaxerxes is identified with Darius Hystaspes, but over 128 if identified with Artaxerxes Longimanus. As the son of Seraiah, he was the uncle of Joshua who had returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:2. 1 Chron. 6:14).

In our outline of the Book of Ezra (published earlier), we showed how the book is divided between the labors of Zerubbabel and Ezra, and how one is the counterpart of the other. The RESTORATION under Zerubbabel was followed by the REFORMATION under Ezra. The former supervised the building of the MATERIAL TEMPLE; the latter looked to the well-being of the SPIRITUAL TEMPLE. Both men did a wonderful service for God and their fellow-men.

EZRA'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM (Ezra 7)

His Successful Petition To The King

There were doubtless many throughout the Persian Empire, besides Mordecai, who viewed with interest the elevation of Esther to favor, and wondered what the Divine purpose was behind this move.

It could have been the cause of Ezra seeking an audience with the king, and beseeching his assistance in sponsoring a further return of Jews to Palestine.

For Ezra was among the number of faithful Jews in dispersion at this time. He was a deeply pious man, keenly interested in the revelation of God, and in high repute among his Jewish contemporaries.

He was favorably received by the king, who, in view of the troublous nature of the times, was interested in establishing a powerful ally to the south west border of his realm, and thus hearkened with intelligent interest to all that Ezra told him.

Ezra outlined something of the hope of Israel to the king, and stressed that the blessing of God rested on those nations that helped the Jew.

"The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him," he told the king (Ezra 8:22).

The seven counsellors, who had assisted the king to find a bride to replace the rebellious Vashti, were present at this interview between Ezra and the king (Ezra 7:14, Esther 1:14), and assisted in the decision arrived at. In a long conversation with the king and his

counsellors, Ezra had pointed out that there was a great need in Judea for consolidation among the people, and the establishment of complete authority among those in control. He pressed that it was to the advantage of Persia to have Judea both spiritually and politically strong, and asked that the king should assist him in his quest by stimulating interest in a further return of Jews back to the land (Ezra 7:13-23).

After due consideration of Ezra's petition, the king issued his decree.

It went beyond that for which Ezra had dared to hope!

It not only invited all who were "minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem," to do so, "but it commissioned Ezra to "enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of his God" when he arrived there (Ezra 7:14). Thus Ezra was given authority, by the greatest ruler of his age, to establish the law of God as a way of life in Israel.

In addition to all this, the king and his counsellors delivered into the hands of the scribe, a large sum of money to purchase sacrifices to be offered in Jerusalem, and invited him to take up a collection in Babylon from those who desired to give a freewill offering for the same purpose. The king further directed, that what money should be left over after the sacrifices had been purchased, should be used as Ezra deemed best. At the same time, he delivered into the hands of Ezra, certain vessels for use in the Temple when he had arrived in Jerusalem.

Thus every effort was made by the king of Persia to further the plans of Ezra.

He even decreed that the tax-gatherers of Persia, resident in nations adjacent to Judea, should deliver into the hands of Ezra a specified amount of silver, wheat, wine, oil and salt, and ordered that this provision should be carried out diligently, "for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons," declared the king* (Ezra 7:23).

From this statement, contained in the king's decree, it seems apparent that Ezra must have shown him that Yahweh repays those who curse or bless Israel. He could have pointed to the downfall of Babylon and Belteshazzar as an example of that.

Two final provisions in the decree were of the highest significance and greatest value to Ezra when he did arrive in the land. The king ordered that all the officers of the Temple in Jerusalem be exempt from taxation (v.24), and authorised that Ezra should set up magistrates and judges who should instruct and judge the people in the law of God, granting him the power to execute judgment against those who refused to do so.

Ezra's Prayer of Thanksgiving

Ezra was deeply moved by the decree of the king. He saw in it an evidence of the goodness of

Yahweh, guiding the issues of nations for the benefit of His people. His approach to the king had been successful beyond what he thought possible. He had not only obtained a liberal decree but a most generous gift. Esther may have had some hand in this, but undoubtedly, it manifested the blessing of God whoever was indirectly responsible. The devout and faithful scribe poured out his heart to God in a prayer of thanksgiving:

"Blessed be Yahweh God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart to beautify the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king and his counsellors, and before all the king's mighty princes.

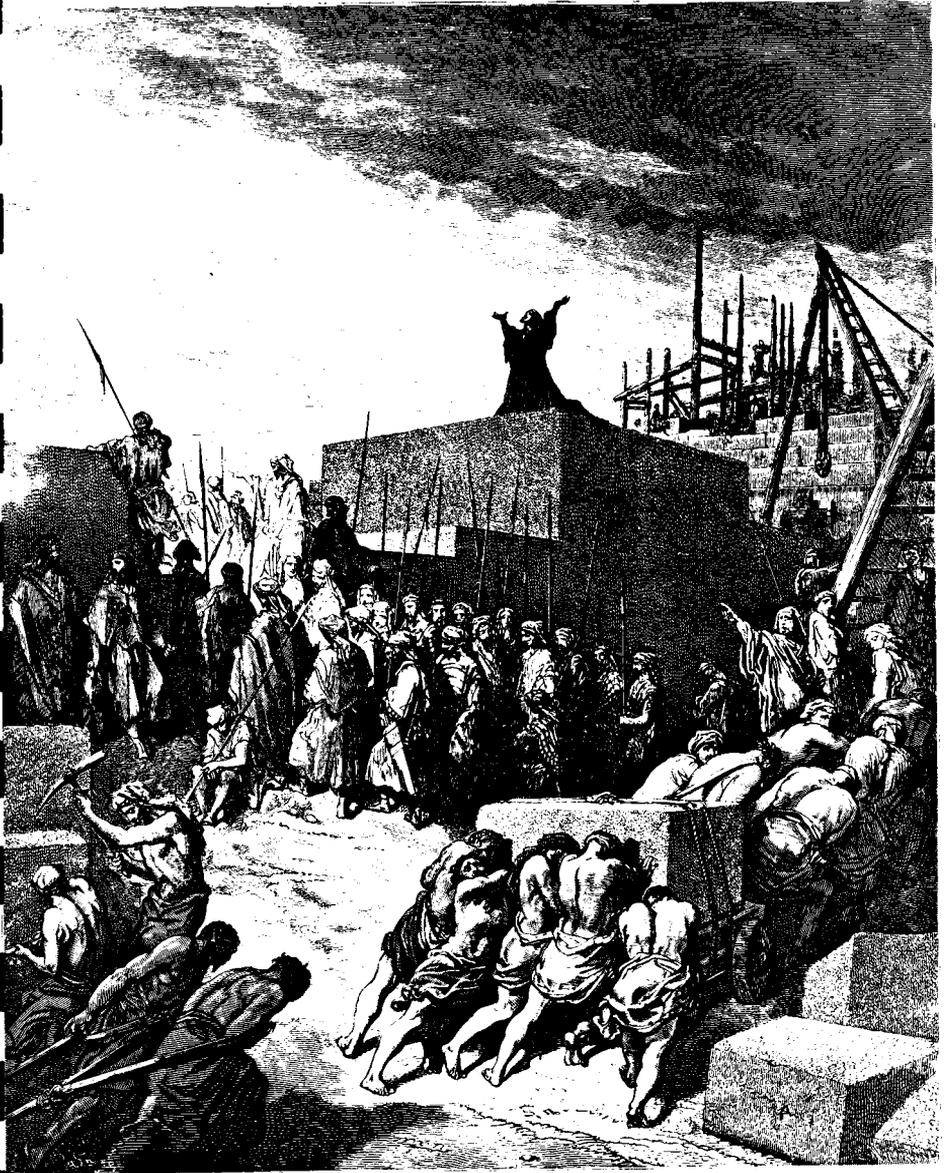
Ezra, the scribe, felt greatly strengthened by this visible evidence of the goodness and reality of God, and immediately set about gathering together a company of chief men to go up to Jerusalem with him.

The king also offered to supply a company of soldiers to protect him during this journey. But Ezra refused the offer. He had told the king that the hand of God was upon all that seek Him, and he felt that to avail himself of these soldiers as a guard when he looked to the protection of God, would be to exhibit a lack of faith.

He left the king's presence to make preparations for his long journey.

(Continued on page 43)

*Darius Hystaspes had three sons by his first wife born before he was king, and four others by Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus, whom he also married. There was some dispute about the succession which was decided by Darius in favour of Xerxes who succeeded him (Herodotus Book 6). This anxiety of the king, relating to his sons, and expressed in his statement to Ezra, is a further slight evidence in favour of identifying Artaxerxes (in common with Darius) as the Darius Hystaspes of history.



THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

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



ARTAXERXES GRANTING LIBERTY TO THE JEWS

I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel — which are minded — to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. — (Ezra 7: 13)

EZRA'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM He Gathers His Company Together

Armed with the decree of Artaxerxes, empowering him to organise a pilgrimage of Jews back to the land, Ezra set about the task with enthusiasm. He published his intention among the Jews of Babylon, but his appeal did not meet with an overwhelming response. Few were interested in it. Some were deterred, perhaps, by news of difficulties that had come upon the newly formed State of Judah; others had established their roots too deeply in Babylon to want to return. Many supported the project financially, but hesitated to go themselves; they would not make the great sacrifice that the call demanded.

Thus the company that ultimately gathered to Ezra was not very prepossessing. Some priests threw in their lot with him, one member of the Davidic line, some relatives of those already in the land, and the rest—a few undistinguished families (Ezra 8).

It was a disappointing response, particularly for the purpose that Ezra had in mind, and the work he was commissioned to do by the king—that of educating the people in the Law of God, and establishing it as the way of life in the land (Ezra 7:25-26).

But Ezra was not the type of person to be easily discouraged by such lack of enthusiasm on the part of those who should have known better. He was a man of faith, who clearly saw the hand of God in all the circumstances of life. Rejoicing in all the blessings that had been conferred upon

him, and ignoring the discouraging circumstances, he made preparations for the commencement of the long and arduous journey.

The Start

The day appointed for the commencement of the journey at last arrived. It was the first day of the first month. In the city of Babylon, the returning exiles all gathered together for the purpose. A long and difficult journey stretched before them, and many gathered to see them go. Relatives and friends would realise that they were saying goodbye perhaps for ever. Thus there would be farewells, there would be all the noise and confusion of last-minute preparations, there would be all the pain and tenderness of partings that must have appeared quite final. Curiosity, excitement and tears would be mingled together, as the Jews with their belongings, their animals, and the rich treasure that Ezra had gathered for use in the Temple, were brought together at the appointed place.

At last all was ready. The leader, the aged and learned scribe, Ezra, well known to the people and to the authorities, took the lead and led the way out of the city of Babylon to commence a journey back to the Land of Promise.

It was like the story of Abram all over again, as they turned their back on the city of idolatry and captivity, and looked hopefully towards Yahweh's land.

At Ahava

But, as yet, Ezra had not taken a proper census of the people he was leading out of Babylon back to the Land. He wanted to leave

the city of captivity far behind him before he did that. They therefore left Babylon on the first day of the first month (Ezra 7:9), and slowly made their way in a westerly direction for 9 days (cp. Ezra 7:9 with 8:15, 31) until they came to the river Ahava. Here Ezra called a stop in order to properly review the company that he was leading back to the land. They pitched their tents, and abode there three days, whilst their leader took a census of the people. It was then that he discovered how disappointing was the company with him, especially in view of his mission, for he found that none of the Levites had elected to throw in their lot with his venture, and they were needed if he were to do what he was commissioned to accomplish. For the Levites were qualified to teach the people, and it was basically for this purpose that Artaxerxes had decreed the return.

Ezra decided that this omission must be corrected. He despatched some of his followers to a place called Casiphia, where dwelt many Levites and Nethinim, and called upon Iddo its chief to help him in his need, by encouraging some of them to return to Jerusalem with him.

God blessed the appeal. A man of Godly understanding attached himself to the cause of Ezra. His name was Sherebiah, which signifies: "Yahweh Hath Made To Tremble." He was one who trembled at the Word of Yahweh (Isa. 66:2), and doubtless saw that Ezra was a man of God, and

divinely guided in his mission. Through his efforts, an additional 38 Levites and 220 Nethinims attached themselves to the company of Ezra, making 1754 in all.*

At last all was ready for the final move. Ezra proclaimed a fast at Ahava, and called upon all to afflict, or humble themselves before God. He reminded them of the many difficulties on the long journey of nearly 1000 miles that faced them. There was not only the problem of supplying sufficient food en route, but there were many enemies who hated the newly established State, and were only too willing to prevent its development. Moreover, there were bands of marauding Arabs, prepared to attack such a company as he headed, especially in view of the rich treasure they carried with them.

Ezra therefore called upon his followers to place their confidence in God. At Ahava a very solemn ceremony was conducted as the people humbled themselves before God, seeking His guidance on their forward journey. Doubtless the learned Scribe remembered the words of Proverbs 3:6:

"In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

That is what Ezra did at this time. He doubtless gained great inspiration to do so from incidents in the lives of great men who had gone before, and particularly from many of the Psalms, which are calculated to help one in such moments, when the future seems dark and uncertain.

*These probably represented heads of families, or males only, so that the total may have been 3 times this number.

It was a very solemn company that engaged in this ardent service before it left Ahava. Ezra was a man of prayer, and recognised that acceptable prayer demands the preparation of the mind. Thus, before leading this people to God, he prepared them for the occasion. Ezra recorded the circumstances in a diary that he kept of the journey. He wrote:

"So we fasted and besought our God for this; and He was intreated of us."

The valuable treasure that had been placed into his hands for use in the Temple was delivered into the charge of the Chief Priests

and Levites, the tents were taken down, the possessions of the people were loaded on the animals, and again Ezra took the lead and led his people into the great Unknown.

At Jerusalem

Four months later, the weary company of people arrived at Jerusalem (Ezra 7:8-9). It had been a long and tiring journey, and perhaps the last miles had been the most difficult of all.

As the returning exiles descended south from the Euphrates to Jericho, and then commenced the ascent to Jerusalem, they would

SOME PRAYERS AND PRAISES OF ZION THAT MAY HAVE ENCOURAGED EZRA AS HE COMMENCED HIS ARDUOUS JOURNEY

"Lead me, O Yahweh, in Thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make Thy way straight before my face" (Ps. 5:8).

"O give thanks unto Yahweh, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of Yahweh say so, who He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy . . . And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Ps. 107:1-8).

"Cause me to hear Thy loving kindness in the morning; for in Thee do I trust; cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Yahweh, from mine enemies; I flee unto thee to hide me. Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God; Thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness" (Ps. 143:8-12).

See also Psalms 126:127.

As the camp at Ahava probably resounded with some such songs of Zion before the journey was commenced, let us also gain inspiration from such a Source, and always make our future intentions a matter of prayer, that Yahweh might guide and deliver us!

see evidences of the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar over 70 years before. At Jericho, the road rises steeply to Jerusalem above. The scenery is harsh and forbidding. The track winds around gloomy, desolate hills which become more and more bare and stony. There is little animal or vegetable life, and in summer

the sun beats down hotly on the white, arid slopes. A steep ascent leads to Bethany, after which the road twists around the Mount of Olives, and Jerusalem presents itself to the eyes of the weary traveller.

They had left in the Spring; they arrived in mid-Summer. Harshly the fierce sun beat down upon the

company and reflected its heat from the barren white hills. The burning heat of July took its toll of the people, and three days rest in Jerusalem was required to recover from the wearying journey (Ezra 8:32). They were three days that were doubtless profitably employed in personal thanksgiving to God, that at last the difficult journey was over, and all was well.

Then followed a solemn conference with the elders in Jerusalem. Ezra explained his mission, displayed the remarkable decree he had secured from the king, and officially handed over the treasure brought from Babylon to those in charge of the Temple.

A service of thanksgiving on the part of the returning exiles was called for. In gratitude to Yahweh, they desired to acknowledge the benefits they had received. This completed, they were officially received into the body of the nation, and "twelve bullocks for all Israel" (v. 35) were offered up to God, for the people identified themselves with the whole nation of Israel and not Judah only.*

Conditions in the Land

The commission that Ezra received from Artaxerxes, called upon all nations south of the Euphrates to help the nation of Judah to establish itself with grants of money and of wealth. Copies of these decrees had to be delivered by Ezra to the various authorities. There was a chief satrap of Syria to whom local

governors were subject (Ezra 5:6), among whom was the governor of Judah. Zerubbabel had evidently died, and others had been put in his place who had not been as faithful as he (Neh. 5:14-15). Through bad administration, a state of chaos had ensued, and Ezra would soon have seen the extent of the work that faced him. He had the necessary authority to accomplish his task. His position was not so much that of governor, but more that of chief justice.

He was empowered to settle everything relating to the nation's religious life, and establish it by law. Thus in matters governed by the Divine Law, his authority was higher than that of the local governors in both Jerusalem (Ezra 10:8), and throughout the country (v. 14).

Ezra found that such wide-sweeping authority was necessary for the work before him. Such authority alone made his difficult task possible and workable.

He experienced very little opposition. His authority was admitted without question, and the other officials, both ecclesiastical and civil, worked under him, apparently without friction or jealousy (Ezra 9:1, 10:5, 14-16).

REFORMATION BEGINS (EZRA 9)

A Problem for Ezra

Ezra had been commissioned by Artaxerxes to establish Judah on the foundation of the Law, and to set in office men who were capable of teaching it (Ezra 7:25-26). He

*This identification was preserved in the days of Christ, in contra distinction to the false claims of British-Israelites. Christ declared he was sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mat. 10:6. 15:24) and he limited his activities to Palestine.

probably brought a copy of the Law back with him for this purpose. This is suggested by hints contained in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Law is mentioned only once before the appearance of Ezra on the scene (Ezra 3:2), but 28 times afterwards in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The copy of the Law was probably given to the princes who had just returned, in order that they might study it, and, in turn, rule the land on its basis, and teach it to the people (Ezra 8:36). Seized with the importance of their task, the princes studied the Law with care. They were dismayed to learn how far the people of Judah had drifted from its commands.

This was particularly the case in regard to the marriage laws.

The Law of Moses called upon the people to maintain strict separation in regard to marriage; they were not permitted to enter into such union with foreigners who did not embrace the Covenants of Promise (Deut. 7:2-8).

These laws had not been adhered to. Foreign marriages had become matters of everyday occurrence. Perhaps the returning exiles had not been accompanied by an adequate proportion of females, and replenished their need from the inhabitants of the land. The Levites and Priests as well as the princes, were foremost in the transgression. These wives retained their pagan beliefs, and thus were a polluting influence among the Jews. A terrible state had ensued. The holy seed had become mingled with pagan worshippers: idolatry had become tolerated: superstitious practises had

become common.

A deputation of those princes who had returned with Ezra called upon him to report upon the matter.

"The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of the lands; yea, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass!"

These were the very nations specifically prohibited by the Law (Deut. 7), so that the action of the people was a direct violation of its precepts. And the fact that the princes and rulers were foremost in the transgression, set a bad example for the rest of the people.

It was a challenge that Ezra had to take up vigorously. He realised that his handling of this problem would set a precedence for solving of any other breach of the Law.

Solving the Problem

Ezra was deeply shocked at the news. He made no attempt to justify the action of the guilty persons involved. He did not seek to minimise the offence by reasoning that though they had married outside of Israel, they might influence their partners to embrace the covenant of God. He knew that God was best served when His laws are scrupulously obeyed, and that such a flagrant rejection of His precepts could only result in disaster to the nation, if persisted in.

He made public his grief. When the princes had completed their

report, he rent his garments, tore at the hair of his head and beard, and sat down stunned at the enormity of the sin, pondering what would be the best to be done under the circumstances.

His excess of grief was contagious. Others heard of it, and being concerned for the welfare of the nation, assembled unto him to consider what should be done. Thus there gathered unto him every one who "trembled at the words of the God of Israel because of the great transgression of those that had been carried away." In stunned silence and for some hours they mourned together the sin of the nation.

At last the time of the evening sacrifice drew near. It was the time of prayer. Ezra aroused himself from his heaviness, and in the spirit of the deepest humility he fell upon his knees, and spread out his hands to heaven, as though as to seize hold of Yahweh (cp. Ezra 9:5 with Isa. 64:7), and poured out his heart in prayer on behalf of the people:

"O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to Thee, my God for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens . . ."

He made mention of the great sin of the people, of the grace that had been poured upon the nation by God in permitting a remnant to escape, "to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage." God had been kind and merciful unto Israel, had caused the kings of Persia to help them, had provided them with a defence in the face of many enemies.

Yet the implicit commands of God had been violated, so that the nation stood before Him in all the uncleanness of its trespasses, and the very Temple service was unacceptable to Him (Ezra 9:15).

All this Ezra expressed in his prayer in words which he selected with the greatest care, and uttered with the most moving humility and depth of feeling.

EZRA'S PRAYER (Ezra 9)

This presents a model of effectual prayer-making. Consider the care taken by Ezra under the circumstances, and the preparation he gave to the matter. Notice particularly the following points:

The Problem Considered . . . vv. 1-2.

The Mind prepared . . . vv. 3-4.

The Humiliation expressed. vv. 5-6.

The Sin confessed . . . v. 7.

Yahweh's Mercy recalled . . . vv. 8-9.

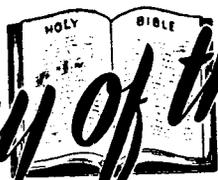
Israel's Negligence reported . . . vv. 10-14.

Israel's dependence on God: v. 15.

The Problem's Shared . . . Ch. 10:1-2.

The above outline can provide the basis for our personal prayers, and can be amended to serve many subjects and requests.

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In the Persian Capital

Ezra, in the city of Jerusalem, was faced with the nation's disobedience to the commands of God. Together with others concerned for the welfare of the nation, he publicly mourned the sins of the people. Then, towards the time of prayer, the great leader roused himself from his heaviness, and poured out his heart in a pleading prayer to Heaven. . . .

The Problem Shared

Perhaps there is no more compelling prayer in all Scripture than that which Ezra uttered on this occasion. His public petition so moved the people, as to cause them to see the folly and sin of their action, and decide to renounce this closest of all relationships, because it was opposed to the will of Yehweh. Only the most careful and solemn preparation on the part of their leader, only the most fervent and earnest of words and actions, could have brought about this result.

Ezra's prayer was uttered with the greatest feeling. He was so stirred emotionally, that at its conclusion he burst out into loud and bitter weeping.

And all the people wept as well, so that great lamentation was made, for a great company was gathered together.

Amid this general distress, a

man by name of Shechaniah arose and addressed Ezra on behalf of the whole nation.

"We have trespassed against our God, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land," he declared. "Yet now there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. Let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise! for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it!"

Shechaniah's words promised full support for the difficult and heart-breaking task that Ezra had to undertake. His exhortation stimulated the weeping scribe. Leaping to his feet, he immediately acted upon the suggestion. He called upon the chief priests the levites, and all the people, to swear that they should do according to this word.

And despite the sad conse-

quences of their action, they swore to carry it out.

The covenant had relation to those wives who persisted in their heathenish practises and worship, despite their marriage with Jews; it would not have relation to those who had embraced the covenant of God.

The Problem Solved

Having thus secured the support of the leaders, Ezra decided to implement the matter without the slightest delay. He called for a general assembly of the people within three days. Messengers were sent throughout the land and commanded that the people should assemble in Jerusalem within the time specified. Any who hesitated to do so would have all his substance forfeited, and he himself would be excommunicated from the congregation (Ezra 10: 8).

Meanwhile, Ezra went into the chamber of Johanan, the grandson of Joshua who was succeeded to the position of high priest, to fast, mourn and pray before his God for the divine blessing of what was proposed.

Arrangements were made for the people to gather together on the 20th day of the ninth month (Chisleu). It was a sad assembly that met together in the large court of the Temple. The month answers to our November - December which is winter time in Jerusalem, so that the weather matched the gloomy spirit of the people. It was cold, wet, and dismal, and the people, herded together for the purpose of correcting the fault into which they had

wandered through false marriages, "trembled because of this matter, and because of the showers of rain" that drenched them (Ezra 10:9).

Ezra stood up before them, to sorrowfully explain the purpose of the gathering. It was a difficult task he had set himself, but he gave himself to it with courage and determination.

As the trembling people looked at the aged Scribe, so full of zeal and courage for the things of God, so fiercely determined to implement the Law that had been committed into his hands, they realised that there was no other way but to break off the marriages into which they had entered. They realised that God's way is best. They could see that the state of anarchy and lawlessness that had spread throughout the nation could only result ultimately in the complete overthrow of the Jewish State that had come into existence, as well as the Divine worship that had been re-established at the expense of so much trouble and sacrifice.

But it is hard to break such tender associations. Proper arrangements had to be made for the wives who refused to embrace the hope of Israel, and had to be sent back to their own lands again. It would require time to make these arrangements, particularly in view of the inclement weather. It could not be done there and then as they stood in the pelting rain!

Thus, as Ezra's short speech came to an end, in which he made brief reference to their folly, and called upon them to enter into a

covenant to separate themselves from the people of the land, and from wives who persisted in introducing the foreign worship of those lands,* there came from the body of people gathered together a great cry:

"As thou hast said, so must we do! But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day or two for we are many that have transgressed in this thing. Let now our rulers of all the congregation stand, and let all of them which have taken strange wives in our cities come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city and the judges thereof, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter be turned from us."

There were some who opposed this measure. Two men, by name of Jonathan and Jahaziah, led a protest against the covenant of Ezra.** They were supported by some of the Levites who had been guilty in the matter. But they found no encouragement among the people. The protest was set aside, and a commission of enquiry set up.

The first sitting was set down for the first day of the month following. Ezra presided over those

appointed, and with him were certain of the elders of the nation. Before them came those who were guilty in the matter, and they were called upon to separate from those wives who had introduced pagan worship in Israel. For three months the commission of enquiry sat, and then recorded its final report.

Four sons of Joshua the high priest who had returned with Zerubbabel were among the guilty ones. Thirteen other priests, ten Levites, eighty-six laymen (many of high rank—cp. Ezra 9: 3) were involved in the trespass (Ezra 10:18-43.) All were required to give their hands that they would put away their wives. The four most exalted offenders were further required to make public acknowledgement of their transgression, by each offering a ram as a trespass offering (Ezra 10: 19.)

Some had had children by the wives they had taken, but no exemption was permitted on this account. Such marriages, not being based upon the Law of God, were deemed inadmissible.***

*This seems to be the implication of Ezra 10:10 (see mg.). The word "strange" signifies "foreign," and these wives were foreign in every sense, introducing their foreign worship into Israel (Ezra 9:1-2), thus "increasing the trespass of Israel" (Ezra 10:10). If they had embraced the hope of Israel they doubtless would have been acceptable as either Rahab or Ruth. But they evidently refused to do this, and persisted in their refusal in the face of Ezra's determination — hence the severe course taken.

**Ezra 9:15 is rendered by Rotherham: "Made a stand against this" (see also the margin and the R.V.). There was some opposition to the reform, and the influence of such may have been responsible for the further decline in this direction which took place during the absence of Ezra, and which Nehemiah noted and corrected (Neh. 13:13-27).

***This implies that the time covered in the Book of Ezra is much shorter than is generally conceded, for some of these guilty ones were among those who had returned with Zerubbabel, and would be in the normal dating over 90 years of age, when they took wives and had children!

They, too, were required to put away their wives.

Was Ezra's Action Justified?

Ezra's action was extreme, but fully justified when all the conditions are brought to mind. It put an end to the scandal for the time being, and demonstrated that God's law had to be elevated above every consideration.

The decision which he enforced so inflexibly must have borne hardly on some of the wives and children, who thus suffered through the folly of their husbands and fathers. This showed that every care should be taken in such decisions of life, lest we bring suffering on others.

The suffering involved in those times would probably not be as extreme as might be thought. The discarded wife would be received back into her family without incurring reproach or disgrace, and would doubtless receive a monetary compensation, or at least a return of dowry. The greatest loss would be emotional, the breaking up of family relationships. But Ezra would scarcely have felt himself bound to consider consequences. He knew the disastrous results that could accrue from such defiance of God's explicit commands. He had a plain duty to perform, and was determined to enforce the law at whatever the cost. He looked upon these lawless marriages as unreal, as no better than ordinary illicit connections. From the evils which flow from such unions, those who make them, not those who break them, are alone responsible.

That was the case in Ezra's day,

and the people, freely acknowledging the fact, concurred in the only possible arrangements whereby they could retrace their steps in undivided loyalty to God.

Ezra Returns to Persia

It was in the 7th year of Artaxerxes that Ezra had left Babylon for Jerusalem (Ezra 7:9). He had been eight months in the land, and during that time, had arranged that the Law should form the basis of the national existence.

The marriage reform had been the crowning act of his labors. It revealed how strictly the Law was to be enforced. The commission given him by the king was to go to the land of his forefathers, and "enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the Law of your God" (Ezra 7:14). That had been done, and the nation established upon a more solid basis. Now the time had arrived for him to return and report back to the king.

We are not told in the Bible that Ezra actually did this, but the implications are that he did. There is a break of 13 years between the incident recorded in the last chapter of his book, and the next time he is referred to in Nehemiah 8 (cp. Neh. 1:1).

Assuming, then, that Ezra returned to report to the King of Persia, and that the chronology of this time is as set out by Mr. Phillips in a previous edition of the "Story of the Bible," the events recorded from the 3rd chapter onwards in the Book of Esther took place during this interval of 13 years.

They were difficult times, during which the enemies of the Jews threatened to overwhelm them, and when, in many parts of the provinces of Persia, the Jewish people had to "stand for their lives" (Esther 9:16). But it is a wonderful story, showing how the hand of God overshadowed the destiny of His people for good, and preserved them from evil.

These attacks must have resulted in distress in Judah and Jerusalem. The enemies of the Jews were more in evidence there than elsewhere, and may have taken the opportunity to attack them when the decree went out inviting them to do so (Esther 3:8-12), so that the "wall of Jerusalem was broken down, and the gates burned with fire" (Neh. 1:3).

God doubtless permitted their enemies this temporary triumph, for despite the covenant into which the people had solemnly entered, once the authority of Ezra was relaxed, the Jews reverted to their former marriages. Thus Nehemiah had to deal with this matter (Neh. 13:13-27), as Ezra had done earlier.

When that moment came, he called for the assistance of Ezra, and the two men perfected the work commenced by the learned Scribe during his first visit to the land.

But for 13 long and difficult years nothing was heard of Ezra. During that same period of time, the dramatic events of the later portion of the book of Esther took place.

Mordecai Saves the King's Life.

Esther sat upon the throne as queen; Mordecai occupied his humble position of service at the gate of the palace. It was a period of peace for the Persian empire, though it had not always been like that. The reign of Ahasuerus had been a difficult one. From the beginning, enemies had risen against him with determined attempts to end his life. But he had succeeded in defeating them one by one.

But now, two of his most trusted servants conspired to assassinate him. They were Bigthan and Teresh, two of his chamberlains; members of the king's body-guard who had charge of the threshold of the king's apartments. They guarded him when he slept, and thus had access to him at times when he was on his own.

They conspired to murder the King. By some means the plot became known to Mordecai as he sat at the gate of the Palace. Quickly and secretly he passed the news to Esther the queen. She, in turn, informed the king in Mordecai's name, without revealing her relationship to Mordecai.

A court of enquiry was immediately set up. It revealed that the two chamberlains were indeed guilty of the crime. They were publicly hanged, and the incident recorded in the public archives, "written in the book of the Chronicles before the king" (Est. 2:23).

Nothing further was done at the time. The incident was closed to all those concerned. Yet this small incident was to play a most vital part in the preservation of the Jew-

(continued on page 59)

ish people. God was behind it, and, later on, it was seen that His providential guidance was at work in this incident.

Thus, in small matters, and in natural ways, are the ways of Providence worked out for the benefit of His people.

MORDECAI AROUSES THE HATRED OF HAMAN (Est. 3).

Five years had passed since Esther's marriage to the Persian

king, and since Ezra had been sent to Jerusalem with the remarkable commission to establish the nation on the basis of the Law of Moses.

A new favorite had insinuated himself into the graces of the king. His name was Haman, and he was an Agagite, a descendant of the Amalekite kings (Num. 24:7. 1 Sam. 15:8). The king had elevated him above all the other princes of the realm, so that he

The Book of Esther – An Analysis

THEME:

How The Invisible God Rules In The Kingdom of Men.

THE PRINCIPLE EXHIBITED:

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:28, 31).

"For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God" (2 Cor. 4:15).

THE PLOT

Destruction threatens Jewry, but God guides events for the benefit of His people, and through His foreknowledge prepares for the eventuality which arose.

The Crisis Anticipated

Chap. The Crisis Overruled

Chap.

Vashti deposed	1	Mordecai honored	6
Esther Elevated	2	Haman executed	7
Haman plots destruction	3	The Jews avenged	8
Mordecai pleads for relief	4	Feast of Purim instituted	9
Esther obtains favor	5	Mordecai elevated	10

The Book reveals how that despite all reverses, the hope of Israel is worked out to a successful conclusion (see Chps. 3:6. 4:14. 6:13. 10:3), and that Providence guides the destiny of nations.

The principal actors in the divine drama are five: Ahasuerus, the Persian monarch; Vashti, the deposed queen; Haman, the Jew hunter; Mordecai, the Jewish leader; and Esther, the Jewish girl who became a queen.

The background is the Royal Palace, the Persian Capital, and the millions of Jews scattered throughout the world.

The book is rich in its typical and exhortatory lessons, and worthy of the closest study by all.

sat in the palace with royal honor.

The king had further commanded that all his servants should revere Haman. Thus, when he entered the gate of the palace, the king's servants who were clustered there, bowed to the ground as in worship of an idol, and revered the mighty Haman as a god.

And Haman loved this worship. Suddenly elevated to power, he delighted to see the adulation paid to him, delighted to walk haughtily into the palace with all the king's subjects bowing to the ground, before him.

But one man bowed not, nor did him reverence.

It was Mordecai the Jew.

Whereas the other servants humbly prostrated themselves to the dust, Mordecai remained standing. The Amalekites were cursed by the Law, which also commanded that only God is to be worshipped (Exod. 17:14, 16. Deut. 25:17-19. 1 Sam. 15:3). And though to refuse the king's command brought him under the threat of royal disfavor, Mordecai's attitude was that of the Apostles: "We ought to obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29).

Mordecai's attitude excited the interest of other servants:

"Why do you transgress the king's commandment?" they asked.

Their question was made in envy, not of curiosity. Mordecai had already told them that he was a Jew, and therefore was not permitted by his law to bow down to flesh (Esther 3:4). But this did not please them. Why should they have to bow down before Haman if Mordecai the Jew did not have

to do it?

They argued with him day after day, and then, at last, reported the matter to Haman (v.4).

For Haman had not noticed that Mordecai had not bowed down to him. Mordecai had not flouted his attitude before the authorities. He had quietly made his stand without any desire to force it before the public gaze. And Haman was so lifted up in pride, that he had scarce given a glance to all the servants bowing deeply before him. With head held high, with haughty demeanour, he had stalked into the palace day after day, without seeing the defiance of the humble Jew.

But when the other servants reported the matter to Haman, and told him Mordecai was a Jew, the haughty Agagite took heed of the attitude of the humble servant.

It filled him with anger. He felt that it made him a laughing stock before all the other people. And he could see that this attitude did not spring from Mordecai as an individual, but because of his race. As he thought over the matter, Haman came to hate the Jews with a bitter hatred. He determined not only that Mordecai should die but every Jew with him.

He became a bitter, determined, Jew hater, dedicated to their completed destruction.

And he imagined that he had sufficient power to accomplish his purpose. He reasoned without God, however, and without the wisdom found in the Word of God, of which he was ignorant. For in Psalm 10:2, God has caused it to be recorded:

"The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor; let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined."

Haman's destiny illustrates the truth of those words.

Haman Seeks Destruction of the Jews.

Haman was a superstitious Gentile, as well as a bitter Jew-hater.

He decided to seek a "lucky day" to implement his scheme to destroy the Jews.

He called his pagan priests before him, and they began to cast "Pur", that is, "the lot" before Haman to decide upon a day and month which it would be deemed best to select for the destruction of

Typology & Character Sketch.

AHASUERUS — THE ALL POWERFUL



The Story of Esther reveals Ahasuerus as aloof, austere, exercising an authority that is unsurpassed, advancing and deposing his subjects with dictatorial powers. In the typology of the book he represents the status and authority of God, although, in character, he is but an Eastern monarch. Consider the following points of identification. He is set forth as a great King (Ps. 95:3), on the throne of his great white palace (Ps. 47:8—Shushan signifies "white"). He exercises universal rule (Est. 1:1. Dan. 4:17), and enjoys unrivalled glory (Est. 1:4, 6. Exod. 24:10). Though his subjects are commanded to attend his banquet, there is no compulsion exercised as to the manner of their partaking (Est. 1:8. Exod. 24:7). He is the husband of Vashti (Est. 1:9—as Yahweh is represented as the Husband of Israel; Isa. 54:5. Ezek. 16:8), whom he put away (Est. 1:21, Cp. Isa. 50:1. Jer. 3:1. Hos. 2:2), and replaced with Esther (2 Cor. 11:1-2). He has seven assistants (Est. 1:14, Cp. Rev. 4:5) who are his assistants in the administration of the affairs of the kingdom.

As is appropriate to the type, Ahasuerus revealed a great sympathy for the Jewish people. He granted Mordecai the Jew a place of honor at the gate of his palace, and advanced the cause of his people when their existence was challenged by the evil scheming of Haman the Jew hater.

As is also appropriate to the type, he promoted Haman, through whom trials came upon the Jewish people (Est. 3:1. See Rev. 13:7), he extended grace to Esther (Est. 5:2. Eph. 1:7. Heb. 1:8). He kept a Book of Remembrance (Est. 6:1) in which were recorded the worthy deeds of notable citizens, and this custom is used by the Bible to represent the remembrance of God of the worthy deeds of those who would serve Him (Mal. 3:16). Thus Mordecai was rewarded, Esther given great powers, and Haman ultimately deposed. Thus did he exercise absolute power over the lives of Jews and Gentiles.

The final picture sees all nations brought under the rule of Ahasuerus, finds Israel saved, and Mordecai advanced to supreme authority (Est. 10:1-3)—a foreshadowing of the Divine purpose.

Esther thus replaced Vashti as the bride of the King, even as the true Ecclesia will replace Israel after the flesh as the bride of the King. And though that King will be the Lord Jesus, yet he is the manifestation of the Father, for his title, like that of God will be: "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).

Thus the drama of the ages was vividly set forth in the dramatic story of this powerful Monarch who stooped to help his Jewish bride and her despised people.

QUEEN ESTHER
of **PERSIA**



MORDECAI
at the **KING'S**
GATE



**ESTHER
SAVES
HER
PEOPLE**

the Jews.*

The Lot indicated that the 13th day of the 12th month would be an auspicious day for this purpose, and believing that the omens promised the success of his plan Haman sought an audience with the King to place before him his proposal.

In due time this was granted. Haman found himself in the palace and before the king. Bowing low before Ahasuerus, Haman made his complaint and proposal.

There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them," he declared. "If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

Haman's accusation was a lie. The Jews did not refuse to "keep the king's laws." But the king did not know that. He probably did not even know to whom Haman was referring. He probably took it as an example of Haman's good faith that he should report such a matter, and even offer to guarantee a sum of money to be paid into the king's treasury. Such a payment, of course, would be recouped by Haman from the spoil he would gain from those whom he referred to as the king's enemies.

The king did not doubt the in-

tegrity and good faith of his servant. Taking the signet of authority from his hand, he gave it to Haman, thus empowering him to do as he thought best.

Rejoicing at his success, Haman hurried from the palace, and prepared the decree calling upon the destruction of the Jewish people. On the 13th day of the 1st month, he gathered the King's scribes together, and dictated a letter in the name of the King calling upon all people "to destroy, kill, and cause to perish" all the Jewish people in their vicinity, at the appointed day.

The letters were written and sent out by posts on horseback. Swiftly they were conveyed throughout the Persian Empire, commanding those in authority to carry out the awful proclamation. All people were told that they must be ready against the appointed day.

In Shushan the Palace, the king and Haman sat down to drink, each satisfied with the transactions of the day, the king still probably in ignorance of the people referred to by Haman in his accusation. But the city of Shushan was perplexed. And well the people might be, for this same king had previously issued a decree in favor of the Jews** Now the Jewish people were threatened with extinction by the terrible decree issued in the name of this same king.

*This appears to be the significance of Esther 3:7.

**This is, of course, if we accept the suggestions made by Mr. Phillips that the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, and the Artaxerxes of Ezra's time, relate to the same king — Darius Hystaspes. The evidence strongly supports his claim.

Typology & Character Sketch.**VASHTI—THE BEAUTIFUL BUT STUBBORN WIFE**

Vashti briefly holds the center of the stage in the drama worked out in the Story of Esther, and then passes from view. She was beautiful in appearance, was granted royal honor, but was insubordinate in character, refusing to reveal her beauty for the glory of the king.

She was thus divorced by the king and replaced by Esther.

In type she represents Israel after the flesh. Israel is represented as the Bride of the King, and was called upon to reveal such a beauty as would reflect to His honor, praise and glory. "But", declares the prophet, "they would not hear" (Jer. 13:11). They proved stubborn and insubordinate, refusing to hearken to the commands of Yahweh "their Husband" (Isa. 54:5).

Thus Israel after the flesh has been set aside, and her position taken by Israel after the spirit: the true Ecclesia of God.

Fear and Terror Among the Jews

A great cry of lamentation arose unto God from the Jewish people scattered throughout the Persian Empire. Down in Jerusalem, in Babylon, throughout the then-known world wherever there were Jews, manifestations of the greatest distress were displayed as the people learned of the terrible decree. Emergency gatherings were called, the Jews met for purposes of supplication, before God, clothed in sackcloth. Periods of fasting, weeping and wailing were set aside as they called upon God to help them.

Thus a wail of despair arose throughout the Empire, as the defenceless people awaited the dread day. But their enemies rejoiced. Joyfully they awaited the time when they would be lawfully permitted to express their hatred upon the Jewish people, and enrich themselves at their expense..

And Mordecai's lamentation was

greater than that of anybody else. He felt that he was personally responsible for the vindictive revenge that Haman sought. Rushing from the gate of the palace he put upon himself the garb of mourning, and with ashes heaped upon his head, he aimlessly wandered in the midst of the city of Shushan, crying with a loud and bitter cry because of the miseries that it seemed he had brought upon his people.

He took his stand before the gate of the Palace (for none were permitted therein dressed as he was), and awaited the opportunity to appeal to Esther. Clothed in sackcloth and ashes, he looked the very picture of misery.

Esther Learns of Mordecai's Grief

Inside the palace, Esther knew nothing of the terrible decree, nor what was threatened against her people. But the picture of Mordecai, clothed in sackcloth and ashes, lying before the gate of the pal-

ace, drew the attention of all, and was soon reported to the Queen.

There was one man in the palace whom she could trust: it was Hatach her personal chamberlain. She pleaded with him to find out the cause of Mordecai's mourning.

And Mordecai revealed unto him all that had happened, and how Haman had offered the king a sum of money to destroy the Jews. He also gave Hatach a copy of the decree that had been issued, and told him to show it unto Esther, and charge her to go in unto the king, to make supplication and request before him for her people.

Thus Mordecai must have revealed the Queen's identity unto Hatach, and disclosed that she was a Jewess. The urgency of the matter, the drama of the situation, was now obvious to the court officials. Hatach became the secret messenger between Esther and Mordecai. Thus, when Hatach brought to Esther the request of Mordecai that she should approach the king, she first conferred with him, before sending him back with a message warning him of the mortal danger such a request as he had made would place her in.

"All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whatsoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king, into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days!"

"You Must Risk Your Life"

But the cause was greater than the individual. A whole nation was threatened and one person's life was nothing in comparison. Mordecai insisted that Esther must show faith and courage, and go in

unto the king even though it was at the risk of her life.

His stern, unyielding answer was taken back by Hatach:

"Think not with yourself that you will escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, then shall relief and deliverance come to the Jews from another place; but you and your father's house shall be destroyed: and who knows whether you are to come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Mordecai was thus a man of faith. He had complete confidence in God, and realised that He would not permit the destruction of the whole Jewish race. In a flash he realised the meaning of the remarkable events that had projected Esther into the position of prominence she held. His concern was with the nation which was greater than the individual, and the cause which was greater than the person.

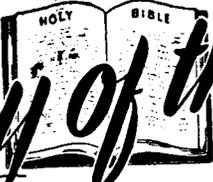
Esther's Faith and Courage

Obedient to the commands of her cousin, Esther put her trust in God, and made ready to do as she was bid. But first she requested that all the Jews should pray for the success of her approach to the king. To Mordecai she sent this answer:

"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish!"

Armed with this reply, Mordecai gathered all the Jews together and instituted the fast. And in the Palace, Esther and her maidens did likewise. For three days preparation, fasting and prayer was made to God. And then, on the third day, Esther made ready to approach the king.

The Story of the Bible



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Esther Before the King

(Est. 5)

The third day dawned. The period set aside by Esther for prayer and fasting had come to an end, and now the time had come for her to approach the king, to plead for her people.

She knew the danger she placed herself in by so doing. Anybody who appeared before the king unbidden was put to death, unless the king, in clemency, extended to such the golden sceptre.

But would he do this for Esther?

She had no cause to believe that he would. For over a month she had not been called to come before him, and it could be that she had completely fallen from grace.

In that case, she placed herself in mortal danger.

Esther thought of this as she made careful preparation for the mission to which she had committed herself. She took off the sackcloth she had been wearing, and replacing it with her royal apparel, made her way nervously

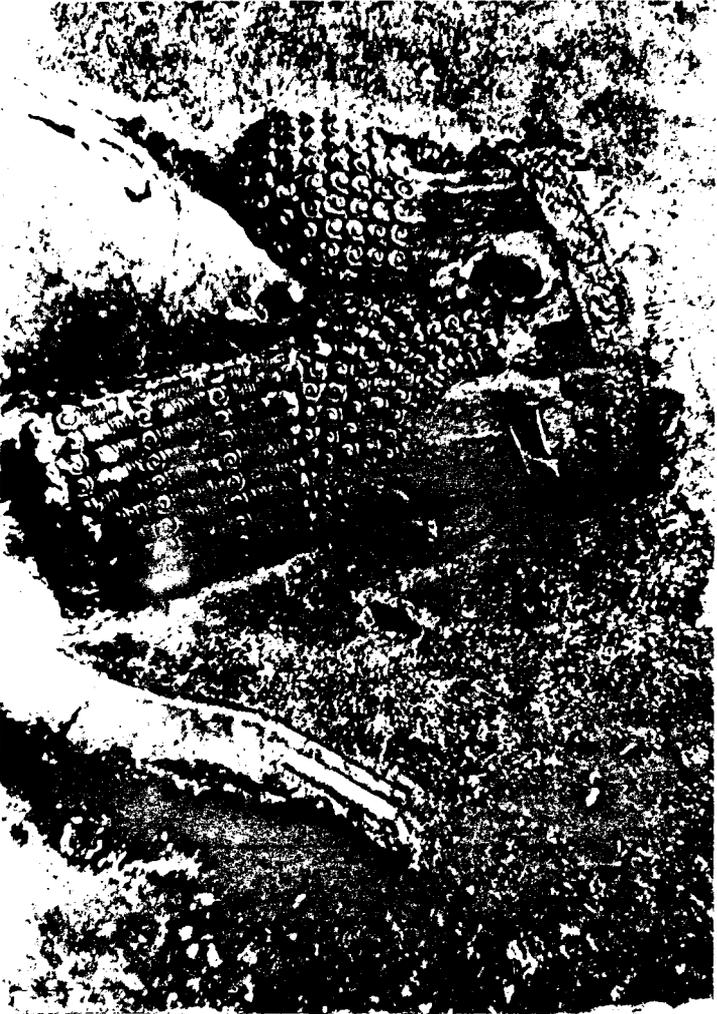
to the throne room of the king's palace.

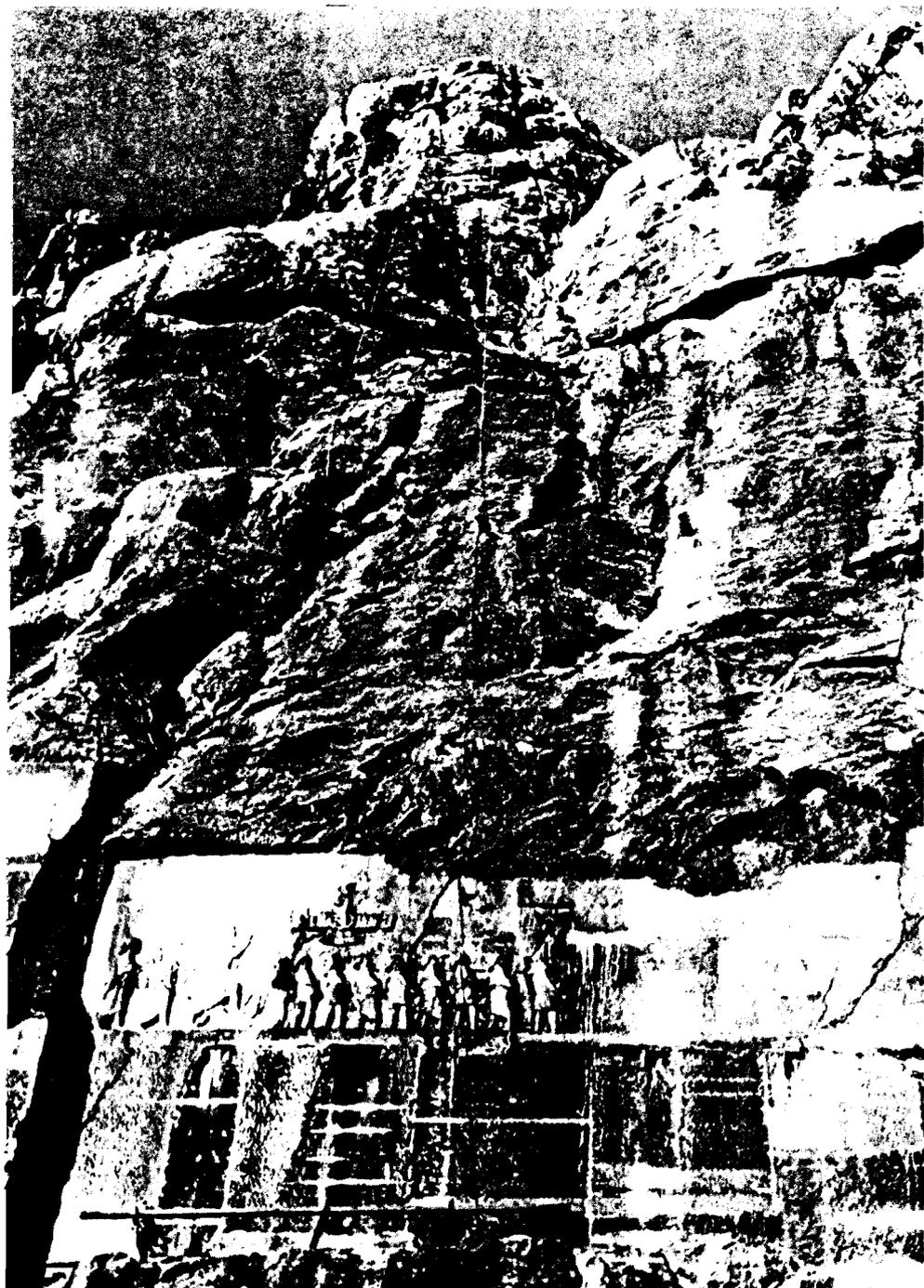
This was a vast hall, at the far end of which was the elevated throne of the king. A flight of broad steps led to it, and upon it, in a blaze of glory, sat the despotic monarch, absolute Lord of all he surveyed.

Nervously, the graceful Esther made her way through the entrance of the hall and approached the king. From his vantage point upon his elevated throne, the king viewed with surprise this unbidden intrusion of his privacy. But his heart was touched at the sight of the graceful young Jewess who was shyly making her way towards him with downcast eyes. She presented such a contrast to all the sophistication that the Persian monarch saw about him, she looked so artless, so lovely in her fresh young beauty, that the heart of the king went out to her . . . "she obtained favor in his sight" (Esther 5:2).

She had defied court etiquette by thus entering the palace, and

Head of Darius at Behistun





The inscription at Behistun

he realised that only a matter of the greatest urgency would drive her to such extreme action. He had an overwhelming desire to put her instantly at ease, and to that end, as she came to the foot of his throne, he extended to her the golden sceptre of the Empire. This was an act of grace and mercy. It meant that Esther was forgiven the unbidden intrusion of the palace, and that her life was saved. With great relief of mind she put forth her hand and touched the sceptre, thus accepting the mercy of the king, whilst doubtless, in her heart, she thanked God that her mission had been blessed to that extent.

The king looked at the young queen standing humbly before him with tender kindness.

"What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be even given you to the half of the kingdom," he declared.

But Esther was not yet ready to tell the king her mission. She had not merely prayed and fasted unto God, but had carefully planned the manner of her approach to the king. She realised that she had to meet guile with prudence, and match cunning-scheming with faith. Haman had worked on the king by guile, insinuating that the Jews were out to destroy the Empire, representing himself as a loyal servant who was prepared to lose a large sum of money to protect the king. Esther had to move carefully and prudently, had to first secure the fullest confidence and affection of the King. She felt it was not ripe to present her petition at that moment, and therefore, as a means of securing the co-operation of the king, she decided to first invite him to a ban-

quet that she had prepared. She therefore answered the King:

"If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him."

The king was only too willing to agree to this.

"Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther has said," he commanded.

Esther's Banquet

Thus the king and Haman came to the banquet prepared by Esther.

Haman came little suspecting the plot that Esther was hatching. He came feeling that it was an honor to do so and believing that a mark of royal pleasure had been expressed in his favor by the invitation he had received.

So they feasted together: the king, the queen, and the prime-minister. And as they did so, Esther awaited a propitious moment to press her petition; but none came.

At last the king became curious and impatient to learn what she desired. The banquet was drawing to an end; it was the time that wine was served; he had waited in vain for Esther to begin, and now he made the opening.

"What is your petition? And it shall be granted you! What is your request? It shall be performed to half of the kingdom!" he declared.

But Esther had an inward feeling that the time was not yet ripe to press her petition. For some reason she felt it best to delay the matter. So she temporised. She answered the king:

"My petition and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant

THE HIDDEN NAME OF GOD

In this book of 167 verses, the King is mentioned 192 times, his kingdom 26 times, his name 29 times, but God is not once named. Typically the events point to the time when His face is hidden from His people (Deut. 31:16-18), though from the shadows He overlooks them for good. It is suggested that the Divine Covenant Name, guaranteeing the perpetuity of Israel, and proclaimed at the bush (Exod. 3:14), occurs five times in hidden form, as an acrostic within the narrative, suggesting the silent, hidden working of Divine Providence in all the affairs of life, for "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:3-4). In this acrostic form, Yahweh occurs four times, and Ehyeh once—in the following places: Ch. 1:20. 5:4. 5:13. 7:7. 7:5. In the first two places, it is formed by the initial letters of the words, in the second two, it is formed by the final letters, whilst the word Ehyeh (I Will Be—wrongly translated I Am—Exod. 3:14) occurs in the final place.

In the first and third places mentioned above, the letters spell the Divine Name backwards, and the speakers are Gentiles unconscious of the fact that they are instruments in the working out of Divine providence. For example, in Esther 5:13, Haman is represented as saying: "This availeth me nothing." In Hebrew, the phrase is: "zeH 'eynennV shoveH leY," and the YHVH form the Divine Name of Yahweh. The second and fourth places quoted above, spell it forwards, and the speakers are Esther and the Spirit (the Narrator). Thus, in Esther 5:4, the queen says: "Let the king and Haman come this day," or, in Hebrew: "Yabo Ham-malech Vehaman Hayyom," and the YHVH form the name Yahweh.

Thus the Divine Name is found hidden in the narrative, as though the Spirit would remind the reader that God is everywhere present, though it may not seem so to normal sight. The Invisible but Omnipotent Yahweh overlooks His own, though they may be unconscious of it, as He is also found in the book before us, though we must search for the evidence of it.

It is said that in some Hebrew Manuscripts of the Old Testament, the letters that form the Divine Name in the various places mentioned above are emphasised so that they stand out clearly to the reader.

In addition to these hidden forms of the Divine Name, it is also found directly referred to in the names Shimei, Jair, etc.

my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king has said."

This was agreed upon, and the banquet came to an end.

Haman's Pride

Haman left the queen's banquet very pleased with himself, and with life in general. His schemes of personal advancement were succeeding beyond his greatest expectations. It was obvious to him

that the queen wanted to pay him a high honor, and he knew that he also enjoyed the greatest favor of the king.

Pompously he left the palace for his own palatial home. On all sides men and women humbly bowed low before the great Haman. His head went higher in fleshy pride.

But there in the gate of the palace was the familiar figure of his hated enemy: the despised Jew, Mordecai. And Mordecai did

not bow. Instead he stood staring contemptuously at Haman, refusing to acknowledge his glory or to move aside.

It ruined Haman's day. Inwardly he seethed with anger; but he constrained himself realizing that it was but a short time, and Mordecai and all his hated race would be destroyed together. He hastened home and gathered his friends and family together, that he might boast of his success, and seek their advice as to what he should do regarding Mordecai. For Haman was a vain, jealous man; he enjoyed power, he loved to see people bowing down before him, but he hated to be defied.

So, with his family and friends gathered around him, he spake of the glory of his power, the wealth of his family, the honor the king had paid him in promoting him above all his princes and servants.

"Moreover, Esther the queen let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow I am again invited unto her together with the king. But this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

And as the friends and wife of Haman looked at the conceited and vindictive prime minister, they also came to hate Mordecai. They felt no pity for him or for his people. Zeresh his wife was foremost in her bitterness. She fed the vindictive nature of Haman by manifestations of the greatest impatience against Mordecai. She urged him to exercise his authority by ordering a special death of humiliation and degradation for Mordecai that all might see and ponder the fate of those who oppose the great Haman.

"Let a cross (see margin) be made fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go in merrily with the king unto the banquet," they advised.

This idea pleased Haman greatly. He rubbed his hands with glee as he thought of the sight of his hated enemy dangling helplessly upon the high cross, a solemn warning to all people of the fate of those who opposed him.

Having decided upon this policy, Haman immediately ordered the cross to be constructed. His mind was relieved of the trifling but nagging problem, and he retired for the night, to sleep well in anticipation of dining again with the king and the queen on the morrow, and to have his revenge upon Mordecai.

Mordecai's Elevation

But in the palace the king could not sleep.

He had a restless night, tossing and turning on his bed. We are not told the immediate cause of his sleeplessness, but obviously God was behind it. Providence was moving out of the shadows to the help of His people, and as an element to that end, something caused the king's sleep to "flee away" from him that night (Est. 6:1 mg).

The preservation of Israel was bound up in this insignificant detail.

The king desired something to occupy his mind, and the Book of the Records of Persia was brought and read before him. Among other things, it recorded the service that Mordecai had rendered the throne by reporting the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh, and so sav-

Character Sketch**ESTHER — THE DUTIFUL CHILD AND BEAUTIFUL BRIDE**

The character of Esther was such as to commend her to her contemporaries. She was noted for:

HER BEAUTY: She was fair of form, and of good countenance (Ch. 2:7).

FILIAL AFFECTION: She obeyed her adopted father (Ch. 2:7), even when she had left his house and was in a position to act independently of his authority, when she was beyond his power to demand (Ch. 2:20).

MODESTY: Her beauty did not make her vain and foolish. She avoided all arts to adorn it to increase its effects on others (Ch. 2:15). Modesty is a lovely grace, which adds additional charm to the highest physical beauty. It makes a woman beautiful though she may lack physical attractiveness, but without it, all the beauty of face and figure only illustrates the truth of Proverbs 11:22: "As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion." Modesty conciliates and wins by its own gentle force, even as Esther won her way into the heart of the king and his ministers. An immodest assertion of one's self in any circumstances indicates either a want of moral sensitiveness, or a want of intellectual insight. A pure heart, a true self-knowledge, and the fear of God, are all and always modest.

DISCRETION: In her new and trying position as queen, she never failed in prudence. This was not due merely to shrewd planning, but good training and becoming modesty. The very simplicity and artlessness of her conduct won her the favor of the king's servants (Ch. 2:9), and finally the king himself.

INTEGRITY: The sudden flush of prosperity and prominence left her unspoiled. Her dutifulness to her foster-father remained as before (Ch. 2:20). She was prepared to perish with her people in performing her duty.

Thus Esther was beautiful yet modest; courageous yet self-effacing; artless yet discreet; faithful yet tactful. In the narrative she is typical of the Bride of Christ, replacing Israel whose "Maker was her husband" (Isa. 54:5). Her name is expressive of this, for she was originally named Hadassah (Myrtle-Esth. 2:7—a name suggestive of Israel), but ultimately earned the new name of Esther (Star), even as the Bride of Christ puts on the name of her Groom.

As one of Christ's titles is that of the Star (Rev. 22:16), the Book of Esther illustrates in type the drama of Num. 24:17-20 which foretold: "There shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel . . . Amalek was the first of nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever." Through the Star and the Sceptre, by the guidance of Mordecai, Haman the Agagite (the Amalekite) perished for ever.

ing the King's life.

"What honor and dignity has been done to Mordecai for this?" enquired the king.

"There is nothing done for him," was the reply.

The king determined, as he went off to sleep, that this omission should be rectified on the morrow.

The following day was to prove one of greatest significance to the various parties in this drama.

Esther, Haman and the king were each anxious to put into effect the plans they had made the night before. Esther wanted to present her petition, the king wanted to reward Mordecai; Haman wanted permission to hang him.

Haman, particularly, had to act quickly. He had to gain the king's permission, arrange for the execution of his enemy, and present himself at Esther's banquet.

Early in the morning he arose and hastened to the palace to petition the king.

The king heard his arrival.

"Who is in the court?" he asked his servants.

"It is Haman," was the answer.

The king was delighted. Here was the man best qualified to advise him how to reward Mordecai. He instructed that Haman should be brought before him, and before his minister could speak, the king had burst out with his request.

"What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" he asked.

The unexpected question drove all thoughts of Mordecai from the mind of Haman. Here was the

possibility of the greatest honor, for whom would the king delight to honor more than himself? So Haman excitedly reasoned, as he took time to think out the answer. He carefully thought, and then gave his reply.

"For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel which the king wears be brought, together with the horse upon which the king rides, and the crown royal which is set upon his head; and let this be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delights to honor, and bring him on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him: Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor."

This was a suggestion of the greatest daring and utmost presumption, in view of the fact that Haman thought that the king was referring to himself. It indicates that he was aspiring to royal honors. He could see himself being paraded through the city, the object of admiring eyes, receiving the applause of the people. However, he was soon to experience the truth of Proverbs 29:23: "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit."

Haman's pride was brought to the dust by the king's next statement. He listened astonished and with mortification as the king commanded:

"Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do so even to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that you have said."*

*It seems obvious from the king's statement concerning "Mordecai the Jew," that he did not realise that it was to the Jews that Haman was referring when he made his infamous suggestion that they were opposed to the king and should be destroyed. Haman did not name the people against whom he laid his accusation (Est. 3:8). The king trusted him implicitly, and was confident that he was acting in the best interest of the crown. Haman was careful not to name the Jews, for they were held in high regard by the kings of Persia.

(Cont. from page 70)

What humiliation for the haughty Haman. The people, already perplexed at the proclamation of the king against the Jewish people that had been engineered by Haman and sent out under the royal seal (Est. 3:15), would be utterly confused at the sight of Haman the "Jews' enemy" (Est. 3:10), publicly honoring Mordecai who had openly shown his contempt for the Agagite (Est. 5:9). Haman would have refused the king's command if he dared but he knew that to do so would endanger his life. There was but one thing to do swallow his pride, and honor Mordecai as directed.

Mordecai was thus clothed in royal garments, seated upon the royal horse, and led through the city by the humiliated Haman who went before proclaiming: "This is done unto the man whom the king delights to honor."

What dark, bitter thoughts must have flooded Haman's mind as he did this! How he must have cursed his enemy in his heart, as with hypocritical lips he voiced his honor! And what an amazing reversal for Mordecai. Lifted high upon the horse, he must have pondered the ways of Providence as he looked down upon the back of his enemy walking before him. He must have realized that God was working for the relief of His people, and that this constituted a token of ultimate deliverance.

Here was a very wonderful answer to his prayers.

And as the people of Shushan witnessed the sudden elevation of Mordecai, they, too, must have pondered the significance of all this,

Haman's Foreboding

Having done as the king had bid in regard to Mordecai, Haman hurried back home, burdened with a sense of despondency and foreboding. He was depressed, worried and fearful at the turn of events, and ashamed to look anybody in the face.

So he covered his head, as he hastened back home to confer with his family, his friends, and his advisers. He called a conference which met under the shadow of the huge cross that he had built for his enemy, and with his advisers assembled about him, he recounted to them the events of the day.

He heard some wise but depressing words of warning from his wise men and Zeresh his wife.

They declared:

"If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him!"

They knew of the history of the Jews, how God had been with them and brought punishment upon those who persecuted them. Thus their advice to Haman was to make his peace with his enemy who would otherwise prove too much for him.

But it was too late. Even while they were talking with him, the king's chamberlains called to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared. His day of opportunity was at an end.

At The Second Banquet

So the king and Haman came to the banquet prepared by Esther the queen.

It must have been held in the atmosphere of greatest tension,

Esther awaited the best moment to present her petition, Haman was doubtless pre-occupied with the remarkable events of the day, only the king was relaxed, for he had accomplished his purpose, and was possibly in a good humour.

Once again the King invited Esther to name her petition:

"What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you! What is your request? It shall be performed, even to half of the kingdom."

This time Esther made her request. Humbly, yet earnestly, she spake to the king:

"If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please you, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. If we had been sold as slaves, I would have said nothing, although the enemy could not compensate for the loss of so many subjects!"

The king listened to this statement with astonishment; Haman in fear. Ahasuerus could not understand what Esther was driving at. He certainly had not understood the decree that Haman had issued in his name in the way Esther expressed it. All that he knew of that decree was that it was issued against certain unspecified enemies of the State (Est. 3:8). Now Esther was claiming that it was dictated by matters of personal revenge against her and her people. The king still found it difficult to believe that she was referring to Haman, however, and doubtless thought that Esther was accusing somebody else of taking advantage of the decree for per-

sonal revenge.*

"Who is he, and where is he, that has presumed in his heart to do such a thing?" he asked.

Esther replied with words of ill-omen for Haman that put the matter plainly beyond all doubt:

"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

Sternly the king looked at Haman who was stricken speechless before him, and whose guilt was obvious in the fear that he clearly showed on his face. The king now perceived that his favorite had gained an advantage over him, had placed him in a most difficult and awkward position. Not only had his foolish decree consigned to death large numbers of loyal subjects, but it had endangered his beautiful bride as well, towards whom he felt the greatest tenderness and love.

Disturbed and upset, recognising that he was partly responsible for the state of things that had developed, he left the banquetting hall to ponder the problem.

The Death of Haman

Haman was now desperate. He could see in the stern, angry countenance of the king as he left the hall, that his life was in jeopardy. He stood up to humbly plead with Esther that she intercede to save his life. But this was impossible. In his extremity, he at last threw himself forward on the couch where she was reclining, seeking, perhaps, to grasp her feet or garments, as is usual with suppliants in the east.

It was in this attitude that the

* The king's words, in the Hebrew, express confused surprise. They have been translated as follows: "Who? He? This one? And where? This one? Hath he filled his heart to do thus?" (See also Youngs Literal trans.)

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Historically the book reveals the hidden ways of God; it shows Providence overlooking His people from the shadows, ensuring the ultimate triumph of the righteous.

Typically, it demonstrates the principle that the devil (Haman) will be crucified on the stake intended for Christ. When Christ hung from the cross, his enemies thought they had triumphed; instead, he gained the victory (Heb. 13:20), and it was the devil that was destroyed through his death (Heb. 2:14). So Haman prepared a cross for Mordecai, but perished on it himself.

Prophetically it foreshadowed the final crisis when Israel shall be delivered from out of the time of Jacob's trouble, and Gogue, the "Jews' enemy" will be destroyed.

Parabolically, it sets forth the purpose of God for the redemption of His people, and thus dramatises and condenses the history of Israel.

The five main characters in the drama, seem to be thus representative: The Persian monarch of God; Vashti, of Israel after the flesh; Haman of the serpent's seed politically and individually; Mordecai of the Lord Jesus; Esther of Israel after the spirit.

As Christ is both Star and Sceptre (Num. 24:17-20), so Esther embraced the name of Star (as the true Ecclesia does that of Christ, and could only obtain access to the king by touching the golden sceptre (Est. 4:11). She was married to the King, thus foreshadowing the position of the Lamb's bride, who replaces Israel after the flesh, the "wife" of Yahweh (Isa. 54:5).

Other types in this interesting book can be searched out as follows:

ESTHER AS A TYPE Her genealogy, as set out in this book, is as follows (Est. 2:5, 7): Benjamin (Son of my right hand), Kish (Power), Shimei (Fame of Yahweh), Abihail (Father of might), Esther (Star). A paraphrase of these names forms the following statement: "The Son of My right hand manifested power, and for the fame of Yahweh, revealed himself as a Father of might to the Star."

Esther was a type of the true Ecclesia. Her name was originally Hadassah, or Myrtle (Est. 2:7), which is a symbol of the true Israel (Isa. 55:13. 41:19. Neh. 8:15. Zech. 1:8, 10, 11). As Esther (Star) she is representative of the multitudinous Christ, having taken upon herself the name of her spouse (Num. 24:17. 2 Pet. 1:19, Gen. 22:17. Ps. 147:4. 1 Cor. 15:41. Rev. 3:1).

She was orphaned (Est. 2:7)—the bride of Christ is represented as having left mother and father (Eph. 5:31-32), is brought up by Mordecai (a type of Christ) as his own child (Est. 2:7)—the ecclesia bears a similar relationship to Christ, Heb. 2:13), was beautiful in appearance (Est. 2:7. Cp. Eph. 5:27), possessed a retinue of seven maidens (Est. 2:9, representative of the multitudinous Christ, Song 1:3. Rev. 1:20), was subjected to a process of purification for marriage (Est. 2:9. Cp. 2 Thess. 2:13), manifested pleasing characteristics and deportment (Est. 2:15. Cp. 1 Pet. 3:1-3), was taken into the royal house (Est. 2:16. Cp. Jhn 14:1-3), always acted under Mordecai's instructions (Est. 2:20. Cp. Matt. 7:6), was called upon to

sacrifice for the faith (Est. 4:16), after three days of humiliation and prayer, assumed royal apparel on the third day (Est. 5:1. Cp. Hos. 6:2), at the royal banquet she found pleasure in the eyes of the king (Est. 5:6, cp. Rev. 19:7-8).

She was ultimately victorious over her enemies. She presided over the banquet of wine for Haman (Est. 7:1. Cp. Jer. 25:27), which brought about his doom, and finally attained unto his possessions (Est. 8:1 Cp. Rev. 3:9). She interceded, and ultimately legislated for the relief of Israel (Est. 8:7-8. Cp. Zech. 10:6). Finally, jointly with Mordecai, she decreed the feast of rejoicing (Est. 9:32. Cp. Rev. 19:9), which was adopted by the Jews throughout the Empire who found great blessings in their efforts on their behalf.

HAMAN AS A TYPE—He represented the seed of the serpent in its various manifestations. He was granted power for a time (Est. 3:1. Cp. Rev. 13:7); he was known as the Jews' enemy (Est. 3:6. Cp. Dan. 7:21); he sought to destroy Mordecai (Est. 5:14. Dan. 8:11); he was forced to honor Mordecai (Est. 6:11. Zeph. 3:19-20); he was commanded to attend the banquet of wine (Est. 7:1. Jer. 25:27), and was afterwards hung on his own gallows (Est. 7:10. Heb. 2:14); his ten sons were slain after him (Est. 9:12, 14. Rev. 17:12-14). Haman thus typifies the flesh in several manifestations. He represented the seed of the serpent which sought to put Christ to death, but in so doing encompassed its own destruction (Acts 2:23-24); he also represented the flesh yet to be politically manifested in Gog who will be destroyed after causing the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7. Ezek. 37. Deut. 4:30); he also foreshadowed the flesh ecclesiastically manifested in the Man of Sin of 2 Thess. 2:4, 8, who is to be destroyed at Christ's coming together with his ten sons (Rev. 17:12-14).

MORDECAI AT A TYPE: His genealogy is given as Benjamin (Son of my right hand), Kish (Power), Shimei (Fame of Yahweh), Jair (Yahweh enlightens), Mordecai (Dedicated to Mars, or Bitter bruising). A paraphrase of his genealogy provides the following sentence: "The Son of My right hand manifested power, and for the fame of Yahweh, revealed himself as he whom Yahweh enlightens that he might dedicate himself to war, or bitter bruising."

He was foster-father to Esther (Est. 2:7. Cp. Isa. 53:10), showing anxious care for her welfare (Est. 2:11. Cp. John 17:11, 15). He rendered such service to the king as to ensure his ultimate promotion (Est. 2:21-23. Est. 6. Cp. Acts 2:22-24). He refused to bow to Haman (Est. 3:5), as Christ refused to bow to the flesh (John 14:30). He took upon himself the salvation of the people (Est. 4:1), instructing Esther how she should conduct herself in the face of danger (Est. 4:8-11), bringing her to the very brink of death because he knew it was the only way of life. (Est. 4:16, Cp. Rom. 6:1-3) He was figuratively brought to the cross by Haman (Est. 5:14), but delivered from it by the king (Est. 6), and elevated throughout the world-wide empire as the royal representative (Est. 10. Cp. 1 Tim. 6:15-16). Haman was ultimately forced to acknowledge his glory (Est. 6:11, Cp. Matt. 23:39, 27:54, Acts 4:16) whilst he inherited the possessions of his enemy (Est. 8:2. Cp. Ps. 2:8), and made it possible for the Jews to find deliverance (Est. 8. Cp. Rom. 11:26). He established a new feast of deliverance which was endorsed by all Israel (Est. 9:27. Cp. Jer. 16:14-15), and thus assumed priestly functions. He also ruled with the king (Est. 10. Cp. Rev. 19:16), so that he manifested the authority of a king-priest.

He thus stands in the narrative as a type of Christ.

angry king found him when he returned.

Harshly he condemned the guilty minister, and instantly the royal attendants seized the one-time favorite, and covered his face to prepare him for death.

What form of punishment was fit for the crime of which Haman was guilty?

One of the king's chamberlains had a suggestion:

"Behold, the cross fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, stands in his house!"

"Hang him thereon!" commanded the king.

So Haman expired upon the very cross that he had prepared for Mordecai.

Relief for the Jews

Haman's folly brought suffering upon all his family, for when a criminal was executed, his goods became the property of the crown. Thus the wealth of Haman passed into the hands of Ahasuerus, and he, in turn, gave them to Esther the queen.

Someone was also required to fill the position left vacant by the death of Haman. Esther spake unto the king, and Mordecai was brought before him. Here, indeed, was one worthy to fill the position, for he had already saved the king's life, and thus could be thoroughly trusted.

Mordecai the Jew became Grand Vizier in the place of Haman the Jews' enemy.

But the decree of Haman still remained, death still threatened the Jews throughout the Empire, and Esther now set herself the task of defeating what was pro-

posed.

Again she took her life in her hands to do so. It was strictly forbidden that any should appear sorrowful in the king's presence (Esth. 4:2), but ignoring this law, Esther came again before the king, and falling down at his feet, she besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman that he had devised against the Jews. Distaught with grief she fell down at his feet weeping.

Once again the heart of the king was touched. The golden sceptre was again extended towards Esther, and rising from the floor she stood before the king to make her petition.

"If it pleases the king," she began, **"and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"**

The king had the fullest sympathy with Esther by now, and would willingly have reversed the wicked decree of Haman if he could. But it was impossible; the laws of the Medes and Persians were unalterable (Dan. 6:8). He had already done what he could. He had given Esther the house of Haman. He had punished that wicked man with death because of his opposition to the Jews. He was prepared to do whatever he could to defeat the decree of Haman; but he could not reverse it.

He explained this to Esther, and then invited her to write as she liked, in his name, and seal her instructions with his seal, that it might have royal authority. For such **"may no man reverse."**

Character Sketch**HAMAN — THE JEWS' ENEMY**

His name means "Well-disposed." He probably appealed to the flesh. He had an innate passion for elevation (Est. 6:6-7). But the higher he rose, the more contemptuous and overbearing he became, and the more indifferent to the fate of those beneath him. Mordecai, however, pricked the bubble of his pride when he refused to bow down to him, for the curse of Yahweh rested on the Amalekites (Exod. 17:14-16). And Haman was an Amalekite, a descendant of their kings (Num. 24:7. 1 Sam. 15:8. See Josephus).

All the tragedy of Haman is condensed in the simple statement that he was the "Jews' enemy" (Est. 3:10. 7:6. 8:1. 9:10, 24). As such, he became the enemy of God. Haman, the vain and fussy courtier, the vulgar and foolish upstart, the cruel and unscrupulous prime minister, the villain of the plot, is still detested by the Jews, who see in him a type of anti-semites throughout the ages.

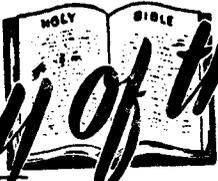
Haman was a complete man of the flesh: vindictive (Est. 3:6), vain (6:7), crafty (3:8), revengeful (3:6), boastful (5:11), wicked and unjust (3:8-9), small-minded so that little things irritated him (5:13). He was driven by intense self-interest (5:12) and immoderate ambition (6:7-8). In his intolerant vanity, he could not bear the slightest infringement of his rights, so that small matters soon assumed mountainous proportions.

Thus he was servile and cruel, using his power for disgraceful purposes. Suddenly and rapidly elevated to authority, the world appeared at his feet—but it was all short-lived, and the greater his elevation, the more calamitous and awful the headlong plunge. Haman's doom was as sudden as it was ironic. In power he is terrible; in decline he is pathetic. One day he vaunts himself; the next day he is impaled by his own stake.

He is the symbol of sin raging and beating upon the shore. But above its hoarse roaring head is the still small Voice of the Allwise and Almighty Disposer of events: "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (see Ps. 37:1. 73:3. Prov. 24:1, 19). For a time he exercised great power under Ahasuerus, even as sin has been permitted to exercise great power in the earth, "to make war with the saints" (Rev. 13:7). He built a cross (rendered "gallows" but note margin), upon which he proposed to crucify Mordecai, but this cross became the means of his own destruction, and it destroyed him. In his bitter animosity towards the Jews, he foreshadows Gogue of the last days (the word Agag has been rendered Gogue in the Septuagint version of Num. 24:7. See Est. 3:1), for Gogue will represent sin in a political sense, and will be destroyed on the cross of his own making.

The downfall of all fleshly power will be thus as sudden and as precipitous as that of Haman, and will make the way for the elevation of the antitypical Mordecai (Christ), and the universal rule of God (see Esther 10).

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From Esther to Nehemiah

Full of feeling for the cause of her people, Esther appears before king Ahasuerus with a plea for their relief. Though he could not reverse the previous decision, the king invited her to write her instructions with his seal. Having this authority, it would become law.

Defeating the Decree of Haman

Armed with this authority, Esther called for Mordecai and set before him the proposition of the king. Mordecai proved to be the man for the occasion. Though the decree of Haman could not be set aside, it could be defeated. It called upon faithful citizens to destroy the Jews in their midst in a terrible pogrom throughout the Empire; but if permission was granted the Jews to defend themselves, and to slay those who attacked them, the evil decree of Haman could be neutralised.

Thus, in the authority of the king, Mordecai wrote a decree, granting permission for the Jews to defend themselves against any who should attack them, to slay and destroy in return, and to "take the spoil of them for a prey."

This second decree was sent out post-haste throughout all the realms of the king, including Shushan the palace.

So now two decrees were before the people: one that invited them to slay the Jews and take their possessions; the other that permitted the Jews to slay in turn and take the possessions of those who might attack them.

Wisdom lay in the direction of ignoring the first decree, and thus avoiding the evil of the second one.

What a relief for the Jewish people when the knowledge of this second decree was made known. It was like life from the dead for them. They now saw the hand of God in their affairs. They had concrete evidence of the power of prayer. They rejoiced with joy unspeakable that their service to God had been so openly rewarded. They had received light in the midst of darkness; gladness, joy, and honor in the place of unhappiness, misery and disgrace (Est. 8:16), and they celebrated the occasion in appropriate fashion. Throughout the

realm of the king, there was feasting and happiness; people recognised in this wonderful turn or fortune the hand of God with Israel, and "many of the people of the land became Jews." Thoughtful Persians became proselytes and added their number to the Jews banded together for defence. This was perhaps due to the influence of certain specific Jews. For example, Daniel doubtless had powerfully influenced some of the wise men of the realm; Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai and others may have played a part in this conversion also. There had obviously been a spirit of sympathy for the Jews among the Persians ever since the decree of Cyrus, and this had lasted for some time. Even Haman's wise men had warned him: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you shall not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him" (Est. 6:13).

Thus it was appreciated in some parts of Persia that a Divine Providence overshadowed the fortunes of Israel.

The Struggle for Power.

The fateful day (the 13th day of the 12th month) drew near. Throughout Persia, the Jews made preparation to defend themselves against their enemies; and those amongst the Persians who still intended to use the king's decree to gain the possessions of the Jews, did likewise.

Thus two hostile groups faced

each other, though those who opposed the Jews were in the minority. For most citizens could see now that the Government was on the side of the Jews. Mordecai was in supreme power in Shushan, and the representatives of the Government throughout the Empire took their instructions from him, and advocated that the people abstain from attacking the Jews.*

As for Mordecai, he became greater and greater, not only with the king but also with the people. The king doubtless found him a skilful administrator and wise adviser, and drew him more and more into his counsels. This probably paved the way for such men as Nehemiah to come into greater prominence.

Thus, by the time the 13th day of the 12th month dawned, the Jews were greatly respected by the people.

Despite this, however, there still remained some who looked upon them with bitter hatred, and decided to seize the opportunity to attack them. Thus on this terrible day, the Empire of Persia was convulsed by trouble. Civil war broke out on all sides. Despite all warnings, many rose against the Jews and had to be repulsed. In the city of Shushan, 500 of the Jews' enemies were destroyed, including the ten sons of Haman; in the provinces 75,000 lost their lives.

No matter how strong the opposition, success was with the Jewish people on that terrible day. They regretted the slaughter which was made necessary by the vio-

*This is suggested by the Hebrew rendering of Est. 9:3. Rotherham renders "helped the Jews" as "extolling the Jews." The rulers probably advised the people to refrain from any form of violence or attack.

lent attacks of their enemies, so that although they defended themselves, they did not touch the spoil of those who opposed them, even though the king's decree permitted this to be done (Est. 9:10, 16).

It was a sad day for the Persian Empire, and yet, foolishly, the party of Haman had not learned its lesson. Resentment still ran rife throughout Shushan.

There were undercurrents of intrigue and revolt, and though 500 had died through their folly on the 13th day, preparations were underfoot to renew the fight on the next day.

Thus Esther requested of the king that he permit the Jews to defend themselves on the 14th day as well, and that he arrange to have the ten sons of Haman hung upon gallows so that all might see the futility and foolishness of their actions (Est. 9:13-15).

But even in spite of this terrible warning, the enemies of the Jews in Shushan made another concerted attempt to destroy them on the 14th day of the month, and a further 300 were slain in consequence.

That finally crushed the resistance. The Empire settled down to a state of peace, and Jewry was saved. Throughout the provinces the Jews gathered together on the 14th day of the month to thank God for the deliverance that had been granted them, to rejoice together because of the great assistance that had been given them, and to sacrifice before God. It was a day of gladness and feasting, a day of relief and release from the awful terror that had overshadowed them for so long. And they celebrated it by spon-

taneously rejoicing together. In the homes of Jews, animals were sacrificed in gratitude to God, and an excess of joy as the families feasted on their portion they sent portions one to another, that all might be drawn together as one in this happy occasion.

The Feast of Purim Established

Mordecai's standing was high, not only in the counsels of the king, but also among the Jews at home and abroad. They deeply respected him, and heeded his instructions.

And although he was not of the priestly tribe, he acted, not only in a civil capacity, but in spiritual guidance as well.

With the authority he now enjoyed, he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of the king, calling upon them to annually set aside this period for a yearly festival of rejoicing, that they might never forget the God-given help that had been wonderfully granted them, in a time of extreme trouble and impending evil. They were to celebrate it with days of feasting and of joy, on the 14th and 15th days of the 12th month (approximately February-March, as a memorial of the great deliverance that they had just experienced. Two days were appointed because of the additional day of civil war, trouble and slaughter that the Jews of Shushan had endured (Esther 9:13-14).

Mordecai's letter and decree was received everywhere with the greatest enthusiasm. It evidently received the endorsement of the high priest in Jerusalem, for even those Jews who had returned to

THE FEAST OF PURIM



Other festivals were ordained by Divine authority this one by that of Mordecai and Esther. Yet its commemoration was undoubtedly sanctioned by God Whose merciful interposition it records. The observance consists of a preliminary fast, of a sacred assembly in the synagogue when the Megillah (or Koll) of the Book of Esther is unfolded and solemnly read aloud; and of a repast at home, followed by rejoicing, and the sending of presents.

It is:

A REMINDER OF AN ERA OF CAPTIVITY — commemorating the exile of Israel, a token of their sin and God's displeasure, yet showing they had not been neglected nor forsaken, but in His mercy spared and recalled to the Land of Promise.

A MEMORIAL OF THE ENEMIES AND FRIENDS OF THE NATION — When Haman's name is mentioned, the synagogue is filled with the noise of stamping and rattling, with shouts of "Cursed be Haman! May his name perish!" On the other hand, the names of Esther and Mordecai are greeted with gratitude and warmth.

A COMMEMORATION OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE — Purim signifies "lots" (Est. 3:7). It illustrates the truth of Proverbs 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of Yahweh." It points to Divine grace which was shown to Jewry, and is a token of that extended to all mankind, which in Christ Jesus is "mighty to save."

A FORESHADOWING OF THE DIVINE PURPOSE — It recalls the Jewish exile, and shows that God is present to save though no open manifestation of His power is seen. It shows that God not only can, but will deliver His people and calls upon the Godly to rejoice in anticipation of this fact, seeing in the past the shape of the future. It is of the greatest significance that this new Feast of Deliverance and Rejoicing was established by a man who was not of the priestly order. In this it is like the Passover established by Christ. It sets forth the Divine drama of the ages demonstrating the ultimate victory of truth over error, the triumph of the purpose of God over the schemes of men, the establishment of righteousness over the designs of wickedness, the conquest of the seed of the woman over the seed of the serpent. All this is seen in the fast and feast of Purim celebrated on the background of the events recorded in Esther.

IT ILLUSTRATES THE GRACIOUSNESS OF YAHWEH — as from the shadows He overlooks the care of His people, and it underlines such principles as are stated in the Psalms:

"For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life! weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5).

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Ps. 126:5).

"The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. 35:10).

"Hear the word of Yahweh, ye that tremble at His word . . . He shall appear to your joy, and they (thine enemies) shall be ashamed" (Isa. 66:5).

And finally:

"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh and their righteousness is of Me, saith Yahweh" (Isa. 54:17).

the land of the forefathers under Zerubbabel and Ezra agreed to do according to his request, and annually keep these two days in the way laid down.

They called these days the Days of Purim, after the name of Pur, or Lot, because Haman had cast lots to discover the best day in which to carry out his wicked purpose (Est. 3:7); but God turned his counsel upon himself, and the day turned out to be a day of deliverance for Jewry and not of destruction.

Mordecai's request was endorsed by the Queen. She had a fellow feeling for the rest of the Jews, for it had been at great risk of her life, at great personal sacrifice, that she had played her part to defeat the schemes of Haman. She wrote a letter of confirmation of his decree, earnestly calling upon the Jews to follow the instructions of the prime minister. And this was also sent out with that of Mordecai.

Subsequent Greatness of Ahasuerus and Mordecai

Mordecai proved a faithful minister to the Crown. Under his wise administration the power of Ahasuerus was extended in all directions. Distant lands were brought under his control, and a tribute was placed upon the countries of the Empire both far and near.

Mordecai was next to the king in honor and authority. The Empire was at peace and happy. The king and the prime minister were beloved of the multitudes whose good they sought to advance.

It was like a foretaste of the Millennium, when the Lord Jesus

shall reign in the authority of the King of heaven, and will be the beloved of the people; when the nations will bring their tribute to Jerusalem (Isa. 60:11 mg), and peace shall spread abroad on every side.

This is the final picture presented to us of Mordecai (see Est. 10). And what a contrast it is to his previous state, when as a mourning Jew he sat despondently in Shushan, clothed in sackcloth and ashes, whilst Haman, pompous in power, schemed his death and that of his race!

A similar contrast will be seen when the Lord Jesus shall reign as king, and all mankind shall applaud him. For 1900 years ago, men shouted for his death, and mocked at him as he hung upon the cross. They derided him, and believed that they had seen the last of him. But he rose from the grave to a glorious victory, which is yet to be manifested to all mankind when he rules gloriously throughout the earth.

And as the triumph of Mordecai made it possible for the Jews to gain the victory over their enemies and ascend from the valley of despair to the joy and happiness of a great triumph, so this will be the lot of all those who seek to serve God in truth through Jesus Christ now. Though they may suffer anxiety and trial, though they may often mourn, they will yet witness a great triumph and joy if they but prove faithful. The rejoicing of Purim will be theirs.

So this lovely little drama of the Divine purpose ends with right vindicated before all, and the righteous triumphant throughout the earth. It is what God will

ultimately establish when He steps out of the shadows to openly reveal His power and authority in the person of His son, and to plainly manifest His providential guidance in the lives of all those whom He has drawn to Himself.

In that day, it will be seen that the drama of the Book of Esther has been enacted many thousands of times, in the private lives of those who have served God faithfully. It will also be seen, that the nation of Israel has likewise been "saved out of a time of

trouble" (Jer. 30:7), in which an antitypical Haman (the Gogue of Ezekiel 38) will try to repeat his wicked intentions, only to learn that God "for His Name's sake" (Ezek. 36:22) will curse him that curseth them.

The Book of Esther is a wonderful reminder that God is ever present to help, even though there appears for the moment no tangible evidence of His presence. Let us never lose our faith in Him for ultimate deliverance is sure (Isa. 54:17).

Character Sketch

MORDECAI: MAN OF COURAGE, KINDNESS, FAITH AND PATIENCE



From a state of servitude, Mordecai was elevated to a position where he executed supreme power. He became great in the earth, so that he was "next unto the king" (Esther 10:3). He knew how to be abased, and how to abound. He was patient when patience was necessary, but moved with lightning quickness when the turn of events warranted it. He was kind and tender to his beautiful young cousin, but ruthless in his demands upon her when the cause of his people was endangered. He was submissive to the decrees of the nations, but boldly defiant of Haman even at risk of his life. He had courage, kindness, faith and patience. He was:

KIND AND GENEROUS—When Esther lost her parents, his heart and home were opened to her (Est. 2:7). His affection was doubtless governed by his belief, for the Law demanded that he should do what he did for the helpless and destitute girl whom Providence brought under his care, but his love and help were extended without stint. Nor did they cease when she was wedded to the King. Mordecai still overlooked her care, and sought her good (Est. 2:11).

DETERMINED AND RESOLUTE—Kind and loving as he was, in time of danger he insisted that she risk her life for her people. He was incorable as to that. As much as he loved his young cousin, he recognised that the cause was greater than self-preservation; the nation greater than the individual. Nor would he bow before Haman, though in so doing he may have secured escape from the danger. A principle was at stake, and therefore what was expedient for personal safety did not enter his considerations.

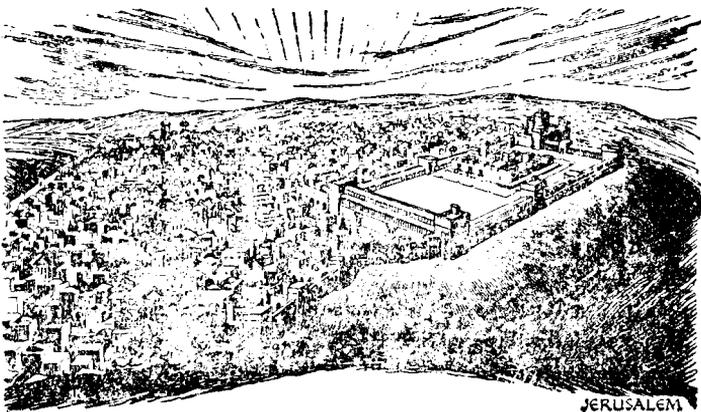
FAITHFUL: He saw a Divine Providence in his life, and had implicit faith in the destiny of his people (Est. 4:14). Why then had he not returned back to the land with Zerubbabel? Probably his appointment at the palace prevented it, for special permission would have been required for one possessing such an honored position as he to leave. Why did he instruct Esther not to reveal her true identity? Because of his faith. Because he wondered what was the purpose of Providence in the sudden elevation of his young foster-daughter. A selfish, faithless man would have revealed the close relationship that he had to the favored Queen, and obtained some advancement of position therefrom, but he had the faith and patience to await the purpose that God had in such a move.

PATIENCE—This is one of the most difficult of all virtues to develop. We so often like to take matters in our own hands; we lack the faith to **WAIT** for God to move; we fret against delay.

Mordecai was not only faithful, but patient. He awaited events to reveal the meaning of Esther's elevation to power, and was quick to recognise its significance at the right time (Esth. 4:14). Thus he sought a Divine Providence in the events of his life, and was God-guided in his actions. He learned the lesson of waiting for God to reveal Himself, to move out of the shadows at His own time to manifest His power.

His final elevation to power found him occupying a position far higher than that of Haman. For here is not only "next to the king" (Est. 10), ruling with royal honors throughout the earth, but acting as a priest as well. He instituted the Feast of Purim, and was obeyed as a priest by the people in the establishment of this religious exercise.

So the final picture presented of Mordecai is that of a king-priest ruling over a mighty world empire, to which peace has come. It is the picture of Christ in the Millennium. From out of humiliation and trouble, Mordecai thus rose to grandeur and glory.



Nehemiah :

—A Man of Prayer and Action

HIS WORK

If the chronology set forth by Mr. Phillips in an earlier issue of "Story of the Bible" is accepted, the events recorded in the Book of Nehemiah follow in point of time those recorded in the Book of Esther. The sequence of events would then be. The regathering under Zerubbabel, the first visit of Ezra, the return of Ezra to Babylon, the elevation of Esther and the deliverance of Purim, the work of Nehemiah.

Given this order, Nehemiah appeared on the scene of action at the very moment when he was most needed. A man of action was required to consolidate and extend the work of Ezra, for since his absence, his enemies had been busy. After he had returned to Babylon, his opponents in Judah set about to try and undo some of the work he had accomplished, so that reform was again needed in the newly established nation. Nehemiah set about the task with vigor and faith. He secured from the king a commission to visit the land, and when there, he organized the defence of the capital, and ruthlessly suppressed those who were trying to undo the work of Ezra.

It has been well said that the difference between these two leaders was that whereas Ezra tore out his own hair when faced with the apostasy of the people (Ezra 9:3), Nehemiah tore out the hair of others! (Neh. 13:25).

Of course, Nehemiah was a much younger man than Ezra, and therefore would be expected to approach these matters from a more energetic standpoint.

HIS BOOK

In the Hebrew Bible, Nehemiah forms part of the Book of Ezra. Certainly there are evidences that indicate that a single hand was responsible for its compilation. Its style is very similar. As the Book of Ezra is mainly composed of extracts from official documents, or from the diaries and records of men whose activities are therein recorded, so also is the Book of Nehemiah.

And as the Book of Ezra is naturally divided into two parts: the former outlining the return under Zerubbabel, the latter the work of Ezra, so the Book of Nehemiah can be divided into two parts, as follows:

RECONSTRUCTING THE WALL — CHAPTERS 1—6.

Enquiry into the state of Jerusalem	1: 1-3.
Pleading God's Help	1: 4-11.
Nehemiah's Expedition to the Land	2: 1-16.
Nehemiah's Exhortation to the People	2: 17-20.
Rebuilding of the City Walls is Commenced	3: 1-32.
The Rebuilding of the Wall is Obstructed	4: 6-14.
The Rebuilding is Successfully Completed	6: 15-19.

REINSTRUCTING THE PEOPLE — CHAPTERS 7—13.

Re-registration of the Remnant	Ch. 7.
Re-introduction of the Law	Ch. 8.
Re-consecration of the People	Ch. 9, 10.
Re-population of the City	Ch. 11.
Re-dedication of the Walls	Ch. 12.
Re-extermination of Abuses	Ch. 13.

HIS CHARACTER

Ezra and Nehemiah were both models of good reformers. They clearly set before them the tasks to be accomplished and the evils to be remedied, and in the performance of their objectives they allowed nothing to turn them aside. They asked of their countrymen to bear no burden, to make no sacrifice such as they themselves were not prepared to carry. They filled others with enthusiasm because they felt it themselves. They both foreshadowed, in different ways, the greatest reformer of all the Lord Jesus. When we read of the warmth, almost the violence, of Nehemiah in cleansing the Temple, we see foreshadowed that spark of Divine zeal which was manifested by the Lord (John 2:17). Nehemiah was noble, generous, high-minded, courageous and upright; but with his stern integrity, he blended great humility and kindness, together with a princely hospitality. As a statesman he was thoughtful, prudent and wise, combining all this with promptitude of decision in action. In dealing with either friend or foe he was completely free from favor or fear, aiming only to do what was right in the sight of God. He walked before God with singleness of eye, relying upon Him for guidance and help, seeking from Him approbation and reward.

Nehemiah was pre-eminently a man of prayer. The affliction of the city sent him to God in four months' weeping and prayer (Neh. 1:6). It culminated in the request to the king, which was preceded by prayer (Neh. 2:4). In building the wall he was insulted, mocked, derided, threatened; but he answered it all by prayer (Neh. 4:9). His enemies tried to ensnare him; he sought help in prayer (Neh. 6:9, 14). He returned from Persia troubled, frustrated, opposed on every side—but prayers flow faster from his lips (Neh. 13:22, 29, 31).

To him God is "great and terrible" but abounding in mercy (Neh. 1:5; 4:14). He implicitly believed in His influence; knew he could move the heart of the king (Neh. 2:8), grant wisdom (Neh. 2:12), defeat the schemes of the enemy (Neh. 4:15), revive the hearts of the people (Neh. 12:43), bestow prosperity (Neh. 2:20), give victory (Neh. 4:20). Implicitly believing all this, the will of God became the motive of his life (Neh. 5:15; 9: 10:29; 13:27).

He was a true patriot. He had an intense love for Israel, and deeply mourned the ruins of its chief city. He suffered and sympathised with the people, and vigorously opposed the highest and lowest of the land when the need arose. A single-eyed, unselfish regard to the nation's best interests actuated him from first to last, whether it be the defences of the city, the poverty of a section of the community, the worldliness of some of Judah, or the subtle infiltration of the enemy.

His activity and energy were remarkable. Yet with all his vigor he was prudent. He took wise precautions (Neh. 2:9). He knew when to hold

his tongue and keep his designs secret until all was ready (Neh. 2:12-16). He prayed to God as a man of faith, but he also set a watch as a man of action (Neh. 4:9). He was no simpleton, but clearly saw through Sanballat's attempts to ensnare him and so refused to be caught (Neh. 6:11).

He shewed outstanding moral and physical courage, taking his place with the common soldier and laborer, accepting duties which he, as the royal favorite, courtier, and cupbearer, was far from qualified. He knew fear (Neh. 2:2), but refused to be intimidated by it (Neh. 2:19).

He was liberal and generous, ruling the province without exacting revenue he could legitimately claim (Neh. 5:14,15), and at heavy cost to himself helping others (Neh. 5:17).

He drew on others to help him, so that we find him shoulder to shoulder with Ezra in the important and difficult work of establishing the nation upon sound grounds of truth and rectitude.

The sum result was a thorough reform. Judaism was strengthened to meet and repel the challenges it had to face from then on until the appearance of Messiah. Thus through the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah a foundation was established essential to the ministry of the greatest character of all time: The Lord Jesus Christ.

It is thought by some that Malachi prophesied during the period of Nehemiah, for his prophesy implies that the Temple is built, and the nation well established. It may be that Malachi helped in the work of Ezra and Nehemiah as Haggai and Zechariah did that of Zerubbabel and Joshua.

Thus the record reveals Nehemiah in the following light:

As a born **LEADER**—(Neh. 2:18).

As a man of **PRAYER** (Ch. 1:5-11, 2:4, 4:4-5, 5:19 etc.)

As a man of **OPPORTUNITY** (Ch. 2:1-5, 7).

As a man of **ACTION** (Ch. 2:12-16, 4:6, 5:6-7).

As a man of **LIBERALITY** and **KINDNESS** (Ch. 5:14-18).

As a man of **FAITH** (Neh. 4:20).

As a man of **COURAGE** (Neh. 4:14).

As a man who was **CLEAR-SIGHTED** (Ch. 6:2), **PLAIN-SPEAKING** (Ch. 6:3), **FIRM-DEALING** (Ch. 13:25, 28), **GOD-HONORING** (Ch. 7:5, 4:15).

NEHEMIAH'S ERNEST PLEA FOR JERUSALEM

He Hears of the Distress of the People

Eight years had passed since Esther's successful intervention on behalf of her people. She was now firmly established as queen in Persia, and Jews were everywhere high in favor. Among their number was one called Nehemiah (meaning, The Consolation of

Yahweh), who had risen to the honored position of one of the king's cup-bearers.

Nehemiah had a kinsman called Hanani. Hanani had visited Jerusalem in order that he might see how the people were faring, and having recently returned to Persia again, was anxious to tell Nehemiah of his experiences.

He had a very sad story to tell the king's cup-bearer,

He had seen many evidences of apathy and frustration at the beloved city.

"The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire," he told Nehemiah.

This destruction had probably been wrought by the enemies of Judah. For they had been busy. Twenty years before, they had attacked the Jews, and compelled them to cease their labors (Ezra 4:23). Since then, opportunity had been given them again to attack (Est. 3:8-11), and apparently this had been so successful that the ruins of the raids then instituted were still in evidence (Est. 9:15-16).

He Determines to Help the People

Nehemiah was greatly distressed by the report of Hanani. So greatly did he love Jerusalem, so deeply did he feel its miseries, that he could not restrain his emotion. He sat down and wept, mourning the miseries of the people. For almost four months* he thought deep and earnestly upon the problem, preparing his mind to seek God, that he might overshadow the affairs of Judah for good.

He could not understand how the people could remain indifferent to the reproach and affliction of the beloved city, how they could permit Jerusalem to remain in the state of disrepair in which it was found.

Clearly a man of ability and vigor was needed on the spot to reorganise the nation, and bring about a spiritual revival among the people.

He determined to dedicate himself to the task.

He recognised the difficulties that would face him, and realised that all his labors would be in vain without the blessing of Yahweh (Ps. 127). Therefore, before he made any definite move, he prepared his heart to seek God, and poured out his mind in an earnest prayer for help in the work to which he had set his hand.

Nehemiah's Prayer

This prayer of Nehemiah is the first of many recorded in his book, and uttered by this man of prayer and action.

It can provide a model for prayer on the part of others who are oppressed with a problem such as that which faced Nehemiah.

It is filled with references to the Law (note the marginal references in the Oxford Bible), indicating that Nehemiah, like Ezra, was well read in the Scriptures, and that he gained his inspiration for prayer from the Word of God itself.

His prayer was like an *answer* to the Voice of God that he heard sounding from the Word. It expresses the following points:

1. The character of God upon which his requests were based—
—v.5.
2. A humble petition that Yahweh will help the people in their plight—v.6.

*Nehemiah had heard the report in the month Chisleu (Neh. 1:1), but it was not until the month Nisan (Neh. 2:1), four months later, that he acted in the way that he describes in his book.

3. A confession of sins—v.7.
4. A remembrance of God's promises of mercy—vv. 8-9.
5. The relation of the people to God for whom he prayed—v.10.
6. An impassioned plea for help. v.11.

In his final plea for help, Nehemiah made mention of his determination to approach the king, asking for his assistance on behalf of his people. He prayed:

"O Lord, I beseech thee, let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant, and the prayer of Thy servants, who delight to revere (see Rotherham's trans.) Thy Name; and prosper, I pray Thee, Thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man!"

For, concludes Nehemiah in explanation, "I was the king's cupbearer."

God Creates the Opportunity — Nehemiah Acts

Four months had passed away since Nehemiah had received the report from Hanani (cp. Neh. 1:1 with 2:1). It was Nehemiah's duty to act as cupbearer to the king once again. He probably alternated with others in this important position, and now appeared on duty for the first time since receiving the sad news of Jerusalem.

He was downcast and preoccupied when at last he stood again in the presence of the king.

The king looked upon the sad countenance of his cupbearer with concern. He had a great regard for him, and enquired the cause of his moody appearance.

"Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick?" the king asked. "It must be caused by sorrow of heart."

This remark of the king caused Nehemiah to fear. It was considered a serious offence to appear sad in the presence of the king, so serious indeed, that it was punishable by death (Esther 4:2). And perhaps the king's tone of voice suggested that he considered that Nehemiah might be hiding some act of treachery.

But Nehemiah replied:

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

To this the king replied:

"For what dost thou make request?"

Thus God had opened up a wonderful way of opportunity for Nehemiah, and this energetic man of God was not slow to seize it. But he did not overlook God. He acted upon two points of advice: one which had already been recorded in Scripture, and the other which has since been set down. They are:

"In all thy ways acknowledge Yahweh, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6).

"In every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

This Nehemiah did. Before he answered the king, whilst he was attending upon him as his cupbearer, he uttered a short, silent prayer to God, that He might bless the petition he was about to make. Then he replied:

"If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you would send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it!"

Sitting next to the king was

queen.* From her, Nehemiah received encouragement, for she was in a position to second his cause, and suggest that his petition be granted. And pressed by his beloved servant, and the beautiful queen, the king granted the petition, requesting however that a limit be put on the time that Nehemiah would be away, and that he would then return to Persia.

To this the joyful Nehemiah readily agreed. He then, in turn, made further requests. If he were to return at the time suggested by the king, he must have assistance in accomplishing the tasks before him. He therefore asked that letters of authority be given to him to give to the governors beyond the river requesting that they assist him in his labors, and that the king's minister might allocate him sufficient material to build the fortress to the house and the wall of the city, as well as his own palace (Neh. 2:8—see Rotherham trans.).

All this the king granted to his beloved servant.

NEHEMIAH AT JERUSALEM

His Visit Viewed with Misgiving

Armed with the king's authority, Nehemiah lost no time. Fortified with a Persian escort (Neh. 2:9), he set off on his mission. Arriving in the land, he presented to the surrounding rulers the credentials

which set forth his power. He was received with sullen resentment by the enemies of the Jews, and whilst they did not dare openly oppose Nehemiah at that time, he could sense their opposition..

He recorded his impressions in a diary that he kept at the time:

"When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Amonite, heard of it, they grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days" (Neh. 2:10-11).

So an uneasy quiet settled on the land as the people waited the next move of Nehemiah.

He Considers the Task Before Him

For a time Nehemiah kept his own counsel. He told nobody what he proposed to do until he had considered the task before him, and had carefully worked out how to go about it. He waited three days so that he might be able to assess better the full situation. Then, one night, with a few trusty companions he had brought with him, and riding upon his beast, he reviewed the state of the walls of the beloved city.

He saw how true were Hanani's words, that the ruinous state of Jerusalem was a reproach to all the people of the Jews.

In the dead of night, so nobody could see him, he descended into the deep valley of Hinnom with his few companions, and threaded

*This, surely, was Esther. The words in parenthesis: "The queen also sitting by him" are most unusual, for little is said of queens in Scripture unless they were implementing some policy. If we identify Artaxerxes of Neh. 2:1 with the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther—as we have in our Story of the Bible—then it is obvious why reference is made to the queen: it was Esther; and she was supporting the proposition of Nehemiah.

his way in and out among the huge masses of rubble and ruin that lay everywhere. He recorded it all in his diary. He loved the city, even in its broken-down state, and recorded each of the sites where the history of the past had been enacted. There was the Spring of the Dragon, and the Dung Gate where the refuse of the city was conveyed to the valley of Hinnom—but the wall was in ruins and the gates blackened with fire. There was the Gate of the Fountain, the King's Pool with which Hezekiah had so much to do—but it was cluttered up with huge masses of broken masonry, so that the animal which he rode could no longer make its way. Alighting from the beast, Nehemiah now picked his way over the rubbish and ruin, stumbling his way along the rubbish and ruin in the dead of night, making notes of all that he saw as he did so.

So he returned, tired out and dusty from his labors; returned to set down on paper all that he had seen, and work out how best to repair the wall and make good the defence of the city.

As yet he had said nothing to the rulers of the Jews. He desired that they themselves should voluntarily seek to do the work rather than that he should exercise any compulsion upon them. So he kept all his plans to himself until they were ready to receive it.

In this he acted wisely. To have done otherwise may have caused them to be discouraged before they were ready for the work. So he ascertained first what work had to be done, then carefully worked out how to do it. Finally he gathered the elders of the people together, to secure their co-opera-

tion in the labors that he was about to propose to them.

He Discusses the Work with the Jewish Elders

Nehemiah's next task was to make the Jewish people willing participants in the work he proposed to do. He thus called a conference with the elders of the people, and having outlined to them the state of the city, he addressed them as follows:

"You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire; come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem that we be no more a reproach!"

It was a reproach that after so long a time the city should reveal such evidence of neglect. It was the subject of ridicule to the world, that the Jews should be so indifferent to the requirements of the times. It adversely reflected upon Yahweh, that such apathy should exist among His people. Slipshod methods adopted by His servants in the things concerning Himself invariably bring reproach and ridicule upon the Truth. Only the very best is good enough for His service, and when that is rendered, His strength is perfected, even in weakness.

Thus the people were made ashamed of their neglect of the things of God. Nehemiah told them of his personal experiences, how "the hand of his God had been upon him for good" (Neh. 2:18), and how the King had been induced to give his support to the work proposed.

He was a born leader. He generated enthusiasm among the people for the work he was about to undertake. He first carefully

surveyed what was required (Neh. 2:12-16), then quietly planned his methods without telling anybody about them (v. 16), then secured adequate co-operation from those who could help him (vv. 17-18).

The people were stimulated by his words.

"Let us rise up and build!" they exclaimed when he finished his discourse.

Thus they strengthened their hands for the good work about to be undertaken.

The Adversaries Mock at Nehemiah

Having received promise of the full support of the Jewish leaders, Nehemiah proceeded to make preparations for the work. Others heard of this, and soon neighboring countries were buzzing with rumors of the intentions of Judah.

Sanballat and Tobiah, the enemies of the Jews, heard of it, together with Geshem the Arabian. They assembled together to consider what should be done, and decided that the efforts were so pitifully weak that the best opposition was to ridicule them. They thought that the Jews would become discouraged, and soon cease their labors.

Nehemiah recorded this in his diary. He wrote:

"They laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?"

Nehemiah had a complete answer:

"The God of heaven, He will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build: but we have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem!"

This was very similar to the reply of Zerubbabel to the Samaritans when they opposed his work under the guise of helping him. Nehemiah's reply angered Sanballat and his companions, and they retired to consider what further they should do to prevent the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

THE WORK IS COMMENCED

Nehemiah Organises the Laborers

With such an energetic and faithful leader as Nehemiah in charge of affairs, the people soon became caught up with the growing enthusiasm. All were pressed into the work: priests, levites, nobles, commoners. It levelled them all in one great act of service. From all parts of the land, workers converged on the city of Jerusalem to assist in the labor. In most cases, the elders of their particular cities encouraged and supported the people; but in other cases they opposed the work, as we shall see.

Nehemiah kept a careful account of the workers, and the places where they labored. It is recorded in Nehemiah Chapter 3, and as we consider the people who labored, and the work they did, together with their subsequent history and actions, some powerful exhortations and examples are revealed.

Eliashib the high priest was foremost in the work. He rose up eagerly in support of Nehemiah, with his brethren the priests, and set to work building the sheep gate through which came the animals to be offered in sacrifice.

In the building of the wall, Eliashib thus rendered valuable service. Unfortunately, he was not always foremost in the things of God. He was the type of person who is energetic in material duties, but negligent of spiritual requirements. Later on, he revealed himself to be quite inadequate for the position of high priest (Neh. 13:4, 28). He was tolerant of marriage with the alien, so that he, himself was allied by marriage with Tobiah, the deadly enemy of the Jews. In addition his grandson was son-in-law to Sanballat (cp. Ezra 10:6 with Neh. 13:4, 28).

How often we meet people like Eliashib! They are keen to serve God in material things, but fail to give Him what He mostly desires: their hearts and minds! Their service, though valuable, is ruined by their lack of appreciation of what God requires in a spiritual direction.

Another worker, similar to Eliashib, was Meshullam. He, too, was energetic in material labors, but he also lacked the spiritual qualities God desires. He repaired two portions of the wall (Neh. 3:4, 30), but he permitted his daughter to marry Jehanan the son of Tobiah, with disastrous results (Neh. 6:18).

How important it is that we should be consistent in our labors for God.

As earnest as the efforts of these men were for the things of God, they ruined them all by incon-

sistent actions later on.

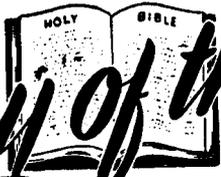
Others were different.

There were the people of Tekoa, for example. They heard the appeal for assistance, and wholeheartedly gave themselves to the work. They did so in spite of the attitude of their leaders. We read that "their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord" (Neh. 3:5). The nobles probably gave everything but personal labor. They were theorists in God's service, but refused to soil their hands in the work. But the people more than compensated for the tardiness of their leaders; they not only repaired the section of the wall given them to accomplish, but gave themselves to "repair another place" (v. 27), thus shaming the nobles.

The work levelled all classes. Priests (v. 1), levites (v. 4), commoners (v. 5), tradesmen (v. 8), doctors (v. 8), rulers (v. 9), women (v. 12), merchants (v. 32) all united to do the work. Many labored at spots where they had a particular interest. Thus the priests labored at the sheep gate close to the Temple (v. 1), others repaired the wall at points where it defended their dwellings (v.23), the Nethinims repaired by the water-gate where they resided (v. 26).

Thus all Judah was united in a wonderful work of service to God. The city of Jerusalem hummed with activity as the people builded and Nehemiah supervised the work.

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THE WILES OF THE ADVERSARY (Neh. 4)

The adversaries of Judah viewed the work in Jerusalem with the greatest concern. Chief of their number was Sanballat, the governor of Samaria. This city was held by a Persian garrison called "the army of Samaria" (Neh. 4:2), and its governor derived his authority from the Persian Satrap of Syria. As governor of Samaria, Sanballat's position was one of dignity and influence. He was on terms of close alliance with an Ammonite chief, Tobiah, and an Arab sheik, Geshem. Geshem was chief over a band of marauders who seemed to be willing at any time to put their swords at the disposal of Sanballat.

In addition to all this, Sanballat was allied in marriage to Eliashib, the high-priest elect. His daughter Nicaso was wedded to Manasseh, son of Joiada and grandson of Eliashib. Tobiah, also, was allied in marriage to Eliashib (Neh. 13:4). These men were thus in positions which rendered them formidable enemies to Nehemiah. Sanballat, especially, being a man of reckless and violent temper, might be expected to cause serious

trouble. He had from the first disliked Nehemiah's appointment, and thought that ill would come from it (Neh. 2:10). He hated the thought of a powerful Jerusalem, for he realised that such could only be established at the expense of Samaria's position. It seems, also, that he had designs on the priesthood itself. This is suggested by his offer of help (Neh. 2:20), and his ties of marriage with the priesthood in Judah (Neh. 13:28). He therefore saw Nehemiah as a dangerous enemy who could defeat his ambitions, and sought in every way to undermine his work. He tried in turn intimidation (Neh. 2:19), ridicule (Neh. 4:2) and force (Neh. 4:7). Nehemiah met all these attacks by prayer, vigilance and work.

Sanballat Ridicules the Work of Nehemiah

Sanballat had tried guile and intimidation (Neh. 2:19), but they had failed to interfere with Nehemiah's labors.

He determined to return to the attack. Gathering the army of Samaria together over which he was chief, he stood at their head, and addressed them concerning the work of the Jews. A paraphrase

of his speech is as follows:

"What do these feeble Jews? Will they fortify themselves? Will they complete the walls and dedicate them by sacrifice? Will they finish the work at the time they have appointed? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"

These words were intended to incite the Samaritans to acts of violence against the Jews. Sanballat was letting his soldiers know that they would not be punished if they should indulge in any unauthorised attacks upon the Jews. He was decrying Judah by mocking at their feeble efforts, describing the wall they were building as a makeshift wall built out of second-hand stones gathered out of heaps of burnt rubbish!

Tobiah the Ammonite, his companion in crime, was standing next to him as he thus addressed the troops. He also mocked at the efforts of the Jews.

"Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall," he mocked.

Thus the enemies of Judah mocked and laughed at the efforts of the Jews.

Nehemiah Answers by Prayer and Work

There is a saying, however, which states: "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me!" It is doubtful whether Nehemiah knew of the saying, but he did act upon the wonderful advice contained in it.

He heard of the mocking of Sanballat and Tobiah. A mighty laugh probably went up from the Samaritan troops when they heard the sarcastic comments of

their leaders. Probably the troops repeated the sayings of their commanders until a great laugh went up against Nehemiah and his fellow-workers throughout the land.

But Nehemiah did not foolishly try to match sarcasm with sarcasm. Instead, he made the problem a matter of prayer. He turned to God, and directed His attention to the mocking reproach of the enemies, beseeching Him that He would bless the labors in which they were engaged.

And in addition to the prayer, he redoubled his work. "We builded the wall," he reported to his faithful diary, "until the half of it was finished; for the people had a mind to the work" (Neh. 4:6).

What an excellent way in which to answer the backbiting of one's enemies. Sanballat had no effective sarcasm to counter the prayer and labor of Nehemiah! In spite of all his mocking words, the wall went steadily up — a complete and effective answer which even Sanballat's troops must have recognised. Their laughter did not last long.

Sanballat Threatens to Destroy Nehemiah's Work

Steadily the walls arose to the dismay and anger of Sanballat and his companions. They saw them rapidly rising, the breaches being filled, the gates erected. They could see that soon Jerusalem would have adequate defence. Some direct action was needed, if Samaria was to retain its position and not be challenged by a powerful Jerusalem!

Sanballat called a conference of

all those interested in defeating the work of Nehemiah. It was obvious to all that a direct attack must be made. They 'conspired to gather together and fight against Jerusalem, and thus hinder the work.' They thought that the merest display of force would be sufficient to hinder the labors of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah Replies by Prayer and Vigilance

Nehemiah reported all this in the diary he kept:

"Nevertheless," he wrote, "we made our prayer unto God, and set a watch against them day and night because of them."

What a wonderful passage of Scripture this is (Neh. 4:9). Nehemiah was a man of prayer and action. He realised that if prayer was to be effective, it had to be combined with work. The farmer who prays for a good harvest will not find his prayer answered unless he labors to sow the seed; the person who prays that God will grant him wisdom (James 1:5) will not find his request granted unless he is prepared to seek for it in the place where God has revealed it (John 5:39).

So Nehemiah not only prayed, but he set a watch against them **DAY AND NIGHT** because of

them.

He combined work with prayer and succeeded because he provided a foundation for the blessing of God.

Some of Judah Become Wearied and Afraid

But now trouble mounted for Nehemiah from within. Some of the men of Judah, hearing the ridicule of Sanballat, seeing the display of force he was making, became wearied and afraid. They reasoned that if God was with Nehemiah in the work, they should not be faced with troubles. They saw only difficulties on every side—heaps of rubbish and ruin, problems in building the wall* and became discouraged. They repeated among themselves the mocking words of their adversaries, and as their fear grew, they went in a body to Nehemiah to repeat to him what Sanballat and others were threatening.

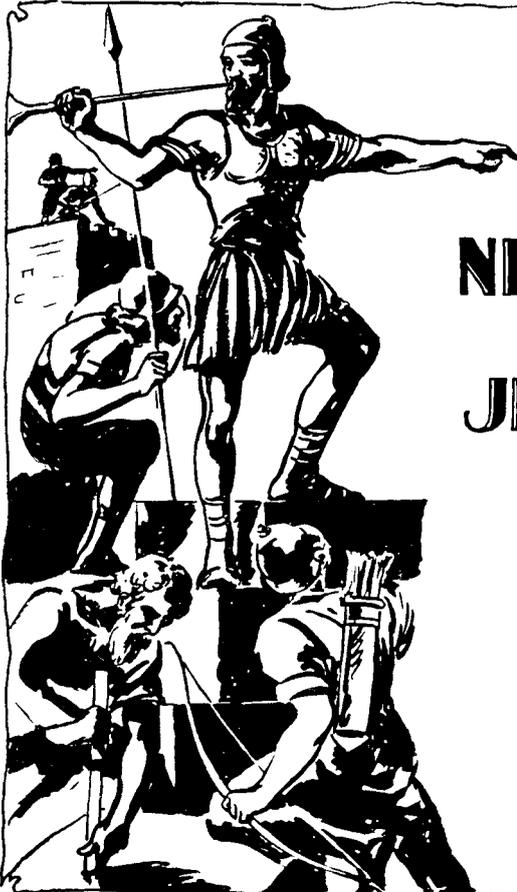
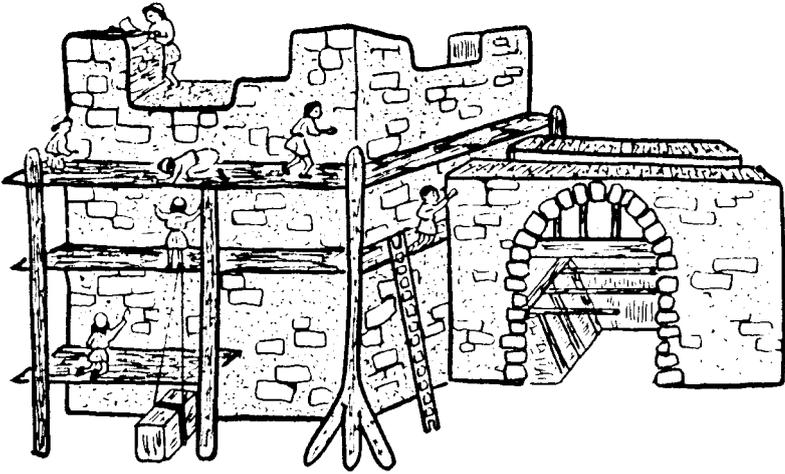
The Need Met by an Organised Defence

Nehemiah could see that there was some justification for their complaints. He therefore armed the people, and made the watch around the city more sure by personal supervision of it.

At one stage** the danger see-

*See Neh. 4:10, which, according to Rotherham's translation, reads as follows: "Then said Judah: The strength of the burden-bearer faileth, and the rubbish aboundeth, and we are not able to build at the wall; and our adversaries have said, 'They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.'" Thus a spirit of defeatism made itself felt, which was nipped in the bud by the prompt action of the vigilant Nehemiah.

**Note Neh. 4:14: "And I looked, and rose up. . . ." This is an entry from the diary of Nehemiah, recording an actual incident. He looked up and noticed the enemy about to attack, and thus moved in the manner described in the succeeding verses.



NEHEMIAH
rebuilds
JERUSALEM



med imminent; the forces of Sannaballat hovering around the walls of Jerusalem seemed to be on the point of attacking. Instantly Nehemiah appeared at the point of attack. He armed the people, and encouraging them to fight with confidence, for God was with them. "Be not afraid," he told them, "Remember the Lord, Who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

With these words of encouragement ringing in their ears, the defenders arose in defence of their work, standing forth boldly with weapons in hand, ready to repel the enemy. This determined attitude deterred the attackers. They could see that the Jews were prepared to fiercely defend their city at any costs, and in the face of such an attitude, they hesitated to attack. So the crisis passed, and the people returned to their labors (Neh. 4:13-15).

This threatened attack convinced Nehemiah that some form of organised defence was necessary, lest the enemy one day take them off their guard, and succeed in its intentions. He arranged firstly, that the personal body-guard that he had brought with him from Persia should be divided into two. Half were instructed to stand ready armed to repel any attack, whilst the other half continued in the work of building the wall. Next, he ordered that every Jewish worker should be armed, and keep his weapons by his side, so that at the sound of the trumpet he may put down his tools and

take up his weapons and gather at the point of attack. Finally, he gave himself the task of keeping vigilance over the city. He became the principal watchman, upon the walls of Jerusalem, keeping guard over the city. He kept a trumpeter by his side, and commanded the people, that if they heard the trumpet-blast, they were to immediately put down their tools and hasten with their weapons to the sound of the trumpet. He also instructed the people that they were to lodge within Jerusalem of a night time, and not return to their individual cities as they had previously been doing.

Nehemiah provided a wonderful example in devotion to duty. Neither he, nor his brethren, nor his bodyguard put off their clothes day or night. They were always found at their post, always laboring at the wall, or standing guard in its defence. The people came to rely upon Nehemiah, and see in him a living example of what was required of themselves. As they saw him so untiring in his labors, so they were induced to follow him in whatever he did. Nehemiah, himself, was a strict disciplinarian. He demanded a lot of himself and his immediate followers. He permitted nothing to interfere with the work in hand, and no member of his own personal band of followers was permitted to absent himself from his duty night or day, except to provide for the barest necessities. The only excuse permitted for absenteeism was the need for each man to obtain his daily requirement of

drinking water* Each man was permitted time off for this purpose only.

NEHEMIAH: CHAMPION OF THE DOWNTRODDEN (Neh. 5)

Poverty in the Land

The exiles had ridden forth from Babylonia, mounted not only on asses, but on horses, camels and mules (Ezra 2:66-67); they had been rich enough to contribute towards the erection of the Temple some 5,000 pounds of silver and 40,000 drams of gold (Neh. 7:72). But the tide of prosperity had turned. Yahweh had sent famine, drought and want in the land (Hag. 1:9. Zech. 8:10), and though this was subsequently relieved (Hag. 2:19), it left its mark upon the community, and was re-imposed when needed (Mal. 3:8-10). When the whole nation was required to dedicate the whole of its resources in building the wall of Jerusalem and securing its defences, this weak point in their spiritual armour was revealed. Impoverished Jews had sought assistance from their more wealthy brethren. These had refused to lend except on security. The borrower was required to mortgage his house, or land, or both (Neh. 5:3), or offer as security his person, or that of his son or daughter.

Although the Law permitted this in measure (it allowed a man to

pledge the person of a daughter—Exod. 16:7—but made no provision for a son), it required that such should go free in the sabbatical year (Exod. 21:2. Deut. 15:12), and required that the creditor, at the time of release, should “furnish the man liberally” out of his own store with a supply of necessities (Deut. 15:14). This was not being done, and a large number of the poorer people had sunk into a state of perpetual slavery to the richer nobles (Neh. 5:5). Some had been sold into the hands of heathen (Neh. 5:8). The population of the land was being diminished by this drain upon it, and that of Jerusalem was especially scanty (Neh. 7:4). Failure of crops (Neh. 5:3), heavy taxation (v.4), oppressive governors (v.15) had increased the difficulties. The Law concerning usury among brethren (Exod. 22:25, Lev. 25:36), and the Law of Release relating to the Jubilee (Lev. 25:24-32) had both become a dead letter.

The building of the wall accentuated these problems, for many who builded were little more than poor slaves to their wealthier brethren, and were still compelled to pay their monthly interest whilst being denied the opportunity of working to provide it. Whilst building the wall they could not work for themselves or their creditors. Thus, as the creditors continued to make demands, so, the

*Nehemiah 4:23 states: “None of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing.” The marginal note better expresses the original: “Every one went with his weapon for water.” Each one had to take his own vessel to the pool to obtain what water he daily needed. Nehemiah thus records that until the work was completed, none of his immediate followers took off their clothes for sleeping, and none left the site of the work, except to take his vessel and obtain his daily supply of drinking water.

condition of the oppressed became increasingly difficult until, at last, they rose against their oppressors. These poor Jews found a worthy champion in Nehemiah.

Trouble in Jerusalem (Neh. 5)

The trials of the poor Jews in Jerusalem became so great, that they could not bear them any longer. They lifted up their voice in a terrible cry of anguish to Nehemiah, pointing out that the work of building the wall interfered with their opportunity of providing for the needs of their families.

"We have large families," they declared, "and have to provide corn for them that we may eat and live!"

Some came to him complaining of the terrible oppression that they suffered from their more wealthy fellow-Jews.

"We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards and houses, that we might buy corn because of the dearth," they declared.

Others had an even more bitter complaint to make:

"We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, upon our lands and vineyards, and our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren (i.e. they had become as slaves to their brethren) our children are as their children; and, lo, we have brought into bondage our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are brought into bondage, neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards!"

Nehemiah was astounded at what he learned. It was incredible that fellow-Jews should be so lacking in thought as to bring their fellows, who were laboring to establish the defence of Jerusalem, under such bondage; it was terrible that those who were prepared to

sacrifice their time and energy should have to mortgage their lands, and even their families, bringing them into bondage and slavery, to meet the monthly requirements of interest to fellow-Jews.

His heart was stirred within him, and he determined something must be done.

Being a man of action he did not allow much time to elapse before he instituted the reform.

Nehemiah's Reform

Stirred up and angry at the state of things revealed to him, he openly rebuked the nobles and rulers for their avarice.

"You are exacting usury of your brethren!" he declared indignantly.

He called an assembly of people who had witnessed the evils that had been done, and calling them together he impressed them with the enormity of the action that had been committed.

"Why!" he exclaimed indignantly to them. "We have already, after our ability, redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will you sell your brethren? Or shall they be sold unto us?"

The people were ashamed when they heard these words of their leader. They could see the inconsistency of their action. Their brethren had been forced to borrow off them because of difficulties that had arisen through giving their time to building the wall, that is, in doing the work of God, but instead of readily helping them, they had charged them heavy interest on the loans. Further, they had forced them to meet this interest when it came due, even taking their children into bondage as

security for it. So the audience, pricked in conscience, remained silent as Nehemiah spake. He continued:

"It is not good what you do!" Should you not walk in the fear of God? Do you not see that this will cause the heathen our enemies to reproach us? I and my brethren and my servants, might have exacted of the poor Jews money and corn, for we have assisted them, but we have not done so. I pray you, let us leave off this usury, and restore to them, even this day, their lands, vineyards, oliveyards, houses, and the hundredth part of the money that you have exacted of them."

Moved by the action and words of Nehemiah, the rulers and wealthy Jews agreed to do as he asked. Then, whilst the people were still gathered before him, he called for the priests, and took an oath of them, that the people should do according to their promise.

This was done, and again the people turned to the noble leader who had given such single-minded service in the things of God. Again he stood up before them, and shaking the lap of the garment he was wearing, he declared:

"So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labor, that performeth not this promise! Let him thus be shaken out, and emptied!"

Solemnly the congregation answered with a loud:

"AMEN!"

And the people did according to their promise.

Nehemiah's Personal Example

Nehemiah's words of exhortation to the people were carried out partly because they saw that what he demanded was only reasonable, and partly because he

gave them a personal example as to what should be done.

Though he had been appointed governor in the land, he had not exacted of the people the tribute that he was justified in demanding. Former governors had made oppressive demands upon them, but he did not think it right to do so. The fear of God was with him, and he therefore acted liberally towards the people.

He had not used the poverty of the people as a means of enriching himself. Others had done so. When the people went in want through giving their time to building the wall, wealthy Jews had purchased their property at much less than it was worth. The opportunity was there for Nehemiah to do likewise; but he would not stoop to such an evil. In fact, he had impoverished himself in employing his servants to give themselves to the work.

And as his diary recorded, he had kept open house for the Jews and rulers. At his own expense 150 of the rulers, as well as other Jews that had been redeemed from the heathen, dined at his table, at his expense. This exacted a heavy toll upon his resources. He could have recouped it by the tribute which he, as Governor, could have demanded from the people. He refused to do so, for with the people giving themselves so freely to the work of God, the payment of tribute would have imposed a heavy burden. His action was a sacrifice that he willingly made that the wall and defences of Jerusalem might be established. And with this sacrifice he offered unto God a prayer:

"Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people!"

We are quite sure that God will abundantly answer this prayer in

the day when Nehemiah shall stand before the Lord Jesus, to receive public commendation for his action.

The Enemy Without

(Nehemiah 6)

In Nehemiah 5, we read of the enemy within. Whilst burdened with the heavy task of building the wall of Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to turn his attention to correcting abuses that were apparent among his own countrymen. In Nehemiah 6, we read how his work was hindered by enemies without. Already (see Nehemiah 4) these bitter adversaries of Judah had tried to hinder his noble work by ridicule and the threat of war; now they used guile and hypocrisy. But in spite of all trials and oppositions, Nehemiah faithfully, courageously and quietly pursued his duty undeterred by friend or foe. In that, he was like Paul who one time wrote: "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us . . . (2 Cor. 7:5-6).

How Nehemiah met the troubles heaped upon him is a wonderful exhortation to us.

Sanballat Seeks a Conference

Sanballat was furious. All his efforts to thwart the building of the wall by Nehemiah had proved futile. He could see the Jews swarming like an army of ants on their project and every day saw further progress made.

He had to move, and that quickly, to defeat the purpose of Nehemiah, otherwise Jerusalem would be completely ringed around with its strong defensive wall, and a further step would have been made in its developing power.

He discussed the problem with his allies, Tobiah and Geshem the Arabian. It was plainly seen that Nehemiah was the moving power behind the Jews, and that so long as he remained, the work would continue. Therefore, the solution to their problem was simple: do away with Nehemiah. But how to

accomplish this was far more difficult; Nehemiah was a hard man to overthrow.

They decided to try treachery, to change their tactics, and pretending to act as friends, take him off his guard, and murder him. They sent him a message:

"Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono;"

This was an invitation to a conference to see if some compromise might not be effected. But Nehemiah saw through their plots. He knew that their request for a conference was mere subterfuge, and that they wanted to get him on his own to do him mischief. He was shrewd enough not to disclose that he could see through their plans, however. To do so would have perhaps driven them to extremity, and caused them to launch an open attack of Jerusa-

lem, which, with its unfinished walls, would not have been easy to defend at that time.

He replied with words of wisdom:

"I am doing a good work, so that I cannot come down; why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (Neh. 6:3).

Here was a wonderful answer, giving a complete reason for his refusal. Why should a good work cease whilst workers engage in useless argument? Nehemiah's answer can be applied to many circumstances of life. It is the complete answer to the many invitations and provocations that a man of God might receive to stop the work he is doing, and enter into useless and trivial arguments or conferences. It is the perfect attitude for a man of God to take in the face of underhand, wicked, and malicious attacks, that are sometimes directed against his labors or motives:

"I am doing a good work, why should it cease, whilst I leave it, and COME DOWN to you!"

If Nehemiah had accepted the invitation, he would have "come down" in every sense! So those who labor in the cause of Christ today, should also refuse to "come down" when false insinuations are laid against them. In the face of such trials, wisdom dictates that they should follow the example of this faithful man, and reply as he did.

Four times Sanballat tried to get Nehemiah to come down to him—but in vain.

And meanwhile the building of the wall went on apace.

Sanballat's Insulting, Lying Letter

Sanballat was becoming desperate. Something had to be done to stop the Jews, otherwise his schemes would be completely frustrated. He decided to try and undermine Nehemiah's influence among the people by falsely imputing wrong motives to his work. He wrote a letter, claiming that Geshem his friend* had evidence proving that the Jews were planning to rebel against Persia and appoint Nehemiah as king.

"You are building the wall of Jerusalem for that purpose," he wrote. "Further, you are employing prophets to preach of you at Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah.' Therefore, come and let us take counsel together!"

He hoped to frighten Nehemiah into the conference he had planned earlier. Then, when he was in his power, he would have doubtless slain him.

The letter was an open one, designed that all could read it. As such it was an insult to Nehemiah the Governor, to whom it was addressed. A letter addressed to one of such high status as Nehemiah should have been sealed up.

And it performed its purpose, for it made many afraid. People became concerned lest such accusations come to the ears of the king of Persia, and that he should rule that the work of building should cease.

But Nehemiah was not afraid. He sent a message back to Sanballat:

"There are no such things done as you say; you are inventing them out of your own heart!"

* "Gashmu" of Nehemiah 6:6 is the same as "Geshem the Arabian" of v. 1, the friend and ally of Sanballat. See margin of the Bible.



EZRA READING THE LAW IN THE HEARING OF THE PEOPLE

And Ezra opened the book, in the sight of all the people. . . . And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen. . . . (Nehemiah 8: 5, 6)



After Schnorr

ATTACKED WHILE AT WORK ON THE WALLS

An artist's conception.

Then, in the midst of trouble, he turned to God:

"O God, strengthen my hands!" he prayed.

Tried By Treachery

All Sanballat's efforts to defeat the work of Nehemiah had proved in vain. He was forced to look around for other means to succeed. He found them in Tobiah his ally. Tobiah had powerful friends in Judah who were prepared to advance his cause against Nehemiah, and Sanballat decided to use them to that end.

Thus, one day, Nehemiah received a mysterious request to visit a prince of Judah called Shemaiah, who was temporarily confined to his own home for some cause or other. In presenting himself at the home of this prince, Nehemiah found himself received with the greatest respect, and the utmost kindness. Shemaiah claimed to have Nehemiah's interests at heart, and warned him that enemies were seeking to kill him. He suggested that Nehemiah should hide himself against the possibility of such an attack.

"Let us meet together in the Temple, and let us shut the doors," he suggested, **"for they will come to slay you; yes in the night they will come to slay you!"**

Shemaiah's interest was not genuine, however, he cared nothing for the welfare of Nehemiah. Nehemiah clearly saw behind his duplicity. Nor was he the kind of man to be easily moved by suggestions of personal danger. He was not easily frightened, and detected treachery in the smooth, oily talk of this prince.

"Should such a man as I flee?" he

boldly asked, "And should such a man as I go into the Temple to save his life?"

If Nehemiah had acted on the advice of Shemaiah, and sought refuge in the Temple, he would have broken the Law of God, for only priests were permitted therein. That was partly Shemaiah's scheme. He had hoped to implant fear in the heart of Nehemiah, so as to cause him to sin in this way, and then bring an evil report against him to discredit him before the people.

But he failed. Firstly, because Nehemiah was a man of courage and not easily frightened; secondly, because he was a man of faith and would not break the law to save his own skin. Nehemiah could see behind the scheming of Shemaiah, and confided to his diary:

"I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me; for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him" (Neh. 6:12).

He not merely confided in his diary; he also confided in his God. As usual, he poured out his heart in prayer, placing the problem squarely before God:

"My God," he prayed, **"think Thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noahdia, and the rest of the prophets that would have put me in fear."**

Thus the wisdom, faith and courage of Nehemiah triumphed over the treachery of his pretended friend.

The Wall is Completed

Meanwhile, despite all the plotting and scheming of enemies, both within and without the city, the

work went steadily on, and was ultimately crowned with success. Despite all hindrances, difficulties, attacks, threats, treachery and opposition, the wall was completed in the incredibly short time of 52 days (Neh. 6:15).

Sanballat had been completely outgeneralled and defeated in every direction. This was obvious as the enemies of Judah looked upon the completed walls of Jerusalem. A feeling of depression came over them, and they became very much cast down in their own eyes.

But though the wall was completed, there could be no relaxing on the part of Nehemiah. Within Judah, Sanballat had his sympathisers. Tobiah, his ally, was son in law to a prominent Jew by name of Shechaniah, and Tobiah's son had married the daughter of Meshullam who had been prominent in rebuilding the wall (Neh. 6:18. 3:4, 30). With the work finished, Shechaniah, Meshullam and others, began to look critically at Nehemiah. Their ties of marriage with the alien, caused them to view with hostility Nehemiah's demands for complete separateness. They described him as being too harsh and unyielding. They claimed that Sanballat and Tobiah were desirous of helping in the work, and that Nehemiah was wrong in refusing them this privilege.

These sympathisers within Jerusalem entered into correspondence with the enemy without. Letters passed between them and Tobiah. They tried to break down Nehemiah's opposition. They tried cunning. They came to him "reporting the good deeds of Tobiah," representing him as a friend of

Judah, implying that Nehemiah was wrong to refuse his aid. And when Nehemiah impatiently swept such false representations aside, they reported back his words and attitude to Tobiah (Neh. 6:19).

This led to unprofitable correspondence between Tobiah and Nehemiah which took toll of his time and energy (Neh. 6:19). Ultimately, these sympathisers with the enemy became responsible for serious abuses of God's law within Judah that Nehemiah had later to correct.

SECURITY PRECAUTIONS FOR JERUSALEM

Guarding the City

Many a man who has proved himself a genius in controlling a crisis, or in winning a battle, has nevertheless proved a failure in the follow-up process. Not so Nehemiah. Having won the tactical battle, he now carefully gave his attention to the work of consolidation.

Perhaps the treachery of Shechaniah and Meshullam proved a blessing in disguise. It must certainly have made Nehemiah realise that there were still enemies that he had to guard against, and though the walls were completed, the gates were still needed to be guarded by men he could trust.

There were two men in whom he could place the utmost confidence. One was his brother Hanani, who had originally brought the report of conditions in Jerusalem to Nehemiah (cp. Neh. 7:2. 1:2); the other was a man named Hananiah, who was ruler of the fortress, and who was dominated by

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on religious matters in a way that would have been impossible to Nehemiah. His mastery of the Law enabled him to read and expound it, and so enforce it on men's consciences as no other living person could have done. The weight of his authority with the priests and levites more than counter-balanced any opposition that Eliashib or the other adversaries of Nehemiah might have attempted, whilst his reappearance in a public capacity after an absence of about 13 years lent the charm of surprise and novelty to the proceedings which attracted general attention.

The people were therefore called together at an appointed time to hearken to the reading and exposition of the Law by Ezra. People of understanding only were asked to attend*, and the time appointed was the first day of the seventh month when it was normal for the priests to sound the trumpets in order to gather the people together.

A large platform of wood had been erected in the broad space within the walls of the city, and before it, on this day, was gathered a large audience of people. Ezra stood upon the platform surrounded by 13 carefully selected priests and levites. His very presence was an exhortation to the people. As they looked upon the countenance of the aged priest and scribe, who was noted for the way he had set his heart to understand

and do the law, they saw an example of what they should do. With his thirteen assistants, surrounded by Israel, he foreshadowed the return of the Lord Jesus, associated with his Apostles surrounded by his ecclesia.

All eyes were turned on Ezra as the proceedings began. Standing on his high platform, he took up in his hands the scroll of the Law and opened it before the people. As he did so, the concourse of people which was previously seated on the ground, unitedly stood up in reverence to the Book. Then Ezra led them in prayer, blessing Yahweh for His great mercy to His people. As the prayer came to an end, the concourse of people lifted up their hands to heaven, and responded with a heartfelt: "Amen! Amen!" And now they had their opportunity of personally petitioning the Father in the heavens. A great silence settled upon the crowd, as each one bowed his or her head and worshipped Yahweh with their faces to the ground.

Following this time of prayer, the reading commenced*. Scattered throughout the crowd were 13 Levites whose duty appears to have been to repeat and explain the words read by Ezra. Thus any questions were answered quietly and on the spot by these Levites moving among the audience:

* This gathering was a most important occasion, and the reading and exposition of the Law was not to be disturbed by the noise or motions of tired and restless children (Neh. 8:2). I am quite confident that tape recorders were excluded!! . . . Editor.

* Nehemiah 8 is out of sequence. It first expresses the purpose and length of the meeting that had been called together (vv. 1-3), and then gives the procedure (vv. 4-8).

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

This public reading and exposition of the Law had a powerful effect. The people were enabled to see how far they had fallen short of what was required. The words in Hebrew rendered "gave the sense" signify to "put weight to it." The careful reading and explanation of the text gave weight to the words of Scripture. The Levites by their skill in exposition showed the value and utility of the law by personal application to the Jews who listened.

Thus the people were "instructed in the law" (Rom. 2:18), and this went on all the morning (v. 3), as Ezra read and his assistants explained. There were no comfortable padded seats for the audience to recline in half-asleep, as the words of the law were droned in their ears; no noisy air-conditioning, or fans, designed for the comfort of the flesh but destructive of the powers of concentration. Ezra was anxious to impress the Law; the people to receive it. Their interest in these things overcame the difficulties that they had to endure, and with interest and perception, they received the instruction.

It made a powerful impact upon them. They applied the exhortations of the Law personally, and were emotionally stirred. "The people mourned and wept when they heard the words of the law."

But mourning was not appropriate to this occasion. Nehemiah and Ezra jointly pointed out that there was great cause for rejoicing. A great work had been accomplished in Jerusalem; a great work

had been done among the people. The first day of the 7th month (Neh. 8:1) was the beginning of the civil year, and was therefore a time of rejoicing in view of the prospects of the future. Nehemiah and Ezra stood before the people, exhorting them to rejoice together at this time in the blessings of Yahweh; to forget the past and work for the future. "The joy of Yahweh is your strength!" they declared (Neh. 8:10).

How true these words are; how often has the same exhortation been pressed upon faithful men and women.

Thus the Psalmist exalted:

"Yahweh is my strength and my Shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my sons will I praise Him. Yahweh is their strength, and He is the saving strength of His anointed. Save Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever."

Paul likewise pointed to the example of the Philippian:

"In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor. 8:2).

He made mention of his own experience:

"I will not glory, but in mine infirmities . . . and lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon me" (2 Cor. 12:5-9).

This exhortation of Ezra and Nehemiah, these words of Paul, are

vitaly important. Adversity, affliction, defeat and failure, even in a spiritual sense, will humble us; but they can also help us if we view them correctly. The humbling effects of trouble can make us more effective mediums of God's power, for it will throw us more completely on His help. And leaning on him, seeking His strength, we will find the power to rise triumphant over every adversity or enemy, and experience the joy of victory. For this reason, the Lord refused Paul's request that the "thorn in the flesh" from which he suffered, should be removed. If God removed from our paths every difficulty there would remain no need for the discipline of self, no cause for the exercise of faith, no leaning on the Divine strength, no joy of victory, but only a feeling of self-sufficiency which would spoil us for the real battle of life. Flesh would glory instead of being humbled, and God would be removed far from us, instead of us constantly seeking His presence.

Thus the Jews were exhorted by Ezra and Nehemiah to find their strength in God; to count their blessings and rejoice in Him. Wisely instructed, the people understood the words that were declared unto them (Neh. 8:12); their mourning was turned into joy for they turned to the Source of strength which could cause them to triumph even over their own sins.

Feast of Tabernacles Celebrated With Joy

The people had been instructed and comforted. But there was

still further work to be done. On the next day, Ezra met a deputation of the people made up of the elders of the people, the priests and the levites. They had found in the Law, the commandment that all Israel should keep the Feast of Tabernacles, and they realised that though this had been instituted by Zerubbabel on the return from Babylon (Ezra 3:4), it had not been conducted in quite the manner outlined in the Law.

After due consideration, it was decided to revive it as it was first instituted. So, for a week, the whole of Judah camped out under booths once again as they did on that time of deliverance when they had come out of Egypt. For seven days they rejoiced together as commanded under the Law. Then, on the eighth day, they had a solemn assembly as instructed.

The people were thus suitably prepared for the great covenant that Ezra and Nehemiah had designed for their benefit. The Feast of the Tabernacles reminded them of the great deliverance from Egypt, emphasised that Yahweh had called them out of the state of Egyptian slavery that He might dwell among them as His people (Exod. 29:46). This now became a preparation of the mind leading them to accept a covenant to serve God according to the Law which Ezra and Nehemiah had prepared. The final "solemn assembly" at the conclusion of the joyful Feast of Tabernacles taught that a people who enjoyed the joy of deliverance from slavery should dedicate themselves to serving God. The people were now called upon to do this.

Judah Endorses God's Covenant

On the 24th day of the seventh month, just after the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh. 9:1), a great gathering of all the people was again arranged, that they might hear the terms of the Covenant, and solemnly endorse them.

Preparation was necessary suitable to the occasion. The people had been called upon to fast, to destroy any feeling of well-being in the flesh; they came dressed in sackcloth, to indicate that they recognised and mourned their constant failures before God; they had earth upon them, to show that they felt humbled to the ground.

Quietly, reverently, with a due appreciation of the solemn occasion, they assembled before Ezra and Nehemiah. Many foreigners were found among them. Those who had not wholeheartedly embraced the things of God were separated from the congregation, so that only true Israelites remained, emphasising the identity of the covenant people, and showing the need for separation in order to serve God acceptably. Those who remained were called upon to confess their sins, and enter into covenant with God.

All this ritual had underlined the following principles: self-denial (fasting), recognition of unworthiness (sackcloth), humility (earth on heads), separation (foreigners removed), confession, meditation (Word read), and dedication (the Covenant itself). These are the principles that the call of Christ demands now. The call demands

sacrifice, it cannot be entered into lightly; it must engage all our consideration, it is a dedication of heart and mind to God and Christ.

This also was impressed upon the Jews. These religious exercises were not performed quickly. The whole day was spent in exhausting spiritual exercises. From 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. the people stood in their places, and heard the book of the Law read; from 9 a.m. to 12 a.m. they prostrated themselves to the ground, meditating upon their lives and confessing their sins to God, doubtless reviewing the national history as well as their personal lives. After 6 hours spent in this fashion (Neh. 9:3), they were commanded to "stand up" and communally seek God in prayer.

They called upon God by His covenant name of Yahweh, the name that guarantees the perpetuation of the people of Israel.

They were led in the prayer by a number of carefully selected Levites, who standing upon a platform high above the people "cried with a loud voice unto Yahweh their God." Over the attentive, standing audience of humbled Jews the words of the long prayer rolled sonorously:

"Blessed be Yahweh your God for ever and ever; and blessed be His glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even Thou art Yahweh alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth

Thee . . .*

And now the prayer became more personal to Israel. It spake of how God chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name of Abraham (vv. 7-8); of the way Israel had been separated from Egypt at a time of great affliction (vv. 9-11); of the Divine guidance and instruction in the wilderness and at Sinai (vv. 12-14); of Yahweh's parental care and love (v. 15).

But then it spake of the wickedness of the people. How they were proud and hard, how they became idolatrous and disobedient. Yet the merciful attributes of the God they served assisted them when they turned back to Him: "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not!" (vv. 16-21). For forty long years he bore with them. He brought them into the land of promise and conquered their enemies (vv. 22-25). But Israel's base ingratitude became again apparent (v. 26), so that again Yahweh had to discipline them in love (v. 27). The prayer summed up the whole of Israel's history: how that sinning brought suffering, whereas when they supplicated God it brought salvation (vv. 28-30).

Then came the grand summing up of the prayer, the significance

of Israel's history. Despite all suffering, all punishment, the Divine mercy had been manifest. Israel, remembering that, and acknowledging the punishment as just (vv. 33-35), and that they were guilty of great folly (vv. 36-37), now threw themselves upon that great mercy:

"For Thy great mercies' sake, Thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for Thou art a gracious and merciful God. Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, Who keepest covenant and mercy. Let not all the troubles seem little before Thee, that hath come upon us, on our Kings, on our princes, on our priests, on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people since the time of the Kings of Assyria unto this day . . . for we are in great distress. And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, levites, and priests, seal unto it."

Thus, having carefully prepared themselves for the occasion, after having their minds stimulated by the reading of the Word, after being uplifted by the wonderful prayer, the nation entered into a covenant to keep the Law.

It was performed with due ceremony. A sacrificial animal was brought forward, slain, and divided into two parts. Ceremoniously the elders of the land, headed by Nehemiah, solemnly entered into covenant with God by passing between the pieces and proclaiming

(Continued on page 123)

* Notice the beauty of this prayer, particularly in its opening sentences: (1)—The covenant name is invoked guaranteeing the continuance of the nation. (2)—God is referred to as Creator, and is therefore capable of fulfilling what the covenant name promised. (3)—All life stems from the great Preserver of all Who therefore can preserve Israel. (4)—The host of heaven (stars, etc.) worship Him by obeying Divine laws which are indicative of the Divine purpose (see Psalm 19). This prayer is worthy of the closest attention. Notice also how prominent the Levites were in this reform. Ezra and Nehemiah experienced some opposition from the high priests, and perhaps also from the other priests,

they would keep the Law. Many of those who stood with Nehemiah on this occasion were elders who had returned with Zerubbabel (cp. Ezra 2, Neh. 7, Neh. 10). But there were two notables who were absent. They were Ezra the scribe and Eliashib the high-priest.

The reason for Ezra's absence is understandable. He was presiding over this ceremony and therefore supervised the transaction; it would have been inappropriate for him to have signed. But Eliashib's absence was significant and ominous, as we shall see.

In the meantime, the people also endorsed the covenant. Their representatives likewise passed between the pieces of the sacrificial victim (see Jer. 34:18-19). Specific points of the Law were emphasized as having particular need for observance at that time:

1. **There was to be no intermarriage with foreigners (Neh. 10:30).**
2. **The Sabbath and Sabbatical year were to be strictly enforced (v. 31).**
3. **A voluntary contribution of a third part of a shekel for the service of the Temple (vv. 32-33).**
4. **The contribution of wood for use upon the altar (v. 34).**
5. **The regular offering of the first-fruit, firstborn, and tithes (vv. 35-37).**
6. **The Levitical tithe to be regularly paid to the priests (vv. 38-39).**

The whole Covenant was summed up in the declaration: "We will not forsake the house of our God" (v. 39).

There were important reasons why each of these provisions should thus be singled out, for they were the ordinances of the Law that had been greatly neglected. Intermarriage with the alien had become common; the sabbath had fallen into neglect; the payment of

offerings and tithes had been discontinued; the work of the priests had been hindered. All this was enjoined upon the people as an earnest of the fulfillment of the rest of the enactments of the Law.

And with great enthusiasm the whole congregation promised to obey.

A grand service had been performed by Ezra and Nehemiah.

It provided the foundation of other reforms that he now set his hand to accomplish. Time was short. Nehemiah had soon to return to Persia as he had originally agreed to do. So he hastened to accomplish other necessary things in Judah and Jerusalem.

Nehemiah Solves the Population Problem

The troubles that Jerusalem had experienced had affected the size of its population. Many had left the city, causing Nehemiah to report in his diary: "The city is large and great, but the people are few therein" (Neh. 7:4).

He determined to correct this while the people were in the mood for reform.

Calling the representatives of the nation together, he revealed unto them the need for a larger population in Jerusalem. They readily agreed that a tithe of those dwelling elsewhere should remove to Jerusalem. This, doubtless, entailed some sacrifice on those involved, but they were prepared to submit to this. It meant that they had to uproot themselves from their dwelling places, perhaps at personal loss to themselves, and establish themselves within the confines of the city. And even then their troubles were not at an end!

for most likely they had to take up uncongenial work as laborers and artisans in the capital, so different to the work in the field, such as they had been used to previously.

But in the full flush of their enthusiasm to reform, these trials seemed as nothing. The people undertook to do all that was necessary, and a tenth of those in the country shifted into the city.

Thus Jerusalem was not only restored, and provided with a wall of defence, but it was also populated.

Nehemiah's work foreshadowed that of the Lord Jesus, whose sacrifice not only provided a defence for the New Jerusalem he founded, but also made it possible for it to be adequately populated, by a careful selection of those who have been brought near to the hope of the calling.

There were other duties that still remained for Nehemiah to do. The king of Persia had instructed that provision should be made for the maintenance of the Temple singers, and had directed that tribute should be gathered for that purpose. He instructed that the tribute was to be paid, not only by the Jews, but by neighbouring nations as well. A treasurer had to be appointed with authority to collect these moneys.

All this was accomplished by Nehemiah

Grand Celebration at the Dedication of the Walls

Gradually the work that Nehemiah had been appointed to do in the land was reaching its conclusion. One thing alone remained:

the official dedication of the walls. A great celebration was arranged for that purpose. People from all parts of the land were called together to witness it. The Levites were especially instructed to come, and to keep the dedication with gladness. It was to be a day of thanksgiving and of rejoicing; singing and music with cymbals, psalteries and harps were to be prominent features of the celebration.

At the appointed time a great crowd gathered together at the city of Jerusalem.

Solemnly they witnessed the ceremony of purification. The priests and levites first purified themselves; then they purified the people, and finally the gates and walls. This was probably done by careful ablutions of water as far as the persons were concerned, or by splashing it on the gates and walls as far as the buildings were concerned. (see Exod. 19:10).

Then, as previously organised by Nehemiah in collaboration with the priests, two processions were formed. In each group were assembled priests with trumpets; levites with cymbals, psalteries and harps; princes of the realm and some of the common people.

A choir headed each group, and then following the choir, came the two great leaders, Ezra, in one group, and Nehemiah in the other. Thus these two grand leaders of the nation—the aged scribe and the energetic governor — were brought prominently before the people (Neh. 12:27-38).

At a given signal, the procession with Ezra at its head, commenced to march south upon the top of

the wall, then turned east along the southern wall, until it came up to the eastern side and stood in front of the Temple itself.

At the same time, the procession with Nehemiah at its head, half encircled the city in the opposite direction.

Singing, playing their instruments, and marching, the two companies encircled the city with song, finally coming to a stop opposite each other in front of the Temple itself.

It must have been a wonderful occasion for the aged Ezra, and the energetic and faithful Nehemiah.

It must have been a glorious day of victory for all faithful Israelites, who had labored so hard with these men of God, to do the work before them.

Surely, as they saw the beloved city surrounded by its faithful citizens, and heard the anthems of praise to its honor, their minds must have turned to the 48th Psalm, if, indeed, it was not used as a basis of rejoicing by the singing companies on the wall.

"Let Mt. Zion rejoice, let the daughter of Judah be glad, because of Thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her. Tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death" (vv. 11-14).

As the two companies paraded around the newly-built walls, the musicians played their instruments, and the singers sang glorious anthems of praise, composed by the sweet Psalmist of Israel. Thus the holy city was encircled by music and song as the march-

ing companies continued their perambulations around the city to meet in front of the Temple. "So the two choirs came to a stand at the house of God" (Neh. 12:40 —Rotherham).

And here the celebrations reached their climax. Here, in an ecstasy of feeling the orchestras and singers now merged their instruments and voices in a glorious crescendo of praise. "The singers sang loud with Jezrahiah their overseer." The sound of music and singing echoed throughout the holy city, and reverberated among the hills, and along the valleys, so that the whole land seemed to re-echo the refrain.

And in front of the wall, the great crowd gathered together to witness the celebrations, rejoiced with their leaders above. Sacrifices of thanksgiving were offered in abundance as the mercy and blessings of God were recalled to mind. Even the children were drawn into the general rejoicing and with their mothers celebrated the goodness of God, so that there was an initial fulfilment of the word of Zechariah: "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof" (Zech. 8:5).

Death of Ezra and Withdrawal of Nehemiah

But there was also a sadness about these celebrations. On the wall, before the people, receiving the acclamation that was his due, was the aged scribe, Ezra. How greatly the people had benefited from his ministrations. As a young man he had set himself the task of helping them. He had "pre-

Nehemiah inspects the Wall by Night



The Dedication of the Wall



pared his heart to SEEK the law of Yahweh, and to DO it, and to TEACH in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:7).

A greater service no man can render.

And Ezra had done it well.

When the Kingdom of God is finally established on the earth, there will be found therein, many who have been helped Zionwards, by the faithful ministrations of this wonderful Scribe.

Even today his example, his words continue to help us.

The work that a man does for God is endless in its value and its scope, as the life of Ezra reveals.

But it was obvious, as he looked down from the wall he had helped to build, upon the rejoicing people below, that his work was temporarily at an end.

This was destined to be his last public appearance.

He now passed from the scene, and we hear of him no more.

Josephus declares that he "died at an old age."

When this occurred we do not know, but Nehemiah must have heard of it with the greatest regret. The influence of Ezra was great, and Judah could ill afford to lose his services at that time. For though the walls had been completed, though an initial reform had been effected, there was a need to consolidate the work commenced. Time was required for that, and Nehemiah's time was fast running out.

Nehemiah had been given leave by King Artaxerxes for only a limited period of time (Neh. 2:6).

That had now come to an end, and he had to return to the court of Persia.

His enemies heard this news with pleasure; it would give them the opportunity they had sought for some time.

But before we consider that, let us ask an important question.

Why did God provide such good leaders as Ezra and Nehemiah, and then when their work was only partially accomplished, withdraw them from the scene of their labors?

Notice that He does that time and again.

Moses brought the children of Israel to the promised land, and then was taken from them.

Joshua made it possible for them to conquer the land, and then passed to his rest.

Josiah brought about the greatest possible reform in Judah, and then was slain at the very time he was most needed.

Why?

Because God wants to give everybody the opportunity of demonstrating their worth in service to Him. He tests His servants, shows them the way, provides them with helps and examples, and then leaves them to develop characters that He can and will use in the age to come.

But so often, when the props that He has provided are taken away, people hopelessly fail!

They lack the faith and courage that God requires.

That was the case, unfortunately, when Nehemiah returned to Persia, and Ezra passed to his rest.

Eliashib : The Apostate

It is remarkable how that some men can experience all the goodness of God, can be brought close to the Truth, can be raised to eminence in its service, and yet hopelessly fail to adhere to its requirements.

Such a man was Eliashib, who was high priest of Israel at the time of Nehemiah.

It is significant, that among those leaders of the nation who are recorded as having signed the covenant that Nehemiah had arranged, the name of Eliashib is missing.

Apparently he disagreed with it. He believed in tolerance towards the things that Nehemiah opposed. Though he was foremost in building the wall (Neh. 3:1), he could not see the value of spiritual virtues, or was prepared to close his eyes to the abuse of these things on the part of others.

He was prepared to sacrifice and labor at material things associated with the work of God, such as building the wall; but was not prepared to labor in things which did not provide an immediate reward, or would not provide material and concrete blessings.

There have been many Eliashibs down the ages; men and women who will labor at certain material work in the things of God, but see no value in doing that what God really requires of them (See Mal. 3:16). They are foremost in good works, but not foremost in honoring God in the way God wants to be honored.

Eliashib was a danger in Judah. Though he toiled to build the wall, he was prepared to tolerate the abuse of the law which Nehemiah was at such pains to establish.

But so long as Ezra was living and Nehemiah was present, his policy of toleration could not be put into effect.

Now, however, one was dead, and the other had returned to Persia. Full authority rested on Eliashib as far as spiritual matters were concerned. The people soon discovered that he was prepared to relax the stringent laws set up at such pains by Ezra and Nehemiah. They found that he winked his eyes at the breaking of marriage laws, and did nothing to correct this sin. Soon Jews were intermarrying with foreigners who proceeded to introduce their strange ways and worship into Judah. A strange jargon began to be heard in the streets of the holy city, as infantile tongues babbled half in the Jews' language, and half in the speech of Ashdod (Neh. 13:23-24); for their mothers spake to them in one tongue and their fathers in another.

Ezra and Nehemiah had found their chief support for reform had stemmed from the priests and levites; but the weak and tolerant policy of Eliashib diminished the influence of the religious class throughout the land. He seems to have connived at the non-payment of tithes and firstfruits (Malachi 3:8), so that the priestly order be-

came impoverished, and many priests and levites had to leave Jerusalem, and employ themselves in the cultivation of fields. With the absence of priests and levites, the law was not taught nor maintained. Apostasy made rapid inroads into the half-finished reforms of Nehemiah, so that soon the choral services were discontinued, the treasury became emptied, the once crowded courts of the Temple were deserted (Neh. 13:11).

What had taken much time and effort to establish, was overthrown in a very short period.

And Eliashib, that weak apostate, connived at it all. He converted the now empty storehouses of the Temple into dwellings, one of which he permitted Tobiah, the deadly enemy of Nehemiah, to occupy (Neh. 6:1, 13:7-9). Other Temple buildings were similarly desecrated. He also allowed the Sabbath to fall into disuse. Instead of it being set aside as a day of rest from normal toil, so that the people could give the time to meditation upon the things of God, it became an active day of trade.

Its sanctity and significance were destroyed by the restless noise of greedy traders and excited buyers in the streets and squares of Jerusalem (Neh. 13:15). The greater part of these traders were foreigners, whose strange ways and harsh speech, attracted the idle curiosity of the Jews, who eagerly deserted the sabbath to do business with them.

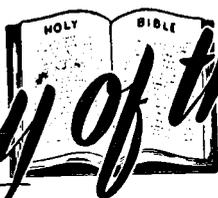
There was little to distinguish life in Jerusalem from life in any Gentile city. With all the noise and confusion of trading in the streets on the sabbath, one of the most meaningful ordinances of Jewish life was destroyed for the time being.

With this state of apathy and confusion in the land, there was a real need for the return of Nehemiah, to complete the work he had originally been sent by the king to accomplish.

In his absence, however, through the labors of Malachi, the last of the prophets, the voice of Yahweh was heard once more, pleading with and exhorting the people to repent.



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Malachi : Last of Yahweh's Messengers to the People

There is no date given to the prophecy of Malachi, and no direct historical reference whereby we can pin-point the exact time of his ministry. But indirect evidence suggests that he was contemporary with Nehemiah. His writings indicate conditions such as developed under Eliashib. They show that he wrote at a time when the Temple was built, for he reproves the people because of their neglect of its true worship. It was also a time when the law was relaxed, when foreign marriages were being contracted, when the observance of the sabbath was no longer retained, when the paying of tithes was neglected. Malachi indicts Israel because of all these things and they are the very abuses that Eliashib the high priest permitted when Nehemiah was called to Persia.

It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that Malachi helped Nehemiah in his work on his return from Persia, as Ezra had helped him on his first visit, and Haggai and Zechariah had assisted the labors of Zerubbabel.

The probability is that Malachi's message sounded forth before the return of Nehemiah, that his was a voice of protest and warning before Nehemiah appeared to more vigorously effect the reforms for which the prophet pleaded.

If that be the case, then Malachi was the forerunner of Nehemiah as John the Baptist the messenger of the Lord—Mal. 3—was the forerunner of Jesus.

Malachi's name means "My Messenger." He represented the voice of Yahweh in Israel, and as he warned the people, he spake of another Messenger who would come—even the Christ (Mal. 3:1)—who will bring about a great reformation at his second coming (Mal. 3:13—4:6).

Malachi's words were not all condemnation and warning; he also declared that there were some who had not given way to the prevailing wickedness. These few gathered together at regular intervals, to speak "one with another" concerning the things of Yahweh, and to strengthen themselves in the glorious hope He had set before them (Mal. 3:16). They met for this purpose, when others were raising the old cry: "It is vain to

serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of hosts?" These malcontents in Judah saw about them conditions that weakened their faith. It seemed to them that the arrogant were happy whilst the righteous seemed miserable; that those who did wickedly seemed prosperous whilst those who observed God's law were in poverty; that those who tempted God were delivered from evil whilst those who humbled themselves before Him still seemed to suffer (Mal. 3:14-15).

But Malachi showed that such a viewpoint was incorrect, that there is a day coming that shall burn as an oven, and then the arrogant, the wicked, and those who tempt God will be cut off, whereas the righteous shall be saved. And who are righteous? Malachi declared—

"THEY THAT FEARED YAHWEH SPAKE OFTEN ONE TO ANOTHER: and YAHWEH HEARKENED, AND HEARD IT, AND A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE WAS WRITTEN BEFORE HIM FOR THEM THAT FEARED YAHWEH, AND THAT THOUGHT UPON HIS NAME. AND THEY SHALL BE MINE, SAITH YAHWEH OF HOSTS, IN THAT DAY WHEN I MAKE UP MY JEWELS; AND I WILL SPARE THEM, AS A MAN SPARETH HIS OWN SON THAT SERVETH HIM" (MAL. 3:16).

What wonderful words of encouragement are these for those who seek to study and understand the Word of God, and apply it in their lives. Such not only find a peace of mind now, but they are storing up for themselves treasure for the future. Their destiny is assured, and it shall be a great one.

Malachi's short book is a wonderful exposition on the Scope and Value of True Worship.

It speaks of: (1)—Yahweh's love for His people (Ch. 1:2-5); (2)—Israel's indifference to that love (Ch. 1:6-14); (3)—The failure of the priests to assume their responsibility (Ch. 2:1-9); (4) The faithlessness of the people even to one another as shown in their hard hearted attitude to their marriage vows (Ch. 2:10-16); (5) The faithlessness of the people to God shown in their indifference to the demands of His worship (Ch. 2:17; 3:6); (6) — Yahweh's promise of prosperity in return for a practical application of religion (ch. 3:7-12). (7). The true prosperity of the spiritually minded among Israel (Ch. 3:16-18); (8) — The purging effect of the second coming of Christ (Ch. 4).

Malachi's message was typically fulfilled in his day, for in Nehemiah who had brought Judah into covenant relationship with God, who had been sent by the king, but recalled "into a far country," who ultimately returned to perfect the work he had commenced earlier, the wise in Judah had a type of the One who will come, to purify Judah and Israel, to make their offering worthy, and to vindicate his Father's Name in all the earth.

Malachi Opposes the Wickedness of Eliashib

God never leaves himself without a witness. He is ever merciful, always desirous of helping His people, so that His pleading voice

has been heard down through the ages. Towards His people He has "feelings of peace and not evil to make their latter end an object of hope" (Jer. 29:11).

It does not always seem like

that. His people sometimes find themselves in circumstances of difficulty, faced with problems that threaten to overwhelm them. But they must ever remember that God, like a wise Father, overshadows their lives for good. He chastises and disciplines them for their good, seeking to guide them into ways of righteousness and ultimate peace.

When Nehemiah left Judah for Persia and the people drifted away from ways of righteousness, they began to suffer. Everything seemed to go wrong. The crops began to fail; the seasons were bad, business was not good. Actually, the blessing of God was withdrawn from them, but they did not understand that; they blamed it on to "bad luck."

There was one man among them that knew different, however. His name was Malachi. He saw Nehemiah leave for Persia with misgivings, and viewed the compromising policy of Eliashib with growing anxiety. He saw the reforms of Nehemiah defeated, one by one. His indignation grew as he saw that God was given the second place in the lives of the people. He viewed with particular concern the manner in which marriage with the alien was becoming commonplace, how the sabbath law was held in contempt, the way in which the priests turned from their appointed function as teachers of the law to other things.

He felt strong stirrings within himself, felt a growing indignation against a people that did not appreciate their privileges, felt that he must do something to stem the tide of apostasy that was sweeping the nation.

Then, one day, the spirit of God took complete possession of him. He felt keenly the love of God; saw clearly the apostasy of the people; and then, publicly, moved by the Spirit of God, he began to speak . . .

Stern, forthright words, expressing a vigor worthy of Nehemiah himself, poured from his lips. He reminded the people of the love of God, and denounced their indifferent worship. He was scathing in his denunciation of the demoralised state of the priesthood, and the general condition of irreligion and laxity among the people (Mal. 1:13-14; 2:17, 3:5-7). He repeated the condemnation of Nehemiah in even stronger terms. He told the priests that they had "despised and profaned" God's name (Mal. 1:6, 12); that they had departed "out of the way" (Mal. 2:8), that they had "corrupted the covenant of Levi" in that they had become partial in the administration of the law (v.9). He denounced the people as "thieves and robbers" for they withheld the tithes and offerings which were God's due (Mal. 3:8-9); he pointed out that they did not profit by this thieving withholding of God's due, for God, in turn, withheld His blessing (Mal. 3:8-9); he ruthlessly condemned intermarriage with heathen wives, and decried it as adultery, for sometimes it had been done to the hurt of loving Jewish wives who were left to bathe the altar with their lonely tears, to the indignation of God (Mal. 2:13). He used the most extreme adjectives, denouncing the people as "adulterers, sorcerers, false swearers" (Mal. 3:5), "treacherous dealers", "workers of abomination" (Mal.

2:11, 14). He summed his message up by warning the whole nation, that though it had been granted great privilege initially, it was now "cursed with a curse" (Mal. 3:9).

But he did not only upbraid and denounce. He had a lofty vision of glory to reveal as well. He saw visions of the future, of a time when not merely in Jerusalem, but throughout the whole world, men will worship God in truth, when even the Gentiles will flock to Him (Mal. 1:11); he spoke of the coming of a great messenger to prepare the way before the Lord (Mal. 3:1), and of the Lord himself who would come suddenly and unexpectedly to his temple. He spoke of the continuing and changeless love of God who was so forbearing that the sons of Jacob were not consumed, despite their wickedness (Mal. 3:6). He spoke of a day that would burn as an oven, to consume all the wicked, but which would purify the sons of Levi, so that they would offer a sacrifice in righteousness, a day that would witness the going forth of Elijah to turn the people wholeheartedly to God (Mal. 4). And he saw in vision the coming of the Sun of Righteousness who would destroy the powers of darkness, and cause men to turn to God in truth . . .

Malachi's Final Message

Malachi's words stirred those of the people who desired to serve God. They were probably uttered before the return of Nehemiah, and thus helped to make ready a people prepared for him when he did appear in Jerusalem again. Both prophet and governor may

have acted in concert together, thus typifying the coming work of the Lord Jesus, who will appear as Prophet and King, to establish righteousness in the earth, and set up his worship in truth.

Nehemiah did that. His second coming to Judah was like the second coming of the Lord to complete that which was commenced 1900 years ago. In that regard, Malachi was to Nehemiah what John Baptist was to the Lord Jesus, what Elijah will be to him at his second coming.

Thus, in these events, the Jews of those days saw enacted before their eyes, that which will ultimately be fulfilled in Christ Jesus. They had a foreshadowing of Malachi's vision of the future age.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament Scriptures. It ends dramatically with three significant words: "WITH A CURSE!" Thus the Old Testament which opens with God looking upon all that He made, and acknowledging that it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), ends with those two ominous words — "a curse."

It is sin, of course, that brought such a change.

The Law of Moses, the Old Covenant that God made with Israel emphasised the sinfulness of human nature, and brought everybody under its curse, because all sinned. It made obvious the need of a Redeemer, one who could remove the curse, and lead the way to life.

Jesus Christ is that Redeemer. Is it not remarkable that Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament ends with those three significant words "with a curse", and the New Testament opens with the

genealogy of the Lord Jesus who, alone, can remove that curse!

The Bible is, indeed, the Book of God.

Meanwhile, the Jewish people cling only to the Old Testament, and refuse to accept the one that

can remove the curse! They receive only half of the revelation of God, worshipping Him according to their interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant; accepting only that portion of God's revelation that leaves them "with a curse"!

Nehemiah's Return



On one occasion, when the Lord Jesus was approaching the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:11-27), he delivered to his disciples a parable of a nobleman who went on a far journey to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. He left his servants with certain riches, and instructed them to "occupy till he come again." His citizens, however, hated him, and declared they would not have him to reign over them. The nobleman, however, proceeded on his journey, and received the authority that he desired. Then he returned. First of all, he gathered his servants before him, and enquired as to how they had conducted themselves in his absence. Those who had done so worthily, he rewarded by granting them positions of authority in his kingdom; those who had not done so, however, he punished by completely deposing them. Then he dealt with his citizens who had sent the message after him saying they would not have him to reign over them. He punished them, and forced them to submit to his rule.

It was a parable relating to the Kingdom of God. The Lord Jesus is the nobleman, and at the moment he is on that far journey. He has left instructions with his servants to occupy their time suitably during his absence, and they must try to carry out his wishes. His subjects, however, repudiate his authority, and refuse to acknowledge it. In effect, they say, we will not have this man to reign over us. When the Lord Jesus returns, he will reward those servants who have tried to serve him faithfully, but he will discipline and punish those who have rejected his authority. Finally, he will set up His power throughout the earth.

Nehemiah types the Lord Jesus as he is represented in this parable. Nehemiah was sent by the king to establish the rule of God in Judah. He was recalled to report the results of his labors. He came again to perfect that which he had originally established, and to bring some permanence to the reforms he had instituted earlier. His labors thus foreshadowed those of the Lord Jesus.

Nehemiah Restores The Priesthood

In Persia, Nehemiah learned of the weak policy of Eliashib, and the state of anarchy that had developed in Judah. He besought

King Artaxerxes that he be allowed to return to complete the work he had commenced. His petition was granted, and soon Nehemiah was back in Jerusalem where previously he had labored for 12 years.

Again he inspected the work before him. Previously it had involved repairing the walls that had been broken down; and, at the dead of night, he had set out with a few companions, to inspect them and make plans for the work before him.

Now the work was much more difficult. He was not treating with stones and mortar now, but persons; and people can be more difficult and stubborn than inanimate matter.

Grimly he learned how quickly deterioration had set in. With indignation he learned that Eliashib the high priest, was not only allied by marriage with Tobiah his enemy, but that he had brought him to live within the Temple itself, setting him up a place of residence in its very courts where previously had been stored the tithes. The high priest had been guilty of the very thing for which Yahweh, through Ezekiel, condemned Israel:

"Ye have brought into My sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to pollute it, even My house . . . and they have broken My covenant because of all your abominations" (Ezek. 44:7).

Nehemiah walked through the courts of the Temple, and saw how deserted they were. Few priests and levites remained to do its work, signs of poverty were manifest on all sides. What he saw made him increasingly angry. At last he came near the place where Tobiah had been allowed to set up his dwelling. And now the indignation of the Governor could be restrained no longer. Full of zeal for the things of God, flushed with

anger at the wickedness of the high priest, he burst his way into the dwelling-place of Tobiah, and catching hold of the furniture, he dragged it to the door, and flung it in the court below. He did not try to reason with Eliashib or his supporters. The time for argument and expostulation had long passed, and the time for action had come, and so, one by one, the household goods of Tobiah were ruthlessly smashed on the courtyard below.

And seeing his determined, grimly-set face, neither Eliashib nor Tobiah dared interfere.

Nehemiah now assumed the authority of the high priest himself. He completely ignored Eliashib, and commanded the levites that remained in the city to cleanse the chambers, and make them ready to again receive the offerings of the people to God.

Seething with indignation, he gathered their rulers together. "Why is the house of God forsaken?" he harshly demanded of them. Nor would he accept any explanation, any excuse. They were ordered to immediately set everything in order in accordance with the law.

But he found that there were insufficient levites for the work before them. Eliashib had allowed the payment of tithes to fall into disuse, and the priests and levites had not been maintained. Gradually they had left Jerusalem, to find sustenance for themselves in other centres. Nehemiah sent a proclamation throughout the country, and gathered them together again. He rebuked them for forsaking the Temple, ordered the payment of tithes to be restored,

(Continued on page 139)

set in order the proper forms of worship, and appointed into positions of authority men in whom he could repose the greatest confidence.

Once more the priesthood was elevated to its proper authority and standing before the people.

Nehemiah Restores The Authority Of The Law

Nehemiah recognised, however, that whilst he had authority to command obedience to the things of God, unless the people willingly desired to obey God themselves, the worship he was at such pains to establish would only last whilst he remained there to enforce it. The people must be shown the value of seeking God, so that they would continue to do this of their own accord.

Besides, it was not likely that Eliashib, with the powerful support he could gather, would remain unmoved at the action of Nehemiah. It adversely reflected upon him as a person, and must affect his standing before the people. Nehemiah could anticipate some powerful opposition from him, and as people tend to support those who weakly allow them their own way rather than obeying the Word of God, the possibility was that they would be swayed to support Eliashib and oppose Nehemiah.

He determined to guard against this eventuality.

He recalled the splendid influence that the public reading of the law had had upon the people in the time of Ezra, and arranged for a similar reading of it now. In due course, the people were gathered together, and they heard publicly

read that portion of the Law that denounced the very sins that were common in their day. They learned that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God, but here was the high priest bringing into the precincts of the Temple itself such as Tobiah! They read, again, how that Balaam had been hired to curse Israel, and only the mercy of God had turned the curse into a blessing, and here, in their day, were the leaders of the nation co-operating with their bitter enemies! They heard the indictment of the Law on marriage with those who did not embrace God's truths, and they knew that such was again becoming common in Judah (Neh. 13:1-2)!

Their consciences were pricked at all they heard; they realised that the spiritual condition then manifest throughout Judah could result in terrible punishment upon the nation if it was not corrected. The public reading of the Law, the study of the Bible by honest and sincere hearts, resulted in many turning to Nehemiah and assisting him in his labors.

But Nehemiah, that energetic man of faith, realised that all his labors would be without avail, unless God overlooked them for good, and blessed them. Thus he sought refuge and strength in prayer, seeking a greater source of strength that what mere flesh could provide.

"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof."

God blessed his labors at that time, and will not forget the good deeds of Nehemiah, in the future.

He will never forget anybody who works faithfully, courageously, and with single-minded devotion in His cause, as did faithful Nehemiah.

Nehemiah Restores The Sanctity Of The Sabbath

So day after day passed away, full of activity and work for Nehemiah, until at last the sabbath dawned. And on this day, Nehemiah had another shock. He found that all reverence for it had departed. No longer was it honored as the Law demanded it should be; no longer did the people appreciate the beautiful significance of it.* He found that it was treated as any ordinary day. His meditation on the things of God was disturbed by the noise in the streets. Investigating the cause, he saw, in amazement, a long procession of laden animals entering the city, bringing in their burdens on the sabbath day.

He asked what this meant, and received the answer that this had become common practice throughout the land. In every place, through the folly of Eliashib, work was carried on as formerly: Jews were treading grapes, reaping fields, engaged in business, bringing their burdens into Jerusalem on the sabbath.

It was complete violation of the

Law of Moses which enjoins that the sabbath be kept holy to the Lord.

Poor Nehemiah! Here was further unpleasant work to be done! But he was the man for the task. Having, without hesitation, boldly thrown Tobiah's furniture out of his dwelling place, and boldly opposed the high priest himself, he was not prepared to stand aside and see the common people violate God's laws. He vigorously protested against it, pointed to the law of God which forbade it, and commanded that it forthwith cease.

But as the day wore on, he saw even worse than that! He saw men of Tyre, dwelling within the city of Jerusalem, and setting up their wares for sale. Jews crowded around their stalls buying their produce. The harsh noise of foreign tongues blended with the shrill calls of excited buyers as they made their purchases. It was complete bedlam.

Determined to immediately stop this desecration of the sabbath, he called for a meeting of the nobles of Judah. Grimly he eyed them as they came before him.

"What evil thing is this you are doing?" he harshly burst out at them. "You are profaning the sabbath! This is what your fathers did, and God brought evil upon the nation and the

*The sabbath law demanded that people rest from their normal labors, and devote the day in meditation upon the things of God, and in performing His will in certain ways prescribed. Though the sabbath law is not obligatory upon followers of Christ (Col. 2:16-17), the principles of the sabbath still remain. It is still obligatory for followers of Christ to meditate upon the things of God and do His will, but they are expected to do this every day, and not one day in seven. Even the normal duties of life can be made a thing of sabbath observance from day to day in Christ (see Eph. 6:1-9), if we do them "as unto him." . . . you desire further information regarding the doctrinal significance of the sabbath, we shall be happy to send you free literature upon this subject. Write Auntie Daphne, Box 226, G.P.O., Adelaide, South Australia.

city! Do you want to bring even greater wrath upon it?"

He demanded that they attend to the matter forthwith. All profanation of the sabbath was to immediately cease, and on the sabbath days, the gates of Jerusalem were to be kept closed.

The rulers hastened away to attend to this matter. And on the next sabbath the gates were closed as required. So determined was Nehemiah that this law would be enforced, that he set some of his servants at the various gates of the city, that they might see that they remained closed all day.

So when the Tyrians and other merchants came to Jerusalem expecting a further rich harvest, they found to their astonishment that they were not permitted entrance into the city. But, anxious to enrich themselves, the persistent merchants and sellers, camped outside the walls on the eve of the sabbath, awaiting the end of the day, that they may venture and engage upon their trade.

This was a violation of the spirit of the sabbath day. Nehemiah's servants reported to him what was going on, but for a time Nehemiah hesitated to make any direct move, hoping that their patience might become exhausted, and that they would cease in this action. But it continued, and within the city some were awaiting the end of the sabbath, that they might return to their buying and selling. Direct action was required, and Nehemiah implemented it.

Thus, on one sabbath, as the traders were noisily arranging their sites outside the city walls, one of the gates opened, and they were confronted by the stern, de-

termined countenance of the Governor:

"What are you doing lodging about the walls?" he asked them. "If you do it again I will see that you are forcibly ejected! I will lay hands upon you!"

The merchants could see that Nehemiah meant what he said, and decided to respect his command.

And Nehemiah saw that it was obeyed. He arranged that additional Levites be on duty and keep the gates, that the sabbath day might be completely sanctified (Neh. 13: 22).

He also kept praying to God:

"Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Thy mercy."

He thus offered his good deeds as a sacrifice to God, and blended them with the sweet incense of prayer, that God might accept them as such.

Nehemiah Again Enforces The Marriage Laws

And now, another difficult matter obtruded itself on Nehemiah. As he walked the busy streets of Jerusalem, he heard a strange jargon of sound. Some little children were speaking half in a foreign tongue, and half in the Jews' language.

What was the meaning of this?

Nehemiah learned to his sorrow, that in his absence, intermarriage with wives of Ashdod, Ammon and Moab had been tolerated. These wives had not embraced the hope of Israel, but had introduced foreign ways and speech in the midst of the people. (Mal. 2:11).

This was a flagrant breach of the covenant that the Jews had solemnly embraced when Nehemiah

had been in Jerusalem before. God is not mocked, and if this were permitted to continue, the whole nation would soon be affected, and would suffer in consequence. Nehemiah knew that God would not tolerate those who broke His laws in such a way, nor those who were prepared to condone such breaking of His laws. The people had endorsed their covenant with God by a sacrifice which called upon God to destroy them if they turned away from it in the manner that they were doing.

No wonder, therefore, that Nehemiah was gravely concerned. Something had to be done, and that quickly.

Indifference on the part of the Jews could bring the whole nation to ruin.

Angry and perturbed by all the evidence of wickedness that he saw about him, Nehemiah acted vigorously. He was not prepared to argue the merits of the case. Sternly he pointed to the law, to their own acceptance of it, and demanded that they keep it. It was no quiet reasoning that he adopted, but firm, forthright denunciation and demands. The case was a clear one of violation of God's laws; no amount of reasoning could overthrow that! Those who tried to justify the marriages were themselves as guilty as those who had contracted them.

The contention became heated and Nehemiah demanded that the law be obeyed. Vigorously he compelled obedience to it. Nehemiah confided in his diary what he was compelled to do by the seriousness of the offence:

"I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, 'You shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives.'"

This action seems harsh, but the circumstances demanded it. But let us not be mistaken as to the action taken by Nehemiah; let us not imagine that he descended into undignified wrangling, personal abuse and force.

By **CONTENDING** with them, he swept aside their arguments, pointed to the requirement of the Law, and their own agreement in the covenant they had made with their God.

By **CURSING** them, he reminded them of the judgment of God, and the sentence of the Law which cursed those who did not live in accordance to it. They had earlier entered into a covenant with God concerning this very matter, which invited His curse upon them if they disobeyed it (see Neh. 10:29) and now Nehemiah brought the knowledge of that curse to them.

By **SMITING** them, he doubtless means that he had some, who persisted in justifying their action, publicly punished by scourging. He was in authority to administer the law, and this he did for the benefit of the individuals concerned as well as the nation as a whole (see Heb. 12:6-7).

By **PLUCKING OFF THEIR HAIR**, he means that he had them shaven as a mark of the greatest disgrace.

By **MAKING THEM SWEAR TO GOD**, he brought them to see the folly of their ways, and agree to correct their action.

All he did, he did to help the people that he loved so much, and for which he was prepared to make the greatest sacrifices himself.

Some of his actions seems harsh, but they were necessary if the nation were to be kept pure. If Nehemiah had not acted as he did, the whole nation would have been ultimately involved, and would have suffered the greatest evil and disgrace. We only have to bear in mind the terrible persecution that the Jews have suffered down the ages, to see what the consequences would have been if Nehemiah had let this matter drift. If the Jews had heeded his instructions, had followed the law, had sought its God in truth, it would never have suffered as it since has. But in turning from God, it rejected the only effective defence that it has, and so has suffered in consequence.

In fact, Nehemiah was being cruel to be kind. He was following the wisdom of the Word which teaches:

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. 13:24).

"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15).

"Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from the grave" (Prov. 23:13-14).

"The rod and reproof give wisdom,

but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15).

Nehemiah's vigorous action was dictated in love, and was the greatest act of kindness that could have been administered to the nation at the time.

Nehemiah Cleanses The Priesthood

But there were some who looked angrily upon the vigorous action of Nehemiah, and sought in every way to overthrow his growing influence with the people. Among these enemies was one who is nameless, who is known only as "one of the sons of Joiada the son of Eliashib the high priest" (Neh. 13:28).

This priest, who was in the line for the position of high priest, had married into the family of Nehemiah's old enemy, Sanballat. It was the example, and influence, of such as he, that had brought Judah into the state of apostasy into which it had fallen.

Nehemiah's action in regard to marriage directly involved him, and greatly angered him. He was not amenable to the law of God, nor did he care about the anger of the Governor.

He became boldly defiant of Nehemiah.

Others supported him. They are also nameless, but are included in the pronoun "them" of Nehemiah 13:29. They formed a party against Nehemiah, and set about developing widespread opposition to him.

But they were no match for the determined, resolute, and bold Nehemiah.

He refused to argue with them,

he refused to enter into any sort of compromise. When they approached him, he chased them from him, doubtless threatening them with scourging and shaving if they dared try and turn people from God.

He recorded it in his diary:

"One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me!"

He chased him away, and drove him from the land of Judah forever. And that was the best thing that he could do to such a person; for the influence of this unnamed son of the high priest could have brought terrible evil upon the struggling nation of Judah.

And again Nehemiah turned to

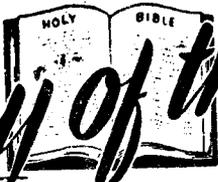
God for confirmation and strength in his action.

"Thou wilt remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites."

What covenant was that? It was the covenant that God would be given first place in all the affairs of life, that He would be honored before mother, father, brethren or children (Deut. 33:9). A person endorses a similar contract when he embraces Christ (Matt. 6:24. Luke 14:26). And, when we do this, when we give God first place in our lives, we best love our father, mother, wife, brethren, or children, for everything we do will turn out for their ultimate benefit.

Faith teaches us that!

The Story of the Bible



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Nehemiah's Return

Final incidents in a life of Courage and Faith

Nehemiah's Work Completed

The purification of the priesthood finalised the work of Nehemiah. At last the nation was purged, and the reform made effective. He had cleansed Judah from Gentile pollution, elevated the Temple worship, corrected the abuse of the sabbath, set in order the marriage problems, restored the priesthood in its purity.

And in the fleeing figure of the unnamed priest, there was symbolised the success of his mission.

According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, this grandson of the high priest who opposed Nehemiah, fled from Judah, and sought refuge with his father-in-law, Sanballat. With Sanballat's permission, he built a rival Temple on Mount Gerizim, over which he continued as high priest. For some centuries, this rival worship of the Samaritans continued as a thorn in the side of Judah. It was used as a refuge for traitors and renegades, a centre of hostility and antagonism, a constant source of trouble and difficulty.

Josephus says that the name of this priest was Manasseh. If that is so, Manasseh had his revenge for he set up a rival, apostate worship to that of Nehemiah; like the apostate worship of Christendom as opposed to the Truth. But in doing so, Manasseh made Nehemiah's reform more permanent. For the building of a rival Temple, and the establishment of a rival worship, showed the people of Judah how important were the reforms of the Governor, and how far the apostates were prepared to go. They were shocked at the attitude of Manasseh, and rallied completely to the support of Nehemiah.

The practical result was that with Manasseh's withdrawal, opposition finally ceased, the reforms of Nehemiah were completely established, and the newly freed nation developed upon the foundation of Truth laid by Ezra and Nehemiah, and not the false way designed by Eliashib and Manasseh.

Nehemiah saw this joyfully, and with thanksgiving to God who had

so abundantly blessed his labors. Thus his work ended with a prayer

"Remember me, O my God, for good"

The Last Significant Incident In The Old Testament

We have seen that the Old Testament ends with the two significant words: "a curse," and that the New Testament opens with the genealogy of the one who shall remove the curse.

This last act of Nehemiah in chasing the unnamed priest from the precincts of the Temple is also most significant.

For it is the last recorded historical incident found in the Old Testament.

It witnessed the Temple cleansed, the priesthood purified, and the rebellious priests chased from the holy city.

The next recorded historical incident takes us to the birth of John, who prepared the way for

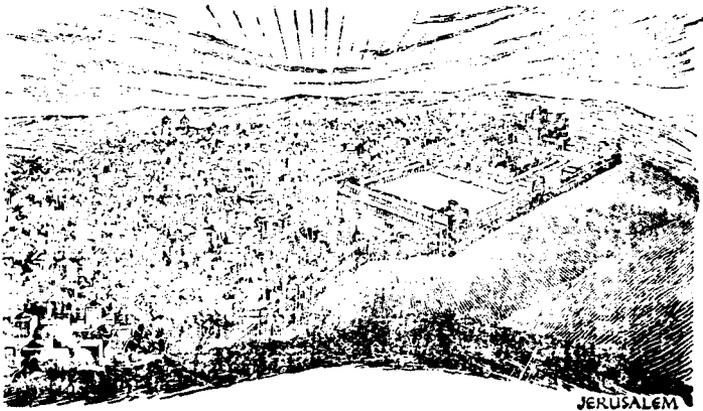
the Lord, who will one day occupy the position of priest in Jerusalem.

So, in the Old Testament, we see in the person of Manasseh, a representative of the Aaronic priesthood ejected from the city and the Temple; and the next incident takes us to the coming of the Great High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek, who has superseded the Aaronic priesthood (Heb. 7: 1). He will one day occupy the Temple and the City as priest-king, vacated by the fleeing priests in A.D.70.

Nehemiah's labours typified those of the Lord Jesus. He will yet witness Christ occupy the position of High Priest in the Temple in Jerusalem (Zech. 6:12-13), from out of which he drove the apostate priest so long ago.

May we be with Nehemiah at that time!

"Remember us, O our God, for good!"



Between Malachi and Matthew

It is sometimes inferred that the Bible is silent concerning the events between the two Testaments, and that we must turn to profane history in order to trace the story of the times. That is not altogether correct. In the remarkable prophecies of Daniel, particularly those contained in Chapter 11, there is outlined in great detail much of what took place. He predicted the downfall of the Persian Empire (v. 2), the uprising of the Grecian Empire, the division of that empire into four parts, and of the emergence of the king of the south (Egypt) and the king of the north (Syria), who were to ravage Palestine over the years. He prophesied of the wickedness of one king in particular (Antiochus Epiphanes), who would try and crush the rising power of Judah, and of the valiant efforts of the Maccabees who would faithfully and successfully oppose him.

And he spoke of the coming of Rome, and how it would conquer and ultimately destroy the nation of Judah and Jerusalem its city.

It was a period of confusion when mighty empires rose and fell, of great heroism when a people weak in number but strong in faith did valiantly, of dark betrayal when those who should have known better succumbed to evil pressure, of ultimate triumph for the forces of sin and wickedness when Rome asserted its power and stretched forth its hand over the land of Israel.

The events of this period established the conditions that existed in Palestine at the birth of the Lord. They therefore help in providing the background to his life. They occupied a period of some 400 years.

CHANGED CONDITIONS

The last incident in Old Testament history records how that Nehemiah indignantly drove the grandson of the high priest from the precincts of the Temple.

Nehemiah had returned to restore the Temple services in their purity, and complete the reformation that he had instituted at his first visit to the land, only to find the priesthood foremost in apostasy.

The next historical incident takes us to the New Testament, and there we witness a great change. Jerusalem is no longer the pioneering city of Nehemiah, but a sophisticated city of wealth and importance. The Temple is no longer a

hastily erected building with but a few worshippers gathered there, but a marvellous place of great wealth with great religious services. The nation is no longer in poverty with its towns and cities destitute of inhabitants, but is well populated, with synagogues established in most places, and the country crowded with people of different races. The tolerant Persians no longer exercise authority over the people, but instead the iron hand of Rome is found heavy upon them. The capital is no longer free with a Jewish governor exercising great independence and protected by a benevolent foreign power, but a Roman governor haughtily dominates the city, and an Idumean (Herod the great,

one of Esau's race) is seated on the throne.

In the crowded streets of Jerusalem, and the other towns of Judea, are found different sects of people. The proud, haughty Pharisees are there, with their narrow-minded religion, walking the streets as a race apart, critically observing the attitude of others about them. The Sadducees are there, wealthy and supercilious, laying claim to the position of high priest because of the influence and power it brought, but openly contemptuous of much of the Bible and those governed by its teaching. The Zealots are there, hotly indignant to the point of fanaticism at the domination of Rome, scheming to overthrow their oppressors, prepared to wade through blood and use every means of violence to gain their end. The Scribes are there, educated in the Law, conceited in their knowledge, insistent upon the formalism of the Temple service. The common people are there in vast numbers, grinding out an existence often in direst poverty, looking for the Messiah whom their prophets had predicted, vainly seeking a shepherd who would care for them and lead them into truth. The publicans are there, hated and despised by the people because they use the misfortune of the nation to enrich themselves.

Outside of Judea, in countries near and far off, are large communities of Jews. They are attached to Jerusalem by their ties of nationalism, and make frequent pilgrimage to the land of their fore-

fathers, that they might give some semblance of worship to their God, but they find themselves far happier in foreign lands, where they can trade and enjoy high culture, and give themselves to foreign study, and have their children highly educated.

It is a vast change to the pioneering days of Ezra and Nehemiah.

What had brought it about?

That is the story that unfolds between Malachi and Matthew.

THE PERSIAN PERIOD

The Persian monarchs, from Cyrus onwards, had proved to be sympathetic to the Jewish people. Cyrus had issued his decree favorable to the return of the exiles in Babylon; Darius had permitted the Temple to be completed in the days of Zerubbabel, Joshua, Haggai and Zechariah; Artaxerxes had given Ezra his commission and authority; Ahasuerus had married Esther and elevated Mordecai; Artaxerxes had granted Nehemiah permission to visit the land and institute any reform he desired to establish.*

But students of the prophecies of Daniel realised that Persian might must give way to the rising power of Greece.

The belly and thighs of brass, in the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream (Dan. 2), had been interpreted by Daniel the prophet to signify that another power would supercede that of Persia.

In another prophecy (Dan. 8), he had seen in vision a ram with

*In previous issues of the Story of the Bible we have given reasons for believing that these names were actually titles several of which were held by the one king.

two horns, and though it stood up in all its power, it was attacked by a rough goat with a large single horn in its head. It furiously rushed upon the Ram with its horn poised to kill, travelling so fast that, to the watching prophet, it seemed as though its feet did not touch the ground (Dan. 8:5). The goat smote the ram with such force as to break its two horns and overthrow it. The goat then, in the fulness of its anger, stamped upon the ram as it lay writhing on the ground.

Daniel was told:

"The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia; and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, four stood up instead of it . . ." (v.20).

Thus Daniel was shown that the Persian Empire must give way to that of Grecia, and that when the first king of Grecia had performed his work, his empire would be divided among four successors.

The Persians were a world power, ruling from Carthage in the west to India in the east. All nations bowed down before them. Great riches were enjoyed by their rulers. The Persian soldiers were known for their bravery, and their leaders for their skill. For many years they dominated the world scene.

RISE OF GREECE

Meanwhile, in the west, Greece was divided by a number of small, quarrelling states. They could not agree among themselves, and constantly called upon the Great King (as the King of Persia was called) to intercede in their quarrels. But prophecy had decreed that Greece should ultimately gain the ascend-

ancy, and circumstances (which God ever controls) threw to the fore a notable leader in Philip of Macedon. He was a wise administrator and a skilful warrior. He united the Grecian states under his rule, and extended his influence on every side until the rising power of Greece became a threat to its neighbours.

The Persians were not unduly concerned. They had mighty resources at hand both of wealth and of manpower, and they had already invaded Greece on several occasions to keep the little states under control.

Then, at the height of his power, Philip was poisoned, and his power passed to his son, Alexander the great. He was a young man of only 20 years of age, but he had an insatiable ambition to rule the world. He proved to be an even more skilful warrior than his father, and organising the forces under him, he went out to conquer the world.

And he succeeded. Like a meteor he flashed across the political heavens eastward until all the lands over which Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia and Persia had once exercised control passed into his hands.

About the year 334 B.C. he invaded Asia to challenge the might of Persia. Darius III was ruling at the time. He gathered together a huge force, five times as large as that of Alexander, and entrenched himself behind the river Granicus. The Persians felt secure in the protection of their forces, and the river which flowed as an obstacle before the advancing Grecians. But nothing daunted, Alexander spurred his men on to the

attack. They swam the river, and (like the rough goat in the vision of Daniel) fell upon the Persians with such fury that they retreated and fled. It was the first of a series of terrible defeats to which Alexander subjected Darius, by which he was elevated to the pinnacle of power. At the straits of Issus in Cilicia, and in the plains of Arbela in Assyria, further victories were won by the Grecians, and the power of Darius was finally broken. Ultimately Alexander's empire extended from Europe in the west to India in the east, and Egypt in the south.

During the course of his conquests, he overthrew the island fortress of Tyre as Ezekiel had predicted, and then he turned, and demanded the allegiance of Jerusalem.

But here, according to Josephus the historian, he unexpectedly received a rebuff. The Jews refused to give him their allegiance on the basis that it had already been given to Darius the Persian. A wrathful Alexander marched against the city, but as he approached it, he was halted by a strange procession that met him. In answer (so it is claimed) to a heavenly vision, the high priest at the head of priests and people advanced to meet him from out of the open city. At the sight of the priests in their garments, Alexander bowed low to the ground, claiming that he was paying homage, not to the priest but to God, and that he had seen such a procession as this in a vision back in Macedonia. It is alleged that the high priest then led him into the city, showed him the prophecies of Daniel which predicted the con-

quest of Persia by the Greeks, and received from him important concessions.

Thus Jerusalem was spared. In addition, Alexander offered immunities to the Jews to settle in Alexandria, an important city he established in Egypt. For, wherever Alexander went, he established Greek cities all over his conquered domains, and along with them, Greek culture and the Greek language.

The Persian Empire had now passed away, and that of Greece had taken its place.

But Daniel had seen in his vision, that the notable horn on the rough goat was broken at the height of its power, and that in its place there appeared four little horns.

This was now fulfilled. Alexander's reign was very brief. Only about 13 years after he commenced his reign, he entered the city of Babylon in triumph. There he decided to celebrate his victories. He did so not wisely but too well. It is said that he died in a drunken orgy.

Immediately the empire he established began to break up. He had no son old enough to take over the reigns of control. His four principal generals, commanding his various armies, began to quarrel among themselves, and soon the united empire was divided into four parts. Two of these are known in prophecy (Daniel 11) as the king of the north (Syria) and the king of the south of (Egypt). In an attempt to wrest power one from the other war broke out between these two kings, and Palestine became the cockpit of warring nations. The tramp of soldiers began

to be heard in the land and Judah experienced the fear and sorrow of an invading enemy.

CONFLICT BETWEEN THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN KINGDOMS

The king of Syria was a man named Seleucus, the king of Egypt was a Greek called Ptolemy. In history, therefore, the kings north of Judah are often called Seleucids, and those in Egypt, south of Judah, are called Ptolemies. For a little while, Judah was under the control of the king of the north, but it shortly passed to Egypt, and remained under the control of the Ptolemies until about the year 198.

During this time the character of the world was changing. Greek influence was making itself felt more and more. In language, literature, sculpture, drama and sports the influence of Greece everywhere made an impact on the people. It became fashionable to speak Greek, and to follow Greek ways. It became almost a universal language, so that many years later, when Paul went preaching the Gospel throughout the world, he was able to do it in one language: Greek.

It became popular also to worship Greek gods. Athens, the capital of Greece, was famous for its marvellous temples, shrines, altars, and statues, and its influence rapidly spread.

In Judah, however, the Jews remained faithful to Yahweh. They spoke the common Syrian language called Aramaic in their talk; but they used Hebrew in their religious and legal writing. Some commenced to talk in Greek.

But there was no Grecian theatre or gymnasium in Jerusalem, as there were in other cities, until the time of Herod the Great.

Alexander had established in Egypt a city which he named Alexandria, and which he designed as a centre of Greek culture and influence. He particularly invited Jews to settle there, and a large number did so. They comprised an important part of the community.

The king of Egypt, Ptolemy Philadelphus, became interested in their religious background, and ordered that a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures be translated into the Greek language. According to tradition, some 70 Jews, skilful linguists, were sent from Jerusalem to Egypt to perform this work. The Law of Moses was first translated. Later the rest of the Old Testament books were added. It was called the "Septuagint" translation of the Bible (the word means seventy because of the seventy translators that commenced the work, and it is still in circulation today.

THE MACCABEES FIGHT FOR FREEDOM OF WORSHIP.

In the northern kingdom, a brutal man, with the nature of a tyrant, and ambitious for power, came to the throne. He hated the Jewish people, and determined that they must worship the Greek gods. His name was Antiochus Epiphanes.

The peace and prosperity that the Jews had experienced until this time was about to be rudely broken, as Daniel had predicted in his prophecy (Dan. 11:20-34).

Antiochus attacked the Egypt-

ian king. He was victorious in his attack, and returning to his land determined to take Jerusalem by storm and spoil the city. Daniel declared: "His heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do things, and return to his own land" (Dan. 11:28).

He did terrible things. He broke down the walls of the city, set houses on fire, and, worst of all, defiled the Temple and even offered swine's flesh on the altar, which was sternly forbidden by the Law of Moses. He left a mourning city. Eighty thousand of its men lay dead; forty thousand had been taken as prisoners and slaves.

He left, but not for long. Again he invaded Egypt, and returning he despatched a force of 22,000 men under Apollonius to destroy Jerusalem. And now, terrible to relate, he had Jews who supported him. Daniel predicted: "He shall return, and have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant" (Dan. 11:30). Wicked Jews, apostate from the faith, fawned before his captain and agreed to put into practice what Antiochus should decree.

They soon learned what he decreed: the total abolition of the Truth. Jewish sacrifices were forbidden, and the Jews were not even allowed to keep holy the Sabbath Day. The rite of circumcision was to be discontinued. The Books of the Law and of the Scriptures were to be publicly burned. Temples and altars to Grecian gods were everywhere to be set up, and the Jews commanded to sacrifice there. They were forced to eat swine's flesh, and the flesh of other animals forbidden by the law. The Temple was

to be rededicated to the god Jupiter whose statue was to be erected in it.

The Jews heard the terrible decree with horror. They also knew that Antiochus was ruthless and brutal enough to destroy them if they resisted his decree.

What were they to do?

Though many had embraced Grecian ideas, and were drifting from the ways of God, this new persecution sent them back to their national faith. With great heroism many preferred to die rather than submit, and to starve rather than eat food offered to idols, or swine's flesh.

Meanwhile the country seethed with indignation and revolt.

In the small town of Modin, about 17 miles north-west of Jerusalem, there lived an old priest by name of Mattathias. His name means Gift of Yahweh, and this he proved to be in Judah's hour of need. Suddenly a Syrian official appeared in the town, and called on Mattathias to use his influence in getting idolatrous worship commenced, offering him and his five sons great wealth in reward for their assistance.

But fiercely Mattathias repulsed the officer.

"If all the nations that are in the king's dominions hearken unto Him, to break away from the worship of his fathers, yet will I and my sons walk in the covenant of our fathers. Heaven forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances," he declared.

But all the Jews were not so faithful. At the bidding of the Syrians, one stepped forward to sacrifice on the heathen altar to one of the Greek gods. Mattathias' indignation got the better of him. Seizing a sword he slew the apo-

state Jew, then the Syrian officer, and finally broke down the altar. Then he fled with his sons, to live for a time in the caves that abound in the hills of those parts.

Here the standard of rebellion against Syria was raised, and many Jews gathered together to the support of Mattathias. When, next year, he died, they appointed his third son Judas to be their leader. He took upon himself the name Maccabaeus, meaning the Hammer, and proclaimed his intention of destroying the influence of Antiochus in Judea.

Soon enthusiastic Jews were flocking to Judas and his brothers in the caves, and on all sides defiance was being hurled at the Syrians.

Something had to be done. But now Antiochus was involved in war in other parts, and could not spare the time to subdue Judah. He directed that a general of the army named Lysias should invade the land and quell all Jewish uprisings. The forces of Lysias greatly outnumbered those of Judas, and were well trained and armed. But Judas won remarkable victories. He inflicted heavy losses on the Syrians at small expense to his own forces. In this he was helped by God. Daniel had predicted: "They that know their God shall be strong, and do exploits . . . they shall be helped with a little help . . ." (Dan. 11:32-34).

Encouraged by victory, Judas now set about retaking Jerusalem. Once more Jerusalem was attacked, and now victory was with the Jews. Once more the Temple was purified and the daily sacrifice

restored. It became the occasion for a joyous celebration, which became an annual affair, known as the Feast of Dedication. We read of it in the days of the Lord Jesus (John 10:22).

Word of the disaster which had befallen Lysias was hurriedly borne to Antiochus. He started for home, but before he got far, the grim enemy death caught up with him, removing one of the Jews' most bitter enemies.

And now turmoil reigned in the Syrian capital. Lysias seized power, but was deposed. Gradually stability was restored to the Syrians, and another army was despatched to Jerusalem. The siege was lifted but only for a time. The Syrians insisted upon controlling the high priest, and supported a man by name of Alcimus, whom Judas opposed. As the struggle blazed up, Alcimus was forced to flee the city. Quickly Syrian forces appeared, and although Judas again defeated them, this time at Adasa just north of Jerusalem, he knew that he must find other help to continue to oppose the more powerful kingdom of Syria. To whom should he appeal?

ROME MOVES INTO THE PICTURE

Far in the west was the rising power of Rome. Many stories of the victories accredited to the valiant legions were heard in Jerusalem. It was obvious that Rome was about to take over the declining power of Greece.

The Jews turned to Rome for aid.

The only aid they received was

a declaration of friendship. Rome proclaimed that she was Judah's friend, and warned other nations to keep away. But the Syrians took no heed of this, and again and again invaded the land. One by one the sons of Mattathias had died, until John Hyrcanus, son of Simon, took full power. He organized the army, and vigorously and successfully opposed the Syrians. Again, Jerusalem was besieged, and Rome appealed to. Again Rome made a resounding promise, but did nothing. Again the Jews had to beat off their enemies.

But now Syria was a fading power, and under Hyrcanus, Judea rose until it reached a greatness exceeding any time since the days of Solomon. At his death, he was able to leave to his son, Judas Aristobulus, a considerable kingdom.

Aristobulus reigned for only about a year. Then his brother, Alexander Jannaeus, took over. He was a fighter like his Maccabean forebears, and much of his twenty-seven-year reign was given to warfare directed against neighboring cities and kings. He pushed his conquests into Trans-Jordan, and at his death in 76 B.C. he had restored the Promised Land to about its original dimensions. Among the nations conquered and converted to Judaism was Idumea -- the descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother.

THE HASMONAEANS

Judea now became racked by civil war of a religious character. This was largely the fault of the Hasmonaeans, as the descendants

of the Maccabees were called. They ruled in Jerusalem from about 167 B.C. to 60 B.C. The early members of the family conducted the nation's affairs with wisdom; but, as the years passed, ambition crept in, and there were quarrels and jealousies, which led to weakness.

The truly religious Jews were greatly distressed by all this.

There was much rivalry for the position of high priest, much bitterness and bloodshed, and wickedness.

In the year 67 B.C. two sons of Jannaeus called Aristobulus and Hyrcanus II quarrelled over the throne. A battle was fought in which Aristobulus came out the winner. Immediately Hyrcanus commenced intriguing with the Arabs, to whom he made many promises if he were elevated to the throne. The go-between in this little drama was an Idumaeen, by name of Antipater. He eventually became an important Roman puppet, and also father of the bloodthirsty Herod, who was reigning at the time of Christ's birth.

ROME TAKES OVER IN JUDEA

In the year 66 B.C., Pompey, a brilliant Roman general, conquered the king of Pontus, a country on the shore of the Black Sea. Then, turning his legions toward the south, he finished off the Syrian Kingdom founded by Seleucus Nicator.

Pompey had a legate, one Scourus, working ahead of him, and when the latter came to Damascus, he was told of the foolish quarrel

between the two brothers in Judea. He hurried on there to intercede, to find that both were prepared to pay him sizable tribute for the intercession of Pompey. The matter was carefully reviewed, and the more likely of the two aspirants seemed to be the younger, Aristobulus.

Meanwhile, Pompey entered Damascus, and here the two warring brothers presented themselves, that they might set their respective claims before the great man. Whilst he made up his mind, Aristobulus encouraged the Roman commander to order the occupation of Jerusalem. Resistance developed as a result, and the city was put under siege. This was in B.C. 63, and thus it was, under those circumstances, that Rome finally entered, not as an ally, but as a conqueror.

The Maccabean period had come to an end, and Judea had become a vassal of Rome.

But the drama was not yet over. The authority of Pompey was challenged by another notable Roman: Julius Caesar. He landed in Alexandria at the head of a relatively small force, and immediately blundered into one of the most critical moments of his career. A large army attacked him, and he was in danger of death. He was rescued by an army from the Syrian cities, among which was Antipater at the head of 3000 troops. He greatly helped Caesar, and did himself much good through his timely appearance.

Antipater had been the go-between in the struggle between Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. He

had assisted Hyrcanus who had been deposed in favour of Aristobulus by Pompey. Caesar could only look upon Antipater as a valuable ally. He advanced him in Judea; made his sons rulers in the land; and through him helped the Jewish people.

Among the sons of Antipater was Herod the Great, who was ruling at the time of Christ. He was made ruler of Galilee.

The troubles of the times continued. Bloodshed and violence remained the order of the day. Antipater was poisoned by a rival. Herod married Mariamne, sister to the Jewish ruler, Hyrcanus. He was opposed by powerful forces, and recognising that he could not successfully defeat them, he hurried off to Rome, there to plead for authority over Judea. This was granted him, and he returned in triumph to Jerusalem, to enter upon his glory with the full support of Rome. He still had to fight his way to power, but he did this with such a ruthless disregard for everybody in his way, as to ultimately bring him what he required: full authority and leadership.

HEROD THE GREAT

Herod the Great was appointed by the Romans as King of Judea in 47 B.C. He was not a Jew, but an Idumean, a member of the people that came from Esau, the brother of Jacob. He married a beautiful princess named Mariamne, a Jewess, a descendant of the Maccabees.

Herod was an able monarch, and the nation prospered under

him in a material sense. He was ambitious for grandeur, and engaged upon a widespread building programme. He rebuilt the Temple, spending tremendous wealth in the project; he also established a theatre and an amphitheatre for games and shows, which disgusted the religious Jews. He built strong fortresses up and down the land so that he might be secure, and lavished wealth on his own palace. He built Caesarea, which he named after the Emperor of Rome.

But he was a cruel, ruthless, brutal man. His reign was stained by bloodshed and violence. Through jealousy he murdered the wife he loved, his two sons, as well as remaining members of the family. No one who stood in his way had any chance against his power and savage wrath. Even the Emperor Augustus in Rome said it was better to be Herod's hog than his son!

A remarkable prophecy of Moses was fulfilled at this time in that the Roman dominated Judea, and an Idumean was on the throne in Jerusalem. Moses had warned the people of Israel that if they proved disobedient to God they would be taken into captivity with their king (Deut. 28:36). This came to pass when Nebuchadnezzar took them and Zedekiah their king captive to Babylon. He also indicated that they would return back to the land, as they did under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah. But he warned the people that if they still proved disobedient, God would punish them in a very remarkable way: "The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low" (Deut.

28:43).

This came to pass just prior to the birth of Christ. In Herod the Idumean we have an example of the "stranger in the midst of Judea" getting up very high, for he became king. And in the Roman influence in Judea we have a further example of the stranger in Judea bringing the people down very low.

God's word is always fulfilled to the very letter.

Herod was on the throne when Christ was born in B.C. 4. He was suffering of a terrible disease (some have suggested that it was cancer) which increased his cruel passions. Few mourned when Herod the so-called "Great" came to his end.

SECTS OF THE JEWS

The period of the Maccabees saw the uprise of various sects of the Jews including the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The word "Pharisee" means "separated one." The Pharisees separated themselves from the body of Jewry when they saw attempts made to Grecianise the people. They turned to the Scriptures, and insisted upon living in accordance with them. They also had an oral law in addition to the written law, which they likewise insisted should be observed.

The Pharisees undoubtedly did a good work to commence with. But gradually they became too rigid in their attitude, and whilst preserving the letter of the law, they completely lost its spirit.

The Sadducees, on the other

hand, accepted the Law of Moses, and rejected the rest of the Bible. They were found mostly among the priesthood, but they were not a good influence upon the people. They did not believe in any future life, and therefore sought what pleasure and power they could find in this one. They became completely unscrupulous in their search for power, and played a very prominent part in condemning the Lord Jesus to death.

There was still another group called the Essenes, which seems also to have been established about this time. They stood aside from both the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and put their confidence in the whole of the Old Testament. By the time of Christ it is thought that this sect had grown to about 4000 members.

Though not mentioned in the Bible, they doubtless exercised a large influence in their far quieter way. They lived a simple, plain, highly disciplined life, dwelling in the barren wilderness of Judea, waiting for the Christ to appear. Some of their writings have been discovered in what is known as the Dead Sea Scrolls. It is from this source that we learn about the Essenes.

When Christ was born there were many people looking for the coming of the Messiah. The influence of the Essenes could have played a part in this. If so, it was a very important work that they did.

These sects were all in existence at the time when the New Testament record opens.

CONCLUSION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

A Word Before Beginning . . .

We welcome you to our study circle, and trust that you find the matter under consideration both interesting and instructive.

We plan to conduct a detailed study of the prophecy of Haggai. Though this comprises one of the smallest books of the Bible, containing only two chapters, there is a wealth of interesting matter contained therein.

It is rich in its historical background, in exhortation, and in prophecy. It is full of drama, revealing the spiritual forces that played such a large part in the revival of Jewry's national existence as portrayed in the Book of Ezra. It provides a wonderful example of faith and courage as it outlines the work of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, as they strove to induce in the returning exiles a proper responsibility to the things of Yahweh. It contains stimulating prophecies of the future, helping to provide a mental picture of what shall happen in the last days.

The example of faith and courage, the exhortation of the book can be given a modern application, can apply to ourselves.

The keynote of its appeal is the cry, "**CONSIDER YOUR WAYS!**"

To obtain the greatest benefit from its teaching, we must give some attention to the historical background — the events relating to the returning exiles as recorded in the early chapters of Ezra.

This you must do for yourself. We have provided but brief study notes designed for Bible marking. To gain the greatest benefit from these, you must personally consider them in the light of the prophet's own words, and come to your own conception of their meaning and instruction.

We suggest that you use these notes in conjunction with the writings of Brethren John Thomas and Robert Roberts. You will find additional help in such works as "Elpis Israel" and "Eureka." By the aid of the Indexes to these and other works by these writers, you will have access to further expository comments on Haggai of the highest importance.

The first volume of "Eureka" contains a short outline of the Prophecy of Haggai. We suggest that at this stage you read that outline.

Mark Your Bible

These study notes are designed for Bible marking. And whilst everybody may have his or her own method of doing this, we herewith present a few hints.

Firstly, have you an adequate Bible?

Your Bible can become your most precious possession. You should use it daily, and therefore you need a good one with a binding that will last. An investment in a first-class Bible will pay good dividends both in this life, and in that which is to come (1 Tim. 4: 8).

A first-class Bible is even more necessary if you intend to mark it. To do so along the lines we are going to suggest, will occupy some time, but the pleasure and profit that will result will make it well worth while.

It will be a pity, however, to expend this time upon an inadequate Bible that through hard use soon wears out.

We therefore suggest that you obtain a Bible adequate to your needs.

There are several such, but we recommend the "Oxford Wide Margin Bible." This Bible is printed upon special paper designed to take ink. It has a margin wide enough to take brief notes sufficient for the explanation and amplification of the Scriptures: even upon such difficult books as "Song of Solomon" and the "Revelation."

The Oxford Wide Margin Bible is obtainable from many religious bookshops, from some Ecclesial Libraries, or from the Christadelphian Publishing Office. If you have any difficulty in obtaining a copy, we shall be very happy to secure one for you. They come in various bindings, and it will pay you to obtain a fairly good one that will stand up to hard work; for once you have marked it up, your Bible will be irreplaceable. The cost of a well-bound Oxford Wide Margin Bible is approximately £7/10/- or 22 dollars per copy.

For your Bible notes use only good quality Indian ink. Your notes are to last a long time, and you want the ink to be durable. We have found Pelikan brand Indian ink outstandingly good. Purchase it in the very smallest bottles, as Indian ink has a tendency to dry up if it stands too long.

Use mapping nibs for your printing. They will enable you to make a fine, clear line. There are many inexpensive makes. A very good nib is the Irinlod 505. It has an advantage over the normal mapping nib inasmuch as it fits into a thicker holder than the normal thin mapping pen; and many find this thicker holder better to grasp and handle,

There is a fountain pen designed for use with Indian ink which also gives an extremely fine line. It is called the Rapiograph. Many brethren are today using these pens for the purpose of Bible marking. We recommend either No. 0 or No. 00. The latter provides a finer line than the former.

We also suggest that you use different colour inks to provide variety in your marking. A system commonly used is to underline the word or words you intend to comment upon in green, placing against them a number in the same colour (commencing at the beginning of every chapter with the number "1"), and writing the corresponding number in the same colour in the margin. Use black for writing your comments in the margin against this green number. Reserve red for any supporting references. The variety of colour enables each to stand out from the other, and is helpful for quick reference.

It is also helpful to set out a chapter in a series of sub-headings which also can be placed in the margin of your Bible at the appropriate places. These sub-headings will provide a general outline of the chapter, whilst your verse by verse notes will give more detailed explanation of the text of Scripture.

An Example

We present herewith a portion of Haggai taken from an actual Bible:

(Text of Bible)

CHAPTER 1

1. In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month,¹ in the first day of the the month, came the word of the LORD² by Haggai³ the prophet unto Zerubbabel,⁴ the son of Shealtiel,⁵ governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech,⁶ the high priest, saying,

HAGGAI

(Marginal Comments)

CHAPTER 1

1. Zechariah commenced to prophesy 2 months later, so that they were contemporaries (Zech. 1: 1).

2. Thus the message is authoritative (Isa. 55: 11; 11 Pet. 1: 20; Jer. 20: 9; Neh. 9: 20).

3. Signifies "Festival," from "Hag" a Feast (cp. Exod. 12: 14; 13: 6). Related particularly to the Passover, thus signifying a gathering together to rejoice in deliverance. Haggai called the people together for that purpose.

4. Sig. "Shoot of Babylon" indicating that he was born in captivity. In Ezra 3: 2-8; 5: 2; Neh. 12: 1; Mat. 1: 12; Luke 3: 27 he is given as son of Shealtiel, but in 1 Chron. 5: 19 his father's name is given as Pedaiah. Thought to have been the son of the latter, but adopted by Shealtiel, Pedaiah's brother (1 Chron. 3: 17-18).

5. Sig. "I have asked, or enquired of El" (God). Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel signifies: "The Seed of Promise sown in Babylon." With Joshua he was a type of Christ (cp. Zech. 3: 8 mg.). He rep. Christ as king, whilst Joshua rep. Christ as priest. He was typical of the Branch shooting forth from the withered stem of Jesse.

6. Sig. "Yahweh shall save for Yahweh hath cleansed." Typical of Christ the saviour,

On the previous page, the numbers and underlining would be in green; the comments in black; the supporting references in red.

A Final Suggestion

You will find it profitable to have a notebook by your side, and to jot down in this notebook the comments you intend to place in your Bible. Then let the matter stand for a couple of weeks before marking it in your Bible. You will then know if the comments are sufficiently clear to express the thoughts you had in mind.

Use determination and persistence in this practise. Set aside a regular time each day (15 minutes is sufficient!) for Bible marking. See that this is done every day without exception — and you will be amazed at the amount you will accomplish in the course of a year, and the pleasure and profit that will accrue to you.

If you wish to ask any further questions on this matter, do not hesitate to direct your enquiry to the Editor of "Logos," Box 226, G.P.O., Adelaide, South Australia.

Remember, too, that Yahweh has promised His blessing in such study. James writes: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1: 5-6).

Make this a practise — Before opening your Bible to study, utter a short, silent prayer that your reading of this precious word might be blessed. Imitate the habit of David, who prayed: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119: 18).

Proverbs tell us: "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter" (Prov. 25: 2). As kings in prospective (Rev. 5: 9-10), it is our honour to search out the wisdom of God that He has concealed in His word.

He has promised to help us:

**Good and upright is Yahweh;
Therefore will He teach sinners in the way.
The meek will He guide in judgment:
The meek will He teach His way.
The secret of Yahweh is with them that fear Him;
He will shew them His covenant."**

(Psalm 25: 8, 9, 14).

May Yahweh bless this study of His word,

VERSE BY VERSE NOTES ON

The Prophecy of Haggai

Historical Background

See Isaiah 45: 1-13; Ezra, Chapters 1 to 6 (particularly Ezra 5: 1).

Chronology

B.C. 606: 1st Invasion of Nebuchadnezzar; the captivity of Judah begins. It is to last 70 years (Jer. 25: 11-12; 27: 8).

B.C. 589-7: 3rd and final invasion in 9th Zedekiah involving a two years siege (2 Kings 25: 1-2; 2 Chron. 36: 23).

B.C. 536: Favourable decree of Cyrus. The exiles return under Sheshbasser (Zerubbabel). The Altar built in 7th month (2 Chron. 26: 22; Ezra 1: 4; 3: 1-4).

B.C. 535: 2nd month. Foundations of house laid (Ezra 3: 8).

B.C. 535-520: Samaritan opposition. Work ceases until completion of 70 years of Jeremiah (Ezra 4).

B.C. 529: Cyrus dies. Succeeded by Cambyses his son, followed by Darius 11 (522), a relation, who reigned 35 years.

B.C. 520: 2nd year Darius 11. Haggai (6th month), Zechariah (8th month) prophecy. Work renewed amid blessing (Hag. 2: 19). New decree of Darius issued authorising continuance of the work (cp. Ezra 4: 24; Ezra 6).

Second Year of Darius

6th Month — Haggai's first prophecy (Hag. 1: 1-15).

7th Month — Haggai's second prophecy (Hag. 2: 1-9).

8th Month — Zechariah's first prophecy (Zech. 1: 1).

9th Month — Haggai's 3rd and 4th prophecies (Hag. 2: 10-23).

B.C. 519, 11th Month — Zechariah's 2nd prophecy (Zech. 1: 7-6: 15).

B.C. 518, 4th Darius — Zechariah's 3rd prophecy (Zech. 7: 1).

B.C. 515, 6th Darius — Temple finished (Ezra 6: 15).

B.C. 457, 7th Artaxerxes — Second return of exiles under Ezra (Ezra 7: 1).

B.C. 444, 20th Artaxerxes — Nehemiah's work commences (Neh. 2: 1), Malachi commences to prophecy.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION — v. 1

VERSE 1:

"In the sixth month" — Cp. Ezra 5: 1; Zech. 1: 1. Zechariah commenced to prophecy two months later.

"Came the word of Yahweh" — This stamps it as authoritative (Isa. 55: 11). Prophetic utterances were the utterances of the Spirit (Heb. 1: 1; Neh. 9: 30; Heb. 10:

15). The prophets could not withstand the impulse to speak when the Spirit came upon them (Jer. 20: 9; 1 Pet. 1: 20). Note the repeated emphasis that the message is the "word of Yahweh" — vv. 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13.

"Haggai" — Signifies "The Festal One," from "Hag" a feast, sacrifice, solemnity, and thus a **GATHERING TO REJOICE BEFORE YAHWEH** (cp. Isa. 30: 29). It had particular reference to the Pass-

over which was recognised as the feast, and which was a gathering together to celebrate and rejoice in the Deliverance. Haggai called the people together for a similar purpose. Fourteen years had passed since the decree of Cyrus had invited the people to return and rebuild in the Land, but due to difficulties, the work had lapsed, and apathy had gripped the exiles who had returned (Ezra 4: 23-24; 5: 1-3).

"Zerubbabel" — Sig. "Shoot of Babylon," indicating that he had been born in captivity. In Ezra 3: 2-8, 5: 2; Neh. 12: 1; Mat. 1: 12; Luke 3: 27; he is called the "son of Shealtiel," but in 1 Chron. 3: 19 his father's name is given as Jedaiah. He is thought to have been the son of the latter, but was adopted by Shealtiel his brother (1 Chron. 3: 17-18).

"Shealtiel" — Sig. "Enquired of El" (God). Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel can signify, "The Seed of Promise Sown in Babylon." He was the branch shooting forth from the withered stem of Jesse. He was a type (Zech. 3: 8) and a predecessor (Mat. 1: 12) of the Lord Jesus. As governor of Jerusalem he represented the future kingly authority of the Lord.

"Governor" — He led the people back from Babylon (Ezra 1: 8).

"Joshua" — Sig. "Yah shall save." He was also a "man of sign" typifying the Lord Jesus as priest (Zech. 3: 8). Thus the Lord is represented in his dual capacity of King-Priest.

"Josedech" — Sig. "Yanweh hath cleansed." His name in full thus signifies "Yahweh shall save for Yahweh hath cleansed."

Names in the Bible

Proper names in the Bible have a significance that is not often appreciated. They indicate the character of the person, or Yahweh's purpose with him. Thus Abram's name was changed to Abraham because the Divine purpose in him had been advanced. Jacob's name was changed to Israel because he was to be elevated from a mere supplanter to a Prince with God. Achor (Trouble), Nabal (Fool) are further cases in point. In Zechariah 1: 1 there appears three names in conjunction: Zechariah, Berechiah, Iddo. These names form the sentence: "Yahweh hath remembered and Yahweh hath blessed at the appointed time." This actually epitomises Zechariah's message. The meaning of the names appearing in the prophecy of Haggai are likewise significant.

1st PROPHECY

A CALL TO WORK — vv. 2-11

VERSE 2:

"The LORD (Yahweh) of hosts" — This militant title of Deity is mentioned no less than 14 times in this short book. Yahweh belligerently manifested Himself on Israel's behalf against its enemies, but the people did not appreciate the fact. "Hosts" = "Armies" in Hebrew and has relation to the angelic armies of the heavens.

"The time is not come"—Seventy years of desolation had been decreed (Jer. 25: 11-12; Jer. 29: 10). The time was up, but the Jews

were reluctant to work justifying their inaction by claiming that "the time had not yet come." They neglected to rebuild the Temple, whilst putting all their energy into building up their own homes. Their indifference was a great contrast to the activity of David who could scarce be restrained from building the Temple though he knew that this honour was committed to his son (1 Chron. 22, cp. v. 14).

VERSE 3:

"Then came the word of Yahweh" — This short book emphasises no less than 23 times that the words are from Yahweh — showing the authoritative nature of the

prophet's message, and the urgency of his appeal.

VERSE 4:

"Cieled" — i.e., "panelled." The Jews not only provided houses for themselves but decorated them, lavishing every attention upon them, though they allowed the Temple to lie waste. We need to exercise care that we do not allow the same spirit to dominate us, causing us to place all our thought into building up our possessions to the exclusion of the things of God.

VERSE 5:

"Consider" — Note margin. "Set your hearts on your ways" — deeply consider them, note them carefully, honestly and ruthlessly examine your actions and motives.

"Your ways" — They were indifferent to the requirements of Yahweh, and He repaid their indifference of Him by turning His face from them. They are warned five times in this book to "Consider their ways!" (v. 5. v. 7; Ch. 2: 15, 18). We need to heed a similar warning today.

VERSE 6:

"Ye have sown much, and bring in little" — They laboured hard, but reaped little profit. They blamed their lack of results on to natural causes — to poor seasons, drought, etc. (v. 10), but Yahweh was behind these natural causes (v. 11). He had warned Israel in the Law that if they neglected Him they would suffer in such a manner (Deut. 28: 38; Lev. 26: 26). On the other hand, He has promised a blessing on those who are liberal towards Him. This liberality need not be in money only but in the study of the Word, and in patient loving service. Let us render Him His dues and He will abundantly repay (Malachi 3: 10; Prov. 3: 9-10).

"Wages in a bag with holes" — Acute inflation; the money went nowhere!

VERSE 8:

"Go and bring wood" — Labour

with your hands in My service. No matter how humble the work is, I will take pleasure in it. This was a call to WORK.

"I will be glorified" — or honoured. Yahweh is honoured in the willing, cheerful though humble labour of true worshippers.

VERSE 9:

"I did blow upon it" — Thus the "little" became "less." The harvests were small, and even that was quickly expended in the high cost of living. The expectations of the Jews were not realised because they lacked the Divine blessing. The poverty of their worship was repaid with material poverty. They did not realise that God was behind all this for their own benefit.

"Why?" — They blamed their poverty on to crop failures, drought, natural causes — but Yahweh revealed that He was behind all those things — cp. Ch. 2: 17; Lev. 26: 3-5; Mat. 4: 4.

THE PEOPLE RESPOND — v. 12

"Obeyed the voice"—The leaders gave a good example, and the people followed it (Ezra 5: 1-2). "Fear" of Yahweh is exhibited by obedience — Prov. 1: 7, 29; 2: 5; 3: 7; 8: 13.

"The people did fear before Yahweh" — By reverencing Him in taking heed to His word and obeying it (Ps. 138: 2; Isa. 66: 1-2, 5; Malachi 3: 16; 4: 2; Psalm 147: 11).

COMMENDATION — vv. 13-15

VERSE 13:

"I am with you" — Note the significant meaning of Zechariah's name. See p. 6.

VERSE 14:

"The spirit" — This relates to the state of mind and feeling — cp. Mat. 5: 3; 1 Chr. 5: 26; 2 Chr. 36: 22.

"Did work" — And Yahweh took pleasure in it (Hag. 2: 5), though many despised the poverty of the effort (cp. Ezra 3: 12 with Zech. 4: 10). So He will with our labours today, no matter how humble the

may be, if done in faith (cp. 1 Sam. 16: 7; Mark 12: 41-44).

VERSE 15:

"The 24th day" — The messages and events relating to this first chapter had been performed over a period of twenty-four days (cp. v. 1) during which time, some considerable discussion must have taken place among the people upon the message. A decision had been

reached to follow after righteousness. They had "considered their ways."

Other prophets have spoken in similar strain (Mat. 6: 25-34; Amos 4: 6-13; Micah 6: 6-9). What a stirring challenge for our generation! Is our first concern for the things of God? Are we busy building in His house (Eph. 2: 19-22)? Let us consider our ways!

How to Study

Do not mark these notes in your Bible just because they are set down here — make them truly your own by pondering over them. Turn to "Elpis Israel" and "Eureka" for further comments. Reduce your notes down so that they are comprehensive yet simple.

Further. As you read and study, let your imagination picture the scene. Try and imagine Haggai giving his message, and the people pondering its meaning with puzzled faces. They did not realise how spiritually blind they were until they were called upon to "Consider their ways!" Are we similar?

CHAPTER TWO

2nd PROPHECY: THE GLORY OF THE FUTURE TEMPLE — vv. 1-9

VERSE 1:

"In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day" — The last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23: 34-36) when Israel gathered together to celebrate the joy of deliverance from Egypt. At this appropriate time Haggai stood up in the midst of the people to publicly deliver his message.

VERSE 2:

"Zerubbabel" . . . "Joshua" — These were "men of sign" (Zech. 3: 8 — margin) representing the Lord Jesus as King-Priest.

VERSE 3:

"Who is left?" — When the foundation of the Temple was laid in 2nd year of Cyrus, only 52 years had elapsed since the final invasion of Nebuchadnezzar in 589-7. Many remembered the glory of the former Temple (cp. Ezra. 3: 12-13). Now, 18 years later, there still remained some who could recall the

past and compare it with the present poverty.

"Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"—This was not said to discourage, but to stimulate to a greater effort — cp. v. 4; Zech. 4: 9-10.

VERSE 4:

"Be strong" . . . "and work" — Notice these requisites for success. Yahweh will bless us if we help ourselves, but we must provide the basis whereupon He can bless. If we merely pray for help and neglect the means at hand for our own assistance, Yahweh will not assist us. We must provide the foundation whereby He can bless us.

"I am with you, saith Yahweh of hosts" ("hosts" = "armies") — No weapon forged against us can prosper if Yahweh of Armies fights our battles. Samaritan opposition (Ezra 4: 4-5), decrees of kings (Ezra 4: 23-24) all failed before His almighty power.

VERSE 5:

"The word which I covenanted" — See Psalm 105: 8-10.

"My spirit"—Cp. Neh. 9: 20; Isa. 63: 11; Zech. 4: 6. Despite the

wickedness of Israel, Yahweh had not changed. He remained constant. Though He punished the people because of their iniquities, He would not destroy them (Mal. 3: 6).

VERSE 6:

"Yet once . . ." — These words are cited in Hebrews 12: 26, 27 in such a way as to provide a commentary upon their meaning here. The word "once" limits the extent of the things to be "shaken." They would only be shaken once — not twice. The Apostle states that the use of this word in Haggai 2: 6 teaches "the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be removed. . . ."

The word "removing" in Hebrews 12: 27 is from the Greek "metatithemi" and signifies: "To transfer to a new basis, to transpose, to change." The phrase "things that are made," implies things that are finite and temporary in contrast to those that are eternal and unchanging.

Paul's comment upon Haggai 2: 6 contained in Hebrews 12: 26-28, therefore reveals the true meaning of this verse to be that Yahweh intended to "shake" the "heavens and earth" but once in order to remove that which is finite and temporary, and to replace it with that which is eternal and unchanging.

"The heavens and the earth" — These are symbolical terms, for the literal heavens and earth are to remain forever (see Ps. 148: 6; Eccles. 1: 4; Ps. 125: 1). The terms are used figuratively for the government and people of Israel (cp. Isa. 1: 2 with v. 10; Deut. 31: 30 with Deut. 32: 1). As the sun governs the earth, and the moon rules the tides of the sea, so the civil and ecclesiastical systems govern the people. In Isaiah 34: 4-5 the terms are used for Gentile powers. Yahweh reveals His intention to dissolve "all the host of heaven," so

that the stars (statesmen) shall fall to the earth (be deposed). He declared that His sword would be "bathed in heaven," and in explanation of what this means, He proclaimed: "It shall come down upon Idumea to judgment." See Isaiah 51: 6 where Yahweh's intention regarding Gentile rulers is thus symbolised; and Isaiah 65: 17-18 where His intention relating to Israel is referred to in similar terms. In Isaiah 30: 26, the perfect government that Christ will set up, and the ecclesiastical system he will establish is likened to the sun shining sevenfold (the perfect number), and the moon appearing "as the light of the sun" (see Matt. 13: 43). These words are obviously symbolical, for otherwise such manifestation of light and power would destroy the earth.

For the Sun as a symbol of Christ's government see Mal. 4: 2; 2 Sam. 23: 4.

For the Moon as representative of the Ecclesia see Song of Solomon 6: 10 and cp. 1 Cor. 15: 41.

There is beautiful symbology in Psalm 89: 36-37 where the throne of David is described as the sun, and the moon is referred to as "a faithful witness in heaven." The moon witnesses to the existence of the sun even at night when the latter is not visible; for the light of the moon is reflected from the sun. How appropriate this is to the faithful witnessing of the Ecclesia (the moon) which at present, in the darkness of the spiritual nighttime that encompasses the earth, reflects the glory of the absent Sun, and thus testifies to his existence and the fact that he will ultimately reign in the political heavens.

The Jewish "heavens and earth" (those referred to by Haggai) were "shaken" in A.D. 70 when Jewry was overthrown, and the people scattered into all parts of the world by the Romans. The use of the word "once" shows that having been thus shaken, it shall never again be thus affected. The kingdom shall be "restored to Israel!"

(Acts 1: 6) upon a permanent basis, never again to be overthrown (Zech. 14: 11; 2 Sam. 7: 10).

"The sea and the dry land" — Whilst "heavens and earth" relate to Israel, the "sea and dry land" are symbolic of Gentile nations (Isa. 57: 20; Dan. 7; Rev. 13: 1). It is significant that Paul, in Hebrews 12: 26-28 eliminates these

words from his quotation, for he is dealing exclusively with Jewry. In stating that Yahweh will shake the "heavens and earth," and the "sea and dry land," Haggai was showing that He would first shake the Jewish constitution of things, and then the Gentile order among men, leaving but the Divine constitution of the Kingdom of God. Thus "all nations" shall be shaken.

"The Desire of all Nations shall come" — Ch. 2: 7

Dr. Thomas renders this: "The Excellency of the nations, they shall come in." The Hebrew noun is in the singular number followed by a plural verb. Christ is the Excellency; his followers are the "they" who shall come in with him. This translation is confirmed by Rotherham's translation. Davies Hebrew Lexicon renders "the desire" as: "Object of Desire." Fuerst's Hebrew Lexicon has "the noblest of all peoples." Gesenius comments: "Desire, delight (i.e. the desirable, precious things) of all nations." G. A. Smith comments: "The Hebrew has singular noun, costly thing or desirableness, but the verb "shall come" is in the plural, and the Septuagint has "ta eklekta," the "choice things".

VERSE 7:

"The desire of all nations shall come" — Christ and the saints. The noun "desire" (or Excellency" — Dr. Thomas) is in the singular number, but the verb is in the plural. Thus Brother Thomas translates: "The Excellency of the nations, they shall come in." Christ is the Excellency of the nations, but he will manifest his power through his brethren. He is both singular and plural, for there is a personal Christ and a multitudinous Christ. The Septuagint Version renders this phrase: "The elect of all the nations." Though the nations are shaken these remain.

They shall come in the Temple, filling it with the Divine glory they will manifest (Rom. 5: 2; 2 Pet. 1: 4; Rev. 3: 12; Ezek. 43: 1-2).

"This house" — i.e., The Temple in Jerusalem, not the building then set up. In Mark 11: 17 Christ identifies that Temple as "his house" which the Jews had turned into a "den of thieves." He declared it would one day be called "of all

nations the house of prayer," but meantime it would be thrown down (Mark 13: 2). It therefore must be rebuilt as Zechariah predicts (Zech. 6: 12), but it is still identified with the Temple of the past (see Ezek. 43: 7-8).

"With glory" — The glory of the past constituted the shekinah light that appeared above the Mercy Seat between the Cherubim. Ezekiel saw this withdrawn (see Ezek. 8: 4; 10: 4; 18; 11: 23) and also predicted its return in a different form — manifested in a glorified multitude (Ezek. 43: 1-3). Christ and the saints will constitute the Divine glory in the Age to come.

VERSE 8:

"Silver and Gold" — The literal Temple is typical of the spiritual Temple that Christ will likewise build (see 1 Pet. 2: 59; 2 Cor. 6: 16). Both will be beautified with precious things extracted from the Gentiles. Isaiah 60: 9-11 mg. speaks of the "wealth of the Gentiles" flowing into Zion. Silver and gold are also used symbolically, and as such will beautify the spiritual

temple of the Lord. Silver is used for redemption (cp. Lev. 5: 15; Exod. 30: 11-16), whilst gold represents a tried faith (1 Pet. 1: 7), comparable to the "precious sons of Zion" (Lam. 4: 2). We are redeemed not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1: 18-19). Those redeemed from among men are precious in the

sight of Yahweh and He claims them as His own. The "silver is Mine and the gold is Mine" and with them He will beautify His spiritual Temple, as with the literal silver and gold taken from the Gentiles He will beautify the glorious House of Prayer for all nations, to be erected in Zion in the Age to come (Isa. 56: 7).

The Temple To Be Rebuilt (Hag. 2: 9)

As a House of Prayer for all nations (Isa. 56: 7; Mark 11: 15-17). To be built, like Solomon's Temple, with the assistance of foreign labour (Isa. 60: 10). The building will be supervised by Christ (Zech. 6: 12). He shall officiate as King-priest (Ps. 110; Zech. 6: 13; Ezek. 43: 7). His followers will constitute associate king-priests with him (Rev. 5: 9-10). All peoples will gather to Jerusalem for worship (Zech. 14: 16, 8: 22-23; Isa. 2: 2-3). The Divine glory will fill the Temple in the persons of Christ and the saints (Ezek. 43: 1-2; Dan. 12: 3; Matt. 13: 43).

VERSE 9:

"The glory of this latter house" — Translate as follows: "The latter glory of this house . . ." It is speaking of the latter glory to be manifested in the Age to come.

"Greater than the former" — Greater than the glory manifest in the days of Solomon when the shekinah glory shone over the Mercy Seat and between the Cherubim, for the glory of the future age will comprise Christ and the saints. The manifestation of this latter glory is connected with peace — v. 9; Isa. 9: 6, 60: 18. The Second Temple, built in the days of Haggai, was associated with grace not glory, for it witnessed the ministry of the Lord Jesus. It was followed by wars not peace (Mat. 10: 34, 24: 6-8; Luke 12: 51). The future will see glory and peace.

"I will give peace" — "Shalom" — derived from a root signifying to "join as one." This peace is not merely cessation of war, but a uniting together with Yahweh. See Ps. 85: 8-9; Jer. 3: 17-18; Ezek. 43: 7; Mat. 5: 38; Isa. 2: 2-4; Mic. 4: 1-3; Ps. 122. Both Israel and the nations will be united together as one with Yahweh through the

future ministrations of Zion. This was prefigured in the days of Zerubbabel when Yahweh blessed the work of the returning exiles with peace. Cp. Ezra 5: 5, 6: 14-15, 22.

TWO MONTHS LATER:

3rd PROPHECY: IMMEDIATE BLESSINGS FOR THE FAITHFUL — vv. 10-19

VERSE 11:

"Ask now the priests" — Haggai puts a question of law to the people to demonstrate what is required of them. Two dead bodies are presented to view: one slain in sacrifice and called "holy flesh," the other dead because of natural mortality. The former made holy those who personally touched it, but that holiness was not transmitted through such a one to other objects or persons. But the latter not only defiled those who touched it, but the defilement was transmitted to all who thus had become defiled. Thus the lesson was brought home that it is much easier to defile than to make holy.

VERSE 12:

"Holy flesh" — This is flesh dead

because it is sacrificed. It is therefore "holy" or separated flesh. It is here contrasted with that which is dead because of the mortality of man (v. 13). Because Jesus' death was sacrificial it cleansed (Rom. 6: 2); Acts 2: 38) whereas in normal cases death would defile. Thus we are made holy through him (Heb. 3: 1).

"The priests answered" — They were divinely appointed to interpret the Law (Deut. 17: 8-9, Mal. 2: 7; Lev. 10: 10).

"No!" — The holiness was only transmitted to the one making personal contact with that which sanctifies. Though the Jews were of the Holy Nation the answer to this question revealed that they could not presume upon that fact, but must make personal contact with that which would sanctify them in Yahweh's sight — in this case, the work of building the Temple. We, too, must have personal contact with that which alone will sanctify us (John 17: 17, 19; Heb. 10: 10, 13: 12; Eph. 5: 26; Heb. 2: 11), with which is associated the work of building the spiritual Temple.

VERSE 13

"Unclean"—cp. Lev. 22: 4.

"Dead body" — Heb. "Nephesh" the word usually translated "soul." Here, then, is a "dead soul." The word is used in similar relationship in Lev. 19: 28; 21: 1; 22: 4; Num. 5: 2; 6: 11 (= "the dead"); Num. 9: 6, 7, 10 (= "dead body"); Lev. 21: 11; Num. 6: 6; 19: 11, 13; Hag. 2: 13 (= "body").

"It shall be unclean" — Whilst holiness is imparted to the one personally making contact with the sanctifying object, defilement is more easily contracted from object to object. This demonstrated the ease of defilement in contrast to sanctification, and showed that the greatest care should be exercised that the people separate from that which would defile.

VERSE 14:

"So is this people"—They were like the "dead body" not the "holy

flesh." Their neglect of the Temple, the deadness of their service, their refusal to sacrifice their convenience for the work of Yahweh showed them to be spiritually dead, and therefore defiled and defiling (cp. Mal. 2: 6-8). They were dead to Yahweh's requirements, and busily engaged on building up their own resources (cp. Ch. 1: 2).

"Which they offer there"—Their offerings upon the altar which had already been set up (Ezra 3: 45).

VERSE 15:

"Consider from this day and upward" — Previously their labours had been cursed (Ch. 1: 11; 2: 17), their returns meagre (Ch. 1: 6; 2: 16), the Divine blessing withdrawn (v. 19).

"Stone was laid upon a stone"—The foundation had been laid 15 years before (see Chronology), and though material had been gathered and work done at the site (Ch. 1: 14), actual building had not commenced.

VERSE 16:

"Since those days" — See also Zech. 8: 10.

"When one came to an heap of twenty measures" — Add the ellipsis: "When one came to where was expected an heap of twenty measures," etc.

VERSE 17:

"I smote you"—As warned (Deut. 28: 22; Amos 4: 9).

"Ye turned not to me" — cp. Jer. 5: 3-4.

VERSE 18:

"Consider now from this day and upward" — They were to see a great change for the better in their state as they commenced the actual building.

"From the day that the foundation of Yahweh's Temple was laid"—Actually this had been 15 years before (see note on v. 15). But so long had the work been intermitted that the carrying on of it was as if the foundation had been laid anew. So as stone was laid upon stone on the foundation that

had been built so long before, it was as though the foundation was rebuilt.

VERSE 19:

"Is the seed yet in the barn?"— This was the 9th month (v. 10), approximating to November, the beginning of winter as far as Palestine is concerned. At that time it was not even possible to

judge as to whether a good season could be anticipated or not. But in the statement: "from this day will I bless you," Yahweh promised them good rains, freedom from the "blasting, mildew and hail" of v. 17, and an excellent season. Thus the answer to the question was, "No, the harvest has not been gathered," but the promise of Yahweh was that it would be a good one, for they would be blessed.

Additional Bible Markings

There is constant repetition of the statement, "Thus saith Yahweh," of the belligerent title of Deity, "Yahweh of Hosts" (consider Deut. 20: 1-4), of the exhortation, "Consider your ways." These will be given added emphasis if these statements are marked out with different coloured pencils. The first demonstrates the authoritative nature of the book; the second underlines the Power that was working on behalf of Israel; the third features the personal exhortation that can be given a modern application to ourselves today.

**SAME DAY: FOURTH
PROPHECY: FUTURE
BLESSINGS FOR THE
FAITHFUL. Vv. 20-23**

"Everyone by the sword of his brother" — Mutual slaughter will characterise the destruction at Armageddon — Zech. 14: 13; Ezek. 38: 19-23.

VERSE 21:

"Speak to Zerubbabel" — He was a type of Christ. See notes Ch. 1: 1.

"I will shake the heavens and the earth" — See notes Ch. 2: 6. Contrast the different fate of the Jewish heavens with the overthrowing of the Gentile nations.

VERSE 22:

"I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms" — Cp. v. 7; Zeph. 3: 8; Dan. 2: 44; Zech. 12: 9.

"Overthrow the chariots," etc. — Destroy the implements of war and subdue all war-mongers — Rev. 11: 18; Isa. 2: 4; Ps. 46: 9.

"Horses and their riders" — In the Bible the horse is a symbol of war, and is used to represent Gentile nations — e.g., Rev. 6. The riders of such "horses" represent the statesmen of the various Powers. Mutual destruction will help bring about their fall.

VERSE 23:

"In that day" — The future age when the Gentiles are overthrown.

"I will take thee, O Zerubbabel" — See notes Ch. 1: 1. He was governor of Jerusalem (Ezra 5:14), a son of David (Matt. 1: 12). He led the people back to the land, and rebuilt the Temple (Zech. 4: 9). In this he typified the Lord Jesus who will be governor of Jerusalem, who is the Son of David, who will regather his people, and will rebuild the Temple (Zech. 6: 12).

"My servant" — Christ was also the Servant of Yahweh (Isa. 42: 1, 6; 49: 1-7; Phil. 2: 5-10), so in this title Zerubbabel likewise typified the Lord.

"As a signet" — A signet was a seal used by those in authority to authenticate any written document. It was therefore a sign of authority essential to the completion of any important document

(see Gen. 41: 42-44; Esther 3: 10-12, 8: 8-10). The words and deeds of the Lord constituted the Divine seal that he was of God (John 6: 27). His death and resurrection was as a Divine seal authenticating the Covenants of Promise (Rom. 15: 8). When Christ returns, as the antitypical Zerubbabel, he will exercise such power and authority as to demonstrate that God is with him. Thus he shall be as Yahweh's seal or signet — everything that he does having the approval of his Father.

“Saith Yahweh of Hosts”—Amid all the confusion and trouble of the last days, with the overthrow of nations, and the subjugation of all forms of Gentile power, the Kingdom of God will be set up, and the Temple (both literal and spiritual) will be established in glory. This will be accomplished by Yahweh of Hosts, or Yahweh manifested in Armies (See Isa. 9: 7; Rev. 19: 11-16).

NOTE: For further information concerning the Temple of the Future Age, read the pamphlet: **THE HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS**, by H. Sulley, and the booklet: **DIVINE WORSHIP IN THE AGE TO COME**, issued by “Logos Publications.”



The Persian Empire

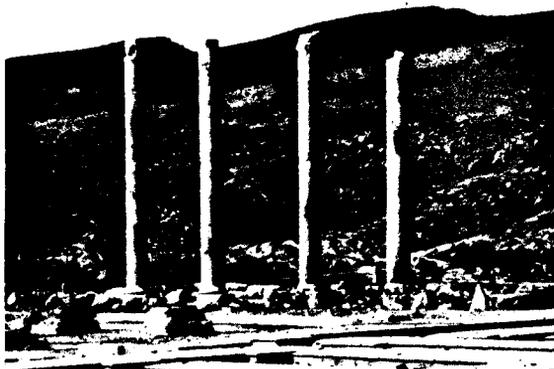
GEOGRAPHY

The Persians, an Indo-European people, were originally nomadic pastoralists from the southern steppes who entered the Iranian plateau late in the second millennium B.C. Their new homeland was bounded by mountains on every side. The Zagros range lay to the west. To the northeast the Elburz range began the slow ascent of the vast plateau towards the Himalayan heights. Less formidable uplands lay to the south.

This geographical situation was made even more unpromising by deserts in the central regions which contained large tracts of salt lakes and infertile soil. The mountains were barren, almost completely denuded of trees. There was good soil

between the mountains and the stretches of desert, but it was gravely lacking in natural water supplies. The high mountains protected the Persians from their enemies, but also excluded the rain clouds in all but a few areas. Where there were gaps in the mountain chains the annual rainfall might amount to as much as eight inches, but in other areas a total of four inches was the most that could be expected. Such scanty amounts of rain were obviously insufficient to bring crops to maturity in a hot climate, but the snows of winter, which melted suddenly in the spring, made agriculture possible. The taming of this wild terrain occupied many centuries, and episodes from this process of conquest are to be found in the mythological material of the Zend-Avesta, whose "Book of Kings" narrated early Persian traditional history.

THIS VIEW OF THE APADAMA COLUMNS REVEALS MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND. THE CENTRAL REGIONS OF THE LAND ARE AREAS OF DESERT BETWEEN BARREN MOUNTAINS.



BEGINNINGS OF THE MEDES AND THE PERSIANS

The first mention in written annals of the Persians and Medes occurred in 836 B.C., when Shalmaneser III of Assyria exacted tribute from the kings of an area known as Parsua, west of Lake Urmia, and also from the lands of the Mada, further to the southeast. By about 820 B.C. his successor Shamshi-Adad V found certain Persian tribes in the land of Parsuash, well to the south, beyond modern Kirmanshah. This area, east of the Persian Gulf, is still called Farsistan. In 737 B.C., Tiglathpileser III invaded the original Parsua and imposed tribute upon Median chiefs as far east as the majestic Mount Bikni. The two principal groups of Iranians, the Medes and Persians, were distributed throughout the fertile mountain valleys and were generally successful in maintaining their independence despite sporadic Assyrian attempts at subjugation. Parts of Median territory were formed into an Assyrian province, but it was poorly organized with ill-defined boundaries. At this stage of their history the Iranians were primarily pastoralists, although attention was paid to agriculture also.

Origins of Dynasties

One of the local Median kings, whom later tradition credited with the founding of the Median empire, was captured in battle and deported to Syria in 715 B.C. Iranian sources

spoke of Cyaxares I as his successor, who, under the name Uaksatar, was recorded as having paid tribute to Sargon II in 714 B.C. This ruler attacked the Assyrian province of Harhar in 702 B.C., during the reign of Sennacherib.

Sennacherib was opposed at Halulina in 681 B.C. by Iranian soldiers from Parsuash and Anzan. According to later tradition these troops were commanded by one Hakhamanish (Achaemenes), who was venerated as the founder of the Achaemenid dynasty by his successors in office. He reigned about 680 B.C.

His son, Chishpish (Teispes), was known as the "great king, king of the city of Anshan," whose capital was northwest of Susa on the Kerkha River. A gold tablet belonging to Ariaramnes, one of his two sons, shows that by about 650 B.C. the Persian language was already written in a simple syllabic cuneiform script. Under Ariaramnes the whole of Parsua (Parsa) was conquered, furnishing the Persians with their future homeland.

Wars Between Medes and Persians

The triumph was brief, however, for the Medes soon occupied the territory and made the Persians their vassals. The new capital appears to have been Hangmatana, the later Ecbatana, situated on the slope of a granite peak towering more than 12,000 feet above sea level. It formed part of an almost impenetrable

north-south range which was broken only by the high Shah pass leading to the Babylonian alluvial plain.

In 653 B.C. Parsua became independent once more, and two years later Cyrus I, brother of Ariaramnes, allied with the Elamites in aiding Shamash-shum-ukin of Babylon, who had revolted against his brother Ashurbanipal of Assyria. The latter sacked Babylon in 648 B.C. and regrouped his forces to march eastward to Elam. He overthrew Susa in 639 B.C., after which Elam became briefly an Assyrian province. Cyrus I, king of Parsua, found it expedient to submit to Ashurbanipal, and accordingly agreed to pay him tribute.

The Median Empire

A Median king named Uvakhshatra (Cyaxares) reorganized his military forces, and was posing a new threat to the Assyrians when Ashurbanipal died in 627 B.C. Taking advantage of Assyrian weakness, Cyaxares made vassals of the successors of Ariaramnes and Cyrus I, and marched with the Median army to besiege Nineveh. At this juncture the Scythian hordes began to pour westward through the Caspian Gates, an opening between the Caucasus mountains and the Caspian Sea. They defeated Cyaxares in battle and made him a tributary for twenty-eight years.

After the fall of Nineveh, Cyaxares gained independence from the Scythians, and began to extend his in-

fluence in Upper Assyria. He followed the Zagros range westward into Armenia, and thence along the fertile valleys of that country through the Anti-Taurus mountains into the broad plains of Cappadocia, halting at the Halys river, the frontier of Lydia, where he waged an inconclusive five year campaign against the Lydians from 590 B.C.

The Persian Empire

Back in Media, Astyages had succeeded his father Cyaxares, while the control of Persia was exercised by Cyrus II, grandson of Cyrus I, from 559 B.C. This man became a vassal king of Anshan, and ruled from his capital of Pasargadae (modern Meshhed I Murghab). The city lay in a plain whose elevation was over five thousand feet above sea level, and which was located northeast of the mountains separating it from the somewhat lower plain in which Persepolis was situated.

The vigor and enterprise of Cyrus II were devoted to his army, which became a formidable military force. For a decade he united his vassal state against Astyages, his Median suzerain, and in 549 B.C. openly revolted against him. Disaffection in Median ranks resulted in a mutiny in which Astyages was handed over to Cyrus II, and Ecbatana was sacked. Media thus became the first Persian satrapy known as Mada, and the ravaged Achmetha (Ecbatana) was subsequently graced with a splendid royal residence. The clo-

relationship of earlier days between the Medes and Persians was still maintained, with representatives of both groups occupying responsible positions in the Persian empire.

THE MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE

Conquest of Lydia

By his conquest of Media, Cyrus II had taken over Median claims to the suzerainty of Assyria, Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia and Cappadocia, a situation which conflicted with the political interests of the Babylonians and the Egyptians. Because of this dramatic shift in the balance of international power in favor of Cyrus, three kings participated in a hurried alliance intended to halt the rising power of Persia. The allies were Croesus of Lydia, the fabulously wealthy monarch who is traditionally credited with the invention of coinage, Nabonidus of Babylon, and Amasis, the Pharaoh of

Egypt (570-525 B.C.). Cyrus seized the tactical initiative by marching from Ecbatana (one hundred and eighty miles west-southwest of Teheran) to Harran in 547 B.C. The following year he penetrated northern Syria as far as Cilicia, which capitulated along with Armenia after a brief struggle. Pushing inland towards Sardis, Cyrus II sacked it and made Croesus his prisoner. The Nabonidus chronicle recorded the collapse of the first member of the coalition as follows:

In May he marched to the land of Lydia. He killed its king. He took its booty. He placed his own garrison in it. . . .

Lydia was formed into the satrapy of Sparda (Sardis) and was governed by a Persian named Tabalus. Resistance was offered to his rule by the Ionian Greek coastal cities, but they were subdued.

Conquest of Babylon

In Babylonia, central government had deteriorated progressively under the weak leadership of Belshazzar, and Nabonidus returned from Tema about 544 B.C. too late to prevent the disintegration of the empire. The onslaught against Babylon may have been prompted by a Babylonian foray against Harran, which was in Median territory. At all events Cyrus mobilized his troops and crossed the Tigris below Arbela.

EXCAVATIONS IN PROGRESS AT THE SITE OF SARDIS. CYRUS EXPANDED HIS EMPIRE INTO ASIA MINOR BY SACKING SARDIS, THE CAPITAL OF THE KINGDOM OF LYDIA.



He established a base of operations there, and may well have overthrown most of the fortified cities in Mesopotamia before attempting the reduction of the capital, which was heavily defended and widely regarded as impregnable. Cyrus launched an attack on Babylon during which he was reported to have diverted the course of the Euphrates to enable his troops to enter the city along the bed of the river. Babylon fell to the Persians in 539 B.C., and the Chaldean army under Belshazzar was routed. With this victory Cyrus II became the ruler of the largest empire known to that time. He returned in triumph to Susa, leaving Cambyses, his son, in Babylon to represent him in religious ceremonies.

Government

Although provincial administration was still in the experimental phase, an attempt was made at this time to divide up the empire into geographical regions governed by Persian or Median nobles who were known as "satraps." This term was derived from the Old Persian *khsathrapāvan*, meaning "protector of the Realm." The satrap was thus a minor monarch, surrounded by his own court and responsible only to the central authority. This organization had first been attempted by the Assyrians, who turned the states which they had conquered into provinces controlled by a governor and an administrative staff.

Darius the Mede

To date archaeological findings have failed to establish any firm identification of Darius the Mede, who "took the kingdom" (Dan. 5:31) when Babylon fell. However, the discovery at Harran of one of the Nabonidus texts, which referred to the "king of the Medes" in 546 B.C., raises the question whether this may perhaps have been an alternative designation of Cyrus II, who in other circumstances was known as "king of the universe, great king, mighty king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, seed of royalty from of old . . ." according to the Cyrus cylinder. Thus Wiseman would translate the reference in Daniel 6:28 as "in the reign of Darius, even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian," a rendering which the Hebrew idiom permits.

An alternative suggestion has been based upon the cuneiform of the Nabonidus chronicle, where it has been observed that most translations fail to distinguish between two separate individuals, Gubaru and Ugbaru, and instead regard them as one person, the Gobryas of Xenophon, who died following the fall of Babylon. It has therefore been proposed that Ugbaru is to be identified with the governor of Gutium (the Babylonian name for Elam), who conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., and died shortly afterwards. Gubaru was then appointed governor of Babylon by Cyrus, and ruled the city for about fourteen years, appearing

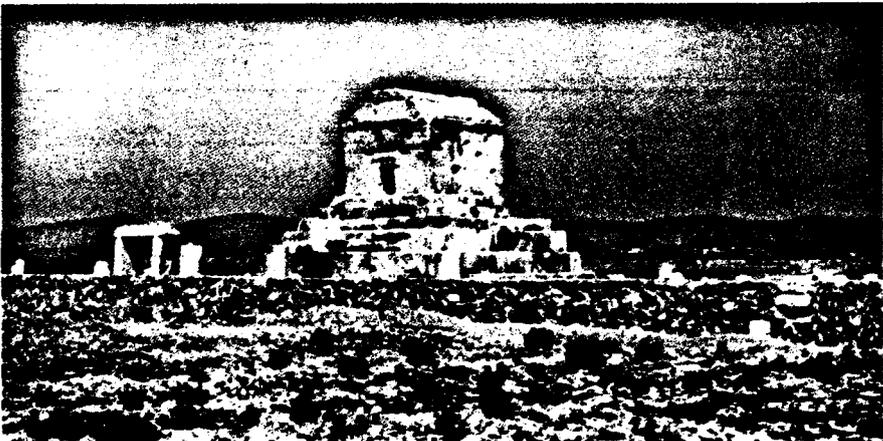
in the book of Daniel as Darius the Mede.

Liberty to Captive Peoples

Cyrus interpreted the fall of Babylon as a rebuke to Nabonidus for his neglect of Marduk, and for taking all the statues of the gods to Babylon when the Persian forces were invading the land. Accordingly he ordered all the exiled deities to be restored in triumph to their native cities. The captive Jews, who had looked upon the devastation of proud Babylon as the beginning of their deliverance, waited eagerly, along with other captive peoples in expectation of release. They were not disappointed. In an act of clemency which was designed to win for Cyrus the gratitude and loyalty of exiled populations in Babylonia, the Persian monarch proclaimed liberty to the captives.

THE TOMB OF CYRUS II AT PASARGADAE IN IRAN. UNDER CYRUS ALL CAPTIVE PEOPLES OF BABYLON WERE ENCOURAGED TO RETURN TO THEIR NATIVE CITIES AND RESTORE THEIR OWN RELIGIOUS SHRINES AND TEMPLES.

The Biblical record of this event (II Chron. 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:2-4) indicates that the exiles were given every encouragement to return and rebuild the state of Judaea. Cyrus even restored the Temple vessels which had been brought to Babylon when Jerusalem fell to the Chaldeans, and appointed Sheshbazzar, a member of the Judaeen royal house, as governor of the reconstituted state. The Nabonidus chronicle and the Cyrus cylinder make it evident that these narratives reflect accurately the policy adopted by Cyrus towards all those expatriated under the Neo-Babylonian regime. By urging the captives to return home and rebuild their religious shrines, Cyrus was at once relieving himself of responsibility for maintaining them in servitude and promoting goodwill for his own regime in all parts of his newly won empire. It may also be noted in passing that Gubaru, who played an important part in the fall of Babylon, was the Persian commissioner for the reestablishment of religious cults.



Arab-Egypt Campaign

While still in Babylon, Cyrus received an embassy of Syrian kings, whose continued loyalty assured him of mercantile dominance in the eastern Mediterranean area. Whereas Syria, Phoenicia and Palestine were part of the huge satrapy of Babylon, the Nabataean Arabs of Edom and the Negeb were organized in a separate satrapy. However, this attempt to control the activities of the Arab tribes was one of the less successful of Persian enterprises, although at the end of the fifth century B.C. northern Arabia, Edom, Sinai and part of the Nile delta formed an important segment of an Arab domain nominally under Persian control. Such a situation was important if only for the reason that adjacent to Palestine and the territory of the Nabataean Arabs lay Egypt, whose king Amasis had made an alliance with Croesus of Lydia and Nabonidus of Babylon in an attempt to crush Cyrus. In consequence Egypt could soon expect to come under attack, and if the Persians could establish a route across the Palestinian desert lands, the invasion of the Nile valley would be greatly facilitated.

In the event, Cyrus was unable to play his part in realizing the Mesopotamian dream of the subjugation of Egypt, for he died suddenly in 530 B.C., leaving his son Cambyses to achieve this objective by defeating Psamtik III at Pelusium in 525 B.C. On the sarcophagus of an Apis-bull the name of the conqueror was in-

scribed in the traditional Egyptian fashion:

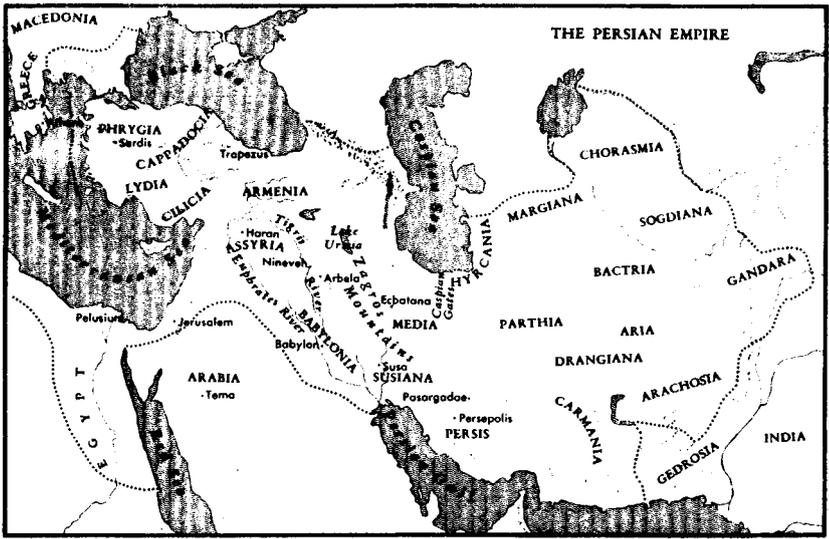
Horus . . . king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Mestiu-Re, son of Re, Cambyses, may he live forever. He made as his monument to his father, Apis-Osiris, a great sarcophagus of granite, which the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Mestiu-Re, son of Re, Cambyses, dedicated, who is given all life, all stability and good fortune, all health, all gladness, appearing as king of Upper and Lower Egypt forever.

THE HEIGHT OF EMPIRE — DARIUS THE GREAT

The Jews in Palestine

In southern Palestine, Jerusalem was a scene of activity between 520 and 515 B.C., as the Temple was rebuilt under the prophetic leadership of Haggai and Zechariah. Following the death of Cambyses at "Agbatana in Syria" in 522 B.C., some of the provinces which had been subjugated by Cyrus began an attempt to break away from the empire, a movement which continued in the early years of Darius the Great (522-486 B.C.).

While Darius was struggling for control, there arose in Judaea the expectation that the Persians might be overthrown and a Jewish state established, but when Darius finally triumphed in the struggle for power, the restored Davidic state failed to materialize and Judah was governed internally by a High Priest.



ultimately responsible to the governor appointed by the imperial court. In Judaea, Darius maintained the Persian tradition of toleration and benevolence, encouraging the inhabitants to rebuild the Temple and to function as a theocracy. The governor of the province whose title was "Across the River" (Ezra 5:3), namely the territory west of the Euphrates, was evidently unaware of the decree authorizing the work of reconstruction (Ezra 6:1-15) when in 520 B.C. he attempted to delay the rebuilding of the Temple. It is of interest that the *dikrona*, or official memorandum, which confirmed the decree was discovered in the archives at Ecbatana, where Cyrus had resided during his first regnal year.

Centralized Government

Whereas Cyrus had sought to unite his far-flung empire by a policy of clemency, Darius thought it best

UNDER DARIUS THE GREAT THE EMPIRE REACHED ITS HEIGHT OF EXPANSION. IN CONTRAST WITH CYRUS' POLICY OF CLEMENCY, DARIUS SOUGHT TO EXERCISE MORE DIRECT CONTROL.

to exercise more direct control. Accordingly he set about increasing the efficiency of his domain to the point where Persia became a centralized state with total power vested in the monarch. In strictly geographical terms this meant that before the end of the sixth century B.C., the empire of Darius the Great extended from the Indus valley in the east to the Aegean, and from the Jaxartes River (modern Syr Darya), in central Asia, to Libya in north Africa.

Campaign Against Greece

The success of Cyrus in conquering the Lydian empire of Croesus in 546 B.C. led him to the conclusion that the jealousies and suspicions characteristic of the various Greek communities might be exploited to conquer Greece itself. Cyrus was unable to realize this objective, but

Darius devoted some energy to an assault on Greece. However, the inhabitants of the peninsula proved resolute in their resistance, and in 490 B.C. Darius and his forces suffered a defeat by a small Greek army at Marathon, a major setback to Persian expansionist plans.

Xerxes — Successes and Failures

The death of Darius I in 486 B.C. was followed by the accession of his son, Xerxes (486-464 B.C.). This man maintained the scope and splendor of the Persian empire and was successful in keeping some of his more restless subjects under control. About 484 B.C. he was compelled to crush a rebellion in Egypt, and in 482 B.C. he had to march against insurgent Babylon to regain control of the city. As a result the fortified walls were demolished, and the famous temple of Marduk destroyed.

THERMOPYLAE. Having thus secured his home base, Xerxes prepared to fulfill the ambitions of his predecessors by launching a military campaign against Greece. Accordingly he marched with his forces to the Hellespont (Dardanelles), and having crossed a pontoon bridge at Abydos, he moved westward through Macedonia in 480 B.C. That same year the stubborn resistance of Leonidas and his famous Three Hundred was crushed at Thermopylae, eighty-five miles northwest of Athens. Xerxes continued his march through Boeotia and Attica, occupy-

ing and pillaging the city of Athens.

SALAMIS. However, the Persians suffered a dramatic reverse in a sea battle at Salamis, an island immediately west of Athens, where the imperial navy was heavily defeated by the Greeks in 480 B.C. Xerxes instructed his general, Mardonius, to continue the fight while he returned to the homeland. Mardonius could not restore Persian prestige, and his forces suffered another grievous blow at Plataea, about thirty miles northwest of Athens, in 479 B.C.

Xerxes' major military fault was the size of his army and its complete dependence upon the fleet. Communications were impossibly long. Salamis made retreat a necessity, and the Greek success in following up and harrying army and ships turned defeat into a rout and quenched the Persian peril for ever.

ESTHER. Xerxes was evidently the Ahasuerus of Ezra 4:6, who married the Jewess Esther on divorcing his wife Vashti. The royal palace was at Susa (Assyrian and Hebrew *Shushan*), a magnificent city which was flourishing even at the time of the Islamic conquest, and which is now represented by the mounds fourteen miles southwest of Dizful, by the Shawūr river. The Book of Esther narrated the manner in which the new queen was able to circumvent palace intrigue at Susa and save her people from anti-Semitism, an achievement commemorated in the Jewish Feast of Purim.

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